1 Strategic management

The majority of institutions evolved when the prevalent mode of study was face-to-face and campus-based. New modes of study offered through ICT should prompt institutions to review their strategies to take into account increased use of ICT, both in institutional and public online spaces.

The institution should have defined policies and management processes that are used to establish strategic institutional objectives, including those for the development of e-learning. In a mature institution, strategic management will operate over several time horizons.

The institutional strategic plan should identify the roles that e-learning will play in the overall development of the institution and set the context for production of the plans of academic departments, administrative and operational divisions.

The institutional plan should outline options for the use of e-learning in teaching that may define a spectrum of blends of e-learning and more established teaching mechanisms. Institutional plans should also consider issues of resourcing, information systems, staff development, innovation and collaboration with partners.

Faculty and departmental plans should aim to best match the student requirements of their particular market sector (national/international focus) in presenting e-learning/blended learning options.

The institutional strategic plan should ensure that plans of academic departments are consistent with each other. Student

mobility between departments should not be restricted by major differences in policy or implementation with respect to e-learning.

Benchmarks

1 The institution has an e-learning strategy that is widely understood and integrated into the overall strategies for institutional development and quality improvement. E-learning policies conform to legal and ethical frameworks.

2 The institution investigates and monitors emergent technologies and educational developments in the field of e-learning and considers their integration in the learning environment. There is an organisational framework that can foster innovation and development, and evaluation by scholarship and research.

3 The resourcing of developments in e-learning takes into account requirements such as equipment purchase, software implementation, recruitment of staff, training and research needs, staff workload and technology developments.

4 Institutional policy ensures that e-learning systems (e.g. an institutional Virtual Learning Environment) are compatible with related management information systems (e.g. a registration or administrative system) and are reliable, secure and effective.

5 When e-learning involves activities or resources beyond the institution (e.g. virtual mobility of students, institutional partnerships, development of

> Open Educational Resources and Massive Open Online Courses, or use of social media), the roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, communicated to those concerned, and controlled by operational agreements where appropriate.

1.1   Policies and plans

The institution should have defined policies and management processes that are used to establish strategic institutional objectives, including those for the development of e-learning. An institutional strategic plan will be the uppermost tier in a planning hierarchy and will shape the plans of academic, administrative and operational units of the institution. The strategic plan will be regularly monitored, evaluated and revised in line with experience and developing requirements. In revising strategy, account should be taken of recent developments in the field of e-learning (for instance learning analytics and MOOCs) and the external environment (for instance the increasing use of tablets).

The strategic plan should encompass a vision for the use and development of e-learning within the institution and provide a timescale for the achievement of strategic goals. The strategic plan should address the provision of the human, technical and financial resources necessary for implementation. Due account should be taken of key strategic issues such as relationships with other institutions, funding and regulatory bodies.

Institutional policies must pay due regard to ethical and legal considerations. Of particular relevance to e-learning is national legislation covering: accessibility to those with particular needs, copyright and other intellectual property rights, data protection, privacy and freedom of information. The institution should have a

Strategic management

strategy for communicating the responsibilities that emerge from these policies to staff and students.

Indicators

- The institution has an identified group of key staff responsible for formulating, evaluating and developing institutional policies and plans relating to e-learning. These policies and plans are set out clearly for the benefit of all participants and stakeholders.

- The institution has a means for communicating legal and ethical responsibilities to staff and students.

- The institution has policies that respond to recent developments in education practice such as learning analytics, social media, OER, and MOOCs.

- The institution has staff responsible for monitoring changing technology and educational practice in order to inform the development of e-learning policy.

At excellence level

- There is institution-wide engagement with the development of policies and plans for the achievement and enhancement of e-learning.

1.2   The role of e-learning in academic strategy

The institutional strategic plan should identify the roles that e-learning will play in the overall development of the institution and set the context for production of the plans of academic departments, administrative and operational divisions.

The institutional plan should outline options for the use of e-learning in teaching that may define a spectrum of blends of e-learning and more established teaching and learning mechanisms. The institution should have a policy on the use of external environments and resources such as public social media and open educational resources.

Faculty and departmental plans should aim to best match the student requirements of their particular market sector (national/international focus) in presenting e-learning/blended learning options.

The institutional strategic plan should ensure that plans of academic departments are compatible with each other. Student mobility between departments should not be restricted by major differences in policy or implementation with respect to e-learning.

Indicators

- The e-learning strategy is part of the general educational strategy of the institution and there is compatibility between the approaches to e-learning taken by individual departments and faculties in line with institutional plans.

EXCELLENCE

Strategic management

At excellence level

- There is a widespread understanding of and engagement with the implementation of e-learning policies across the institution.

