

The CAMEL Project:

Collaborative Approaches to the Management of E-Learning





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Published September 2006

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ISBN 10: 1-86135-338-3

ISBN 13: 978-1-86135-338-2

Designed and produced by Corporate
Development, Northumbria University
CD: 180444/09/06J

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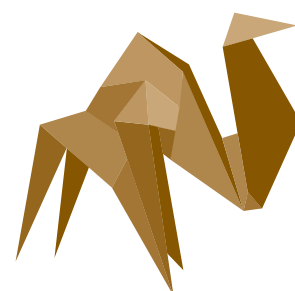
What is CAMEL?

CAMEL is short for Collaborative Approaches to the Management of e-Learning. CAMEL was a project funded by the HEFCE Leadership, Governance and Management programme. It set out to explore how institutions who were making effective use of e-learning and who were collaborating in regional lifelong learning partnerships might be able to learn from each other in a Community of Practice based around study visits to each of the partner institutions.

This short publication highlights some of the things CAMEL participants found out about e-learning and about each other. One of the most interesting aspects of the project was, however, the model itself. We believe the CAMEL model could have widespread application for many types of people wanting to share experience and learn from one another. The model is discussed briefly here and you can order a free accompanying CD-ROM that provides a Do-It-Yourself guide to setting up a CAMEL network from our publications page at www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/publications

Although CAMEL started out as an acronym we found the name summed up certain things about what we were doing. Camels are versatile animals and can operate in the harshest of conditions, surviving on the poorest vegetation and through extremes of temperature. They produce milk for nutrition and dung for fuel as well as providing transport. There are a lot of parallels with the versatility of e-learning in making learning happen in places where it wouldn't otherwise be possible and we saw some examples of this in the project. There is also a resonance with the nomadic element of the project as our groups travelled to a location to share a meal together, network and show their wares.

We hope this summary will inspire others to try out a CAMEL network and we welcome feedback on your experiences to jiscinfonet@northumbria.ac.uk



Uruguayan meetings were 'calzon quitao' – 'with underpants removed'

Sometimes there emerged some truths or criticisms which were very painful, and this is what I think helped many to come to terms with reality.



Where did the idea come from?

Strange as it may seem CAMEL has its origins in a self-help group formed many years ago by a number of small farmers in Uruguay. The credit for the idea of applying a Uruguayan farming model to the UK education sector goes to Seb Schmoller of the Association for Learning Technology (ALT) whose uncle was a member of the group.

Seb visited Uruguay back in 1985 and his uncle showed him a folder of documentation from what he described as a farmers' self-help club. This stuck in Seb's mind and caused him to reflect on the parallels between education and agriculture. The technology and the process may be different but to be successful at either requires an enormous amount of tacit knowledge, and understanding about how to make things work in a co-ordinated way, and the success has a long time frame.

Farmers from 8 small farms used to meet monthly, taking turns to visit one another's establishments. Participants were provided with prior information including plans and stock lists. On the day of the visit they toured the farm then had a discussion (led by an expert facilitator) about key issues arising and gave views on topics on which the host sought the group's advice. There was an evaluation session at the end of the day and the outcomes were documented.

Key features of the group that we sought to emulate in CAMEL are that the visits were:

- Planned collaboratively
- Documented before and after
- Focused on things which matter
- Expertly facilitated
- Formally evaluated and had a
- Strong emphasis on tacit knowledge and making this explicit

We were fortunate enough to receive some reflections on the workings of the group via an email from Seb's uncle in Uruguay and this mentioned another critical feature: the meetings had to be 'calzon quitao' which he translates as 'with underpants removed'. N.B. This is also the title of a popular South American soap opera shown elsewhere as 'The Naked Truth'.

