

5 Staff support

The objective of staff support services is to enable all members of academic, administrative and technical staff to contribute fully to e-learning development and service delivery. Institutional adoption of innovations from the media and technical landscape will trigger the need for specific staff development activities. There is also a need for ongoing dissemination of good practice.

Academic staff need particular support to make the transition from traditional face-to-face teaching to effective teaching using an online environment; this support should encompass both educational and technical aspects without demanding that academics become ICT or media specialists in their own right.

Teaching through e-learning should be acknowledged when managing staff workload. Career development incentives should promote the use of e-learning. It is important to address the needs of both full time and associate staff who may be employed in a number of teaching and administrative roles.



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Benchmarks

- 25 Staff in academic, media development and administrative roles can adequately support the development and delivery of e-learning elements and activities.
- 26 The institution ensures that appropriate training and support is provided for staff and that this training is enhanced in the light of technological and educational developments.
- 27 Educational research and innovation in e-learning are regarded as high status activities, and are promoted by career development incentives.
- 28 There are mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice based on experience and research on e-learning.
- 29 The institution ensures that issues of staff workload, and any other implications of staff participation in e-learning activities, are taken into account when managing courses or programmes.
- 30 Adequate support and resources (e.g. technical helpdesk and administrative support) are available to academic staff, including any affiliated tutors/mentors.

5.1 Technical aspects

Academic and administrative staff working in an e-learning environment may require significant technical support in the

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acquisition, operation and maintenance of ICT systems. Specialist technical staff should be available to provide support in all technical aspects.

5.1.1 Technical support

All staff should have access to technical support in the use of the e-learning environment and the hardware and software used in teaching. This support should extend to software used for authoring and production, including audio/visual media, and for teaching support, including learning analytics. Support may be provided by a helpdesk service.

For those working remotely, technical support can be provided online or by telephone. Whilst the institution may not have responsibility for the physical equipment used by those employed in support roles, it should provide access to a comprehensive advisory service to staff that covers technical aspects that might affect the institution's teaching. The use of cloud computing may reduce the need for locally provided technical support.

Within the institution, technical support should be available to all staff and should operate to clear performance levels, bearing in mind the impact that technical problems might have on the capacity of staff to support student learning.

Indicators

- All staff have access to technical support services in selection, acquisition and maintenance of their ICT equipment and networks.
- Technical services operate to clear and agreed standards

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for provision of staff support.

- The infrastructure supports teachers at all times with online access to materials, administrative data and communication facilities.
- Technical support is available for access to academic and administrative services through mobile devices.

At excellence level

- There is an institutional plan for the provision and future direction of the technical support function.
- Technical departments collaborate with academic, media development and administrative staff in the development of strategies and plans that take into account the potential of emerging technologies.
- A suite of online technical support services is available to staff working remotely.

5.1.2 Technical training

Academic, administrative and support staff should have access to appropriate training.

Design of training programmes should be informed by a training needs analysis that identifies training requirements by job function and addresses the needs of existing and newly recruited staff.

Training may be provided by induction programmes on appointment, training programmes associated with the

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introduction of new systems, updating programmes, online training materials and helpdesk services. Elements of embedded training may be available via the help functions within the VLE or other online systems.

The training of staff who work remotely from the institution's headquarters or campus may be provided via online and telephone support services.

Indicators

- Responsibility for the provision of training is clearly defined and adequate resources are allocated.
- Newly appointed staff are provided with induction in the use of software and systems.
- The introduction of new systems or equipment is supported by adequate training for all users.

At excellence level

- There is an institutional plan for the provision of training in the technical aspects of e-learning.
- The institution provides access to online self-help training materials augmented by helpdesk services.

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5.2 Educational aspects

The provision of support for staff in the educational aspects of e-learning is essential if e-learning is to be implemented as an integral component of institutional activity. Many academic staff will not have experienced e-learning during their own education and may not have received training in the educational possibilities of e-learning.

The development of early generations of e-learning programmes was driven by enthusiasts, but future institutional development should be based on involvement by the majority of academic staff. Institutions must foster an environment that encourages and supports the development of teaching skills and expertise amongst its staff. Recognition of these in its structures of reward and esteem is an important factor.

An institution may choose to implement a formal, mandatory programme of training, to equip staff with a basic introduction to e-learning techniques before they assume significant responsibilities for e-learning. However, in a higher education environment a more collegial approach is likely to be adopted, particularly with respect to academic staff.

Lighter touch approaches might involve a rolling programme of seminars, websites providing examples of pedagogic techniques, developmental workshops for course development teams etc.

5.2.1 Educational support

Staff need to be supported in the development of the teaching skills and methods that are necessary for e-learning.

Enthusiasts and professionals may have key expertise but be dispersed across an institution. This can be focused by the formation of a real or virtual department within the institution

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charged with the responsibility for e-learning development. Members of this department can make their expertise available to others involved in e-learning delivery via, for example: internal consultancy; secondment to course development teams; training courses; seminars (real and virtual); and good practice guides.

Indicators

- The institution offers to its staff an online information service on uses of e-learning.
- Training courses are available for staff engaged in e-learning activities.
- Staff are encouraged to provide mutual support, in cross-professional groups, in the development of e-learning materials.
- Staff are supported in the educational uses of digital technologies (including web oriented tools) in teaching.
- Staff employed as tutors and in other student support roles are appropriately briefed, trained and supported in the educational techniques incorporated in courses.
- Staff are encouraged to reflect on the possibilities of mobile and ubiquitous learning as well as on the implications of merging formal and informal learning.
- Staff are supported in the educational use of learning analytics, including how to interpret analytics data in order to inform learning design.
- Staff have opportunities to provide and receive feedback on their experience of teaching a course.