1.3   Policy on resources

Institutions developing and delivering e-learning programmes should have a comprehensive set of policies that relate to the effective provision for delivery of teaching materials and student support services, whether through its own or through public infrastructure. The policies should address issues of:

- financial, physical and technical resources;
- staffing and staff development;
- management, responsibility and accountability.

Implementation of e-learning may require an institution to review and revise its policies on the deployment of resources to ensure that it has in place an adequate managerial, technical and physical infrastructure.

The administrative aspects of e-learning programmes may require significant changes in administrative systems to enable students to access information regarding their status, progress, etc. online. Equally the system must have the capability to distribute appropriate teaching resources to students. To meet these needs the institution must ensure that its management information system is capable of operation to appropriate standards of reliability, security and effectiveness.

Strategic management

Indicators

- Departmental and faculty plans address issues of resourcing, staffing and staff development for those involved in delivery and support functions.

- Appropriate operating and security standards for all aspects of the provision of online services are defined.

At excellence level

- Institutional plans make provision for the resources necessary to install and maintain the physical and technical infrastructure needed and allocate responsibility for the delivery of services to specific departments.

- Resourcing plans embrace both initial investment in equipment, software, etc. and also set appropriate targets for cycles of updating, renewal and replacement.

- Staff development plans address the skills required in a digital world.

EXCELLENCE

1.4 Policy on virtual mobility

The capability of ICT systems to enable routine communication and sharing of information between dispersed individuals and communities is changing the nature of personal and professional networks. Major business concerns operate on a global basis with projects shared between teams in multiple locations. These technologies enable study to be conducted beyond the confines of the traditional campus.

Strategic management

E-learning provides opportunities for presenting programmes that offer considerable flexibility in terms of place and time of study and equally provides opportunities for students and staff to participate in virtual communities.

Programmes encouraging the physical mobility of students are commonplace and receive considerable support from agencies such as the EU. The development of policies that encourage and facilitate virtual mobility is desirable for all institutions and is of particular relevance to those operating e-learning programmes.

Policies for virtual mobility should be designed to provide students with opportunities to study programmes from institutions geographically remote from the student's home base and across national boundaries.

Institutions participating in virtual mobility programmes should develop policies that embrace academic, professional and social aspects of student and staff mobility.

Institutions participating in virtual mobility programmes should ensure that assessment of student outcomes is consistent, well documented and interchangeable between institutions. Wherever possible, student performance on a virtual mobility programme should be recognised for the purposes of an award of the home institution in the same way as for other programmes.

Indicators

- The institution recognises the benefits of e-learning for virtual mobility, has assessed the problems, and has an explicit policy on virtual mobility.

Strategic management

1.5   Ventures beyond the institutional boundary

The infrastructure and developmental costs of e-learning can be significant and skills may be required that are not available within the institution. This may be mitigated by collaboration with other institutions or by using external services and resources to develop and/or deliver e-learning. For example, institutions have used external platforms for providing Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

Contractual arrangements between the collaborating partners should define the scope of the collaboration, the responsibilities of partners, financial arrangements and the relationships with third parties, particularly students and teachers. All collaborative ventures should be subject to risk analysis, and contingency planning should be in place in the event of the collaboration breaking down to ensure that student study experience is not jeopardised.

Institutions have produced MOOCs as a way of developing expertise in e-learning away from their core offering. An institution should have a policy that covers engagement with MOOCs, setting out the benefits, costs and risks. MOOCs allow an

institution to offer e-learning without full conformance to an external accreditation / quality process since MOOCs are typically not credit bearing. However, since there is a reputational risk attached to poor quality, the institution should have a clear policy on an appropriate level of internal oversight.

Another, less formal, collaborative approach is the use and/or development of Open Educational Resources (OER). Sharing and reuse of e-learning material in OER repositories can mitigate the cost of development. They also provide a low risk entry route into online resource-based teaching for individual academics.

At the lowest level of engagement, the institution needs to understand the management of digital rights in this context; the Creative Commons licences are a widely understood rights framework for both provision and use of material.

Higher levels of institutional engagement may include an institution publishing and maintaining an institutionally branded repository of OER or institutional involvement in an OER consortium. In such cases, the strategic rationale for involvement should be evident to staff. In particular, academic staff should understand whether publication of their teaching materials as OER is allowed, recommended or obligatory.

Institutions can also use public social media, such as blogs, wikis and social media, to support learning and build community. If this approach is adopted, issues which need to be considered include accessibility, privacy and the boundary between academic and social life.

Strategic management

Indicators

- Collaborative ventures are formalised through contractual relationships and service level agreements are in place for these.

- Any use of social media takes account of accessibility and privacy issues.