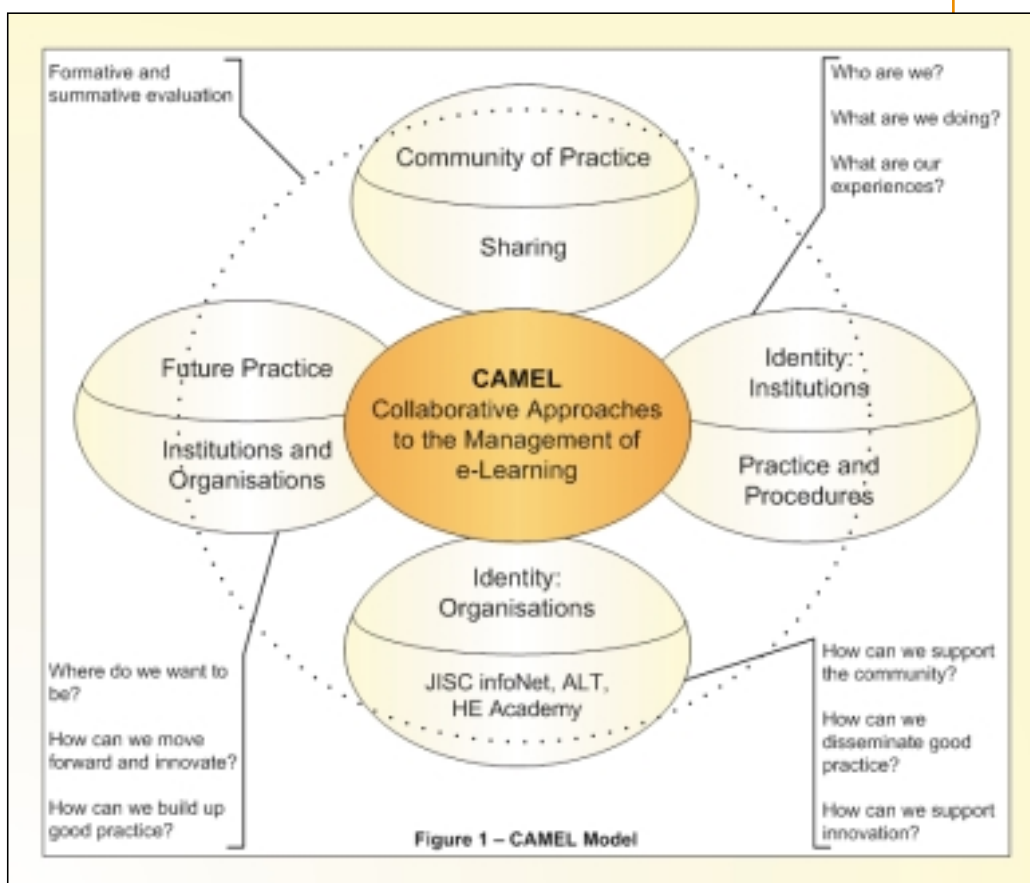
He describes this as meaning 'you have to put all your cards on the table and hide nothing' from your guests. He goes on to say 'sometimes there emerged some truths or criticisms which were very painful, and this is what I think helped many to come to terms with reality.'

How did we apply the model?

Funding from the HEFCE Leadership, Governance and Management programme provided the opportunity to run a pilot project based on the Uruguayan farmers' model. JISC infoNet and ALT led the project and provided a management framework and facilitation. We issued an open invitation to HEFCE funded institutions to participate and we selected four of the many applicants (find out more about the participants on page 11). The project then went through the following stages:

- A start-up meeting to get to know each other and agree key topics of interest and the schedule of visits
- Development of a Project Initiation Document (PID) which included roles and responsibilities and agreed 'ground rules' for the project
- Appointment of an external evaluator
- Four study visits with each agenda agreed in advance and an evaluation session at the end of the visit
- Some online interactions using various collaboration tools
- A summative evaluation by the external evaluator

A member of the Higher Education Academy and the JISC Executive participated in each visit in order to observe the development of the model and to identify good practice to share with their respective communities. Figure 1 shows a diagrammatic representation of the model.