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At excellence level

- The institution has recognised structures for the dissemination of best practice in relevant educational techniques.
- There is an institutional plan for the development of educational support services.
- The institution has means of showcasing best practice in online teaching and learning.

5.2.2 Educational innovation

Educational innovation and development should be seen as a key activity for academic and student support staff within the institution. The efforts of staff in this area should be respected, acknowledged and rewarded.

Workload planning processes should acknowledge the time required to develop and practice new teaching skills.

Indicators

- Staff are encouraged to take part in new teaching and learning developments.
- Professional development seminars and symposia on teaching and learning issues are organised (and well attended).
- Internal and external publication on teaching and learning issues related to e-learning is encouraged and rewarded.

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- Internal secondments and cross-departmental working are used as mechanisms for sharing expertise in teaching and learning techniques.
- The experience of tutorial and other support staff is valued and acknowledged by the institution.
- Student feedback is used extensively in review of new teaching and learning developments.

At excellence level

- Teaching and learning development is widely respected throughout the institution and recognised through reward and career development structures.
- The institution has a group of staff who are committed to the development of e-learning methods. These staff may operate as a self-contained unit or as a distributed group.
- The institution encourages and supports participation in inter-institutional collaboration and exchange programmes related to teaching and learning development.

5.3 Resources

Those involved in the development and delivery of e-learning courses and programmes should have access to the resources to enable them to undertake their activities effectively. The aspects identified in this section include information resources, administration and support in their career development.

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5.3.1 Information and media support

Staff should have support in the acquisition of information and media materials necessary for them to fulfil their role in the development and delivery of e-learning programmes. This should include information needed to understand and track intellectual property rights, particularly when use is made of OER.

Information on the performance of current and previous e-learning programmes is an important aspect of achieving improvement in programme design and delivery; hence staff should have access to institutional data and other information relevant to their sphere of activity.

Data on student activity and performance may be captured and stored to allow the analysis of individual e-learning activities. This is an aspect of learning analytics that focuses on the improvement of the learning experience rather than the individual learner.

The indexing and archiving of e-learning materials is essential to institutional learning, in order to avoid reinvention of materials, teaching activities or software tools. The indexing and archiving of e-learning materials demands different approaches to those required for traditional materials, and institutions risk losing hard-won experience if they are unable to easily identify and access exemplars of materials or software components. Library staff can provide this expertise.

The semantic web may be one way to increase the reusability of learning resources. This envisages web material marked-up in a way that is machine-understandable. Semantic web technologies could help learners to find learning resources, courses, or complete learning paths that best suit their needs.

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- The technical infrastructure supports teachers by providing online access to materials, administrative data and communication facilities.
- The library function within the institution is adapted to the provision and maintenance of online resources for staff and students
- Support is available for course design staff in locating and evaluating online resources for student use.

At excellence level

- The institution has staff committed to the maintenance of historical records of course and student performance and their analysis to assist in programme development and delivery.
- Learning analytic data is used to gain insight into the success of aspects of e-learning design. This is used to improve the design of future courses.
- The institution has processes for indexing and archiving its e-learning materials for evaluation and potential re-use.
- Development teams are routinely able to access previously developed materials and OER, and consider their potential for re-use.

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5.3.2 Administrative support

Effective administrative support should be provided to all staff involved in the development and delivery of e-learning courses and programmes.

Institutions are increasingly providing online interfaces for administrative services which can be used efficiently by students and staff. There is a parallel requirement that interactions requiring staff input are processed with the speed and efficiency appropriate to a customer service organisation operating primarily via online interaction, e.g. full student information is available to all staff handling phone or postal enquiries.

The introduction of e-learning may create new administrative tasks or shift the burden to different staff compared to previous modes of delivery (e.g. the administration and management of teaching activities devolved to tutors/mentors). The impact on staff should be assessed and appropriate arrangements made for additional staff to be employed or for adjustment of workloads.



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The institution may operate a network of study centres; if so, these should provide tutors and teachers with support for effective teaching (e.g. supply electronic teaching facilities independently of the central office). This includes administrative support, both at the study centre as well as (online) via the central office.

Indicators

- The administrative impact of e-learning and e-learning systems on the workloads of all staff groups has been assessed and adjustments made as required.
- Administrative support is provided for devolved teaching, for example where tutors or mentors are used.
- Where study centres are used, effective administrative support is provided, for example to arrange meetings with students.

At excellence level

- All staff using the online administrative system report that it operates well.

5.4 Career development, incentives and recognition

Staff motivation is important to the effective development of e-learning programmes. The institutional leadership should provide motivation for staff to engage with e-learning by emphasising e-learning as a high-status activity and providing reward by financial incentive or peer esteem. Institutional initiatives to change

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teaching methods will not be well supported if the staff are not appropriately rewarded for adopting new practices.

The involvement of staff in e-learning should therefore be properly recognised and rewarded by the institution. This recognition and reward needs to be integrated into mechanisms for promotion and career development.

The introduction of e-learning may require different working patterns, and produce different outputs, to those that have been used as markers for existing career progression patterns. The institutions should therefore pay considerable attention to the impact of new teaching methods on career review and progression procedures.

Indicators

- Inputs by staff to e-learning programmes are recognised and rewarded.
- The institution has reviewed its careers progression structures to take account of new roles and functions associated with e-learning.
- Criteria for progression and promotion from existing roles are reviewed to ensure that e-learning contributions are appropriately reflected.

At excellence level

- There is evidence that the criteria are actively used by decision makers in the career progression process.