

Implementing ICT Strategy

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Theme: Policy and Planning

Summary

The Learning Media Unit's main role is to provide support to individual staff and their departments when introducing C&IT into teaching. This ranges from informal one-to-one advice to full-scale project support and production. The unit also offers a point of reference on the wider implications of introducing new elements into teaching, including help and advice with evaluation.

Two years ago three separate units (the Television Unit, the Distance Learning Unit and the Teaching & Learning Development Group) were joined together to form the Learning Media Unit. Aim was to improve the co-operation between the three units.

Implementing an L&T (Learning & Teaching) strategy within a university isn't easy. The academic 'owns' the course he/she teaches. They determine the structure etc. Both in the Netherlands and in the UK, at universities, research is still more important than teaching.

The university selected WebCT as their VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) in November 1998. There is no pressure to use the VLE; it was facilitated. They started with three projects that received considerable funding, instead of giving small amounts of money to a lot of projects. One of the goals was to find the strengths and weaknesses of WebCT. Starting September 2001 they started offering WebCT as a formal service for all. Within three months there were 10,000 registered students and more than 190 courses. The unit only supports this one VLE because supporting multiple applications isn't really possible (time/money). So far there haven't been any examples of courses that couldn't be supported by WebCT.

The first users were mainly power-users, but at the moment there also are a lot of novice users. Often they don't really know what to do with the VLE. In some cases they have seen a course using the VLE and want the same thing for their course. The Learning Media Unit then also helps them to 'translate' their existing course into a course that uses the VLE.

The Unit offers a lot of courses that are available for all staff-members of the university. They are attended not only by professors/academics but also by secretaries and other support staff members. Quite often they are the ones supporting the academics and thus also need to know about creating materials for use in the VLE.

Discussion

After the introduction of the Learning Media Unit by John Stratford the session quickly changed from a presentation into an interesting, rather informal round table discussion. The discussion concentrated on how to implement an ICT strategy, challenges and problems and the differences between the Netherlands and the UK. Though that means that there isn't a set of slides or a handout available for download, it was very interesting and allowed for true interaction during the session.

Website: www.shef.ac.uk/learningmedia