It's about practice, warts and all – and the warts are more interesting than the practice sometimes

We don't particularly want to wash all our dirty laundry in public

It provides the opportunity to strut your stuff as an institution but also throw your doors open

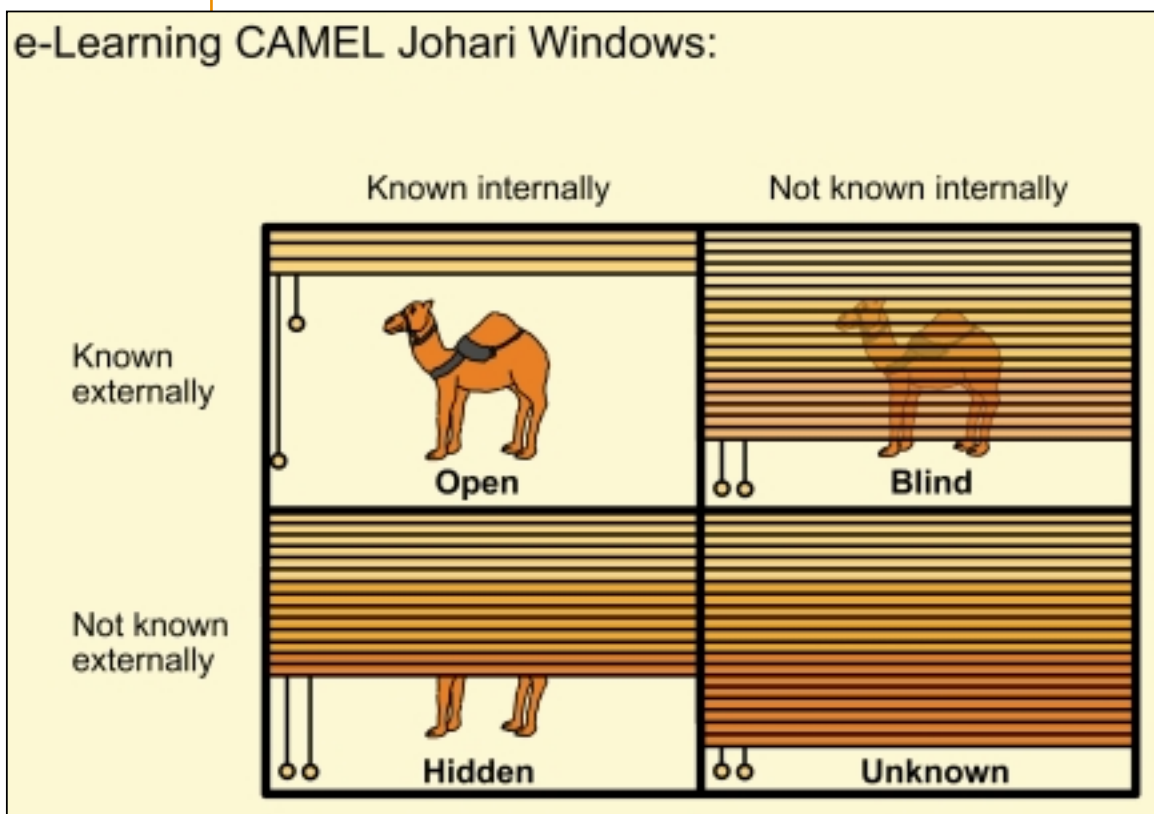
Ground Rules and Trust

As with the Uruguayan farmers we found that, although the informality of the network was one of its strengths, it was important to operate within a structured framework and to set some 'ground rules'.

The sharing of practice is a difficult area, as there is often considerable pressure to show your institution in the best possible light and to gloss over the issues representing the 'warts and all' that is required for institutions to learn from each other and further develop practice. The group had to find a way of addressing the issues, and meeting the objective of disseminating something useful to the outside world, whilst respecting institutional sensitivities. 'We do want to show people what we do, and we also want to show what the issues and implications are of what we do ... However we also don't particularly want to wash all our dirty laundry in public.'