- Staff are supported in the rights issues associated with use of imported OER and implications of publishing their teaching materials as OER.

- The institution has processes for managing rights in the development and use of OER associated with any institutional managed repository or consortium.

- The institution has a clear policy on the development and use of MOOCs.

At excellence level

- A risk analysis is conducted on all initiatives involving third parties and contingency plans to protect student and institutional interests put in place.
- The institution's engagement with OER and MOOCs is regularly reviewed and evaluations widely shared across the institution.

Strategic management

1.6   Research, scholarship and innovation in e-learning

Policies on research, scholarship and innovation in e-learning need to cover both technical and educational aspects.

While not all institutions with e-learning programmes will be in a position to conduct fundamental research into these areas, institutional management needs to ensure that there is a clear policy framework through which new research findings, developments and emerging techniques may be identified, evaluated, disseminated and (where appropriate) adopted. This may involve frameworks to support, resource and evaluate innovative practice by departments, programmes and individual teachers. While such technology tracking activities may be determined by the needs of the institution's own e-learning programmes, the results will usually be of relevance to e-learning programmes at other institutions and the results may represent new scholarship in the field and be published accordingly.

Indicators

- There is a policy framework and an agreed set of planned activities directed towards the improvement of e-learning programmes through more effective use of technology, improved teaching and learning approaches, etc.

- Policies and activities are linked to the institution's processes for continuous improvement based on monitoring, feedback and self-evaluation

- Activities such as horizon scanning or technology tracking take account of developments elsewhere in e-learning and its applications.

Strategic management

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At excellence level

- The institution has a research, scholarship and innovation policy which supports the development and/or evaluation of new technical and educational approaches to e-learning, and a planned programme of activities in support of the policy.

- The results of technology tracking activities are disseminated beyond the institution.

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1.7   Learning analytics

An e-learning environment can collect extensive data on student activity and performance, for example by tracking the activity of an individual across the pages of a VLE. The systematic measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of such data is known as learning analytics. The learning analytics approach has the overall aim of improving the learning of students and has potential as a tool for quality enhancement.

Learning analytics relies on a 'big data' approach that gathers large volumes of varied data and uses statistical analyses to make predictions. Typical data collected would include number of visits and time spent on VLE pages (including downloads, videos, and forum posts) to reveal whether a student has engaged with particular resources and what routes they took through material. In blended delivery, this might be combined with data on campus attendance, visits to the library and so on. The student's assessment record on their current and previous courses may also be used, together with prior educational achievement and other

EXCELLENCE

demographic and socioeconomic data from the student's personal records.

Learning analytics can be used for a variety of purposes, focusing on the individual learner, the course experience, or the whole institution. Some examples are below.

- An institution can evaluate courses and curricula to understand which courses perform well as measured by retention, pass rates, or satisfaction. The big data approach offers more sophisticated analysis than simple summary statistics, for example identifying a course that has a better pass rate than expected given the previous educational achievements of the students it attracts.
- Comparative analyses can highlight features of course design that lead to successful learning, and so make it possible to design more successful courses in future.
- A course designer / presenter can monitor a course in presentation to spot pinch points, for example a place in a course where student engagement drops sharply. Action taken might be to provide additional teaching or to rewrite of material for the next cohort.
- A tutor can monitor a group of students to target those for whom timely and appropriate intervention may increase their chance of passing the course.
- A student can monitor their own performance or learning behaviour, relative to themselves over time or to others in a cohort, and take action as a self-regulated learner.
- An automated system could suggest alternative resources or behaviours to students who show patterns of activity associated with poor results.

A learning analytics system should report results to users in a way that is clear and understandable and leads to appropriate action.

Strategic management

Reporting is typically through dashboard systems that are tailored to the intended class of user: tutor, student or support staff.

Learning analytics relies on the collection of data on individual behaviour and therefore raises ethical and legal issues: these include privacy, data protection and informed consent. The institution should have a code of practice on learning analytics that is consistent with the institution's ethics policies and guidelines. Policies should be in place to ensure that collected data is accurate and held securely. It is important to develop an understanding of the purposes and scope of learning analytics that is widely shared among students, teachers and the institution's management. This is particularly the case because, in practice, students may not be in a position to withhold consent since the institution collects data (for example assessment scores) for its normal operations and for regulatory purposes. The inclusion of demographic and socioeconomic data about individuals is a particular issue: it might improve the accuracy of a statistical model that predicts student success, but may lead to prejudicial judgements about individuals.

Indicators

- The institution has a strategy for use of learning analytics to improve student support and learning.

- There is a policy and code of practice relating to use of student data that covers privacy, security, consent, and the purposes for which learning analytics is carried out.