The Johari Window (Luft & Ingham 1955), named after the first names of its inventors, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham, is a useful model describing the process of human interaction and is commonly used by self-help groups.

A four paned 'window' divides awareness into four different types, as represented by the quadrants: open, hidden, blind, and unknown. The lines dividing the four panes are like window blinds, which can open or close as the interaction progresses.



- The OPEN quadrant represents knowledge that is known to all. This can be purely factual but can also include elements of Mission/Vision. At the start of the CAMEL project the opening of this first quadrant was not very large since there had been little time to exchange information. As the process of getting to know one another continues, the window blind opens placing more information into the open window.
- The BLIND quadrant represents knowledge that is overt to outsiders but hidden from internal people in the same way that one remains oblivious to a smut on one's cheek whilst it is plainly obvious to an observer. A challenge for CAMEL was to get this information into the open in an acceptable way so that outsiders could act as 'critical friends'.
- The HIDDEN quadrant represents things that are overt to insiders but hidden to externals such as issues relating to internal politics. As trust between the parties grows they will feel more comfortable with the kind of self-disclosure that opens this blind.
- The UNKNOWN quadrant represents things that are known to neither insiders nor outsiders. Being placed in new situations often reveals new information not previously known to self or others. In the CAMEL project the process of describing existing practice to others gave people some surprising insights about themselves and their institutions.

The underlying philosophy of CAMEL was based on trying to draw back the shutters so that more information would be in the OPEN quadrant. This does not necessarily mean such information is in the public domain rather that it is available in a way that is useful to the participants.

Trust is central to the sharing of real experiences and practices and so at the start-up meeting it was agreed that The Chatham House Rule would apply. The Chatham House Rule reads as follows:

'When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under The Chatham House rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant may be revealed' .

We have been careful in the published outputs to obtain permission to include attributable information and this was identified early on as being a challenge in terms of demonstrating the value of the project to others. 'The biggest issue we might face is extracting benefit for others – the benefit for those involved will be easy both to demonstrate and articulate – benefit for others may be more problematic, although this may be through providing a model rather than through spreading content.'

We hope the quotes from participants will serve to illustrate the transferable value of a network of this type. The external evaluation report on the project noted 'Considering the short time-frame ... it was surprising the extent to which an ethos of open and trusting relationships had developed within the community'.

It's a holistic kind of getting together in terms of both the known dimensions ...and also the things that are more hidden

When you're selling your wares you're always wary that someone else is just going to think it's a joke

It was surprising the extent to which an ethos of open and trusting relationships had developed within the community

You don't just share everything that's good and that you are proud of but you are also prepared to share your problems and issues and perhaps find ways of solving those together

Actually going to
other people's
institutions gives
you a different sort
of sense of how
it ticks

At a neutral location
I don't think we
would have had the
breadth of sessions



When everybody
is on unknown
territory discussions
can be quite neutral

What's nice
about the CAMEL
model is that it
opens the doors



Study Visits

The nomadic element of the CAMEL experience came from study visits to each of the participating colleges and universities. This was a key feature of the Uruguayan model and our experience bore out the fact that actually going to one another's 'farms' gave an understanding of the organisation that no amount of conference sessions or seminars could replicate. One participant noted 'It has been great to go round people's institutions and get a feel for what it smells like, what it looks like, what it sounds like which you wouldn't get in any other way.' As another participant said, 'You actually heard tutors who were on the ground talking about real students and real case histories in a way that just reading about it would not have given you.'

That experience helped put some of the practice we saw into context: 'You do get the feeling that many of the things you see won't actually work in your own institution because it's based on the way that institution works ... but there are always bits and pieces of practice that come up.' Another participant commented, 'You start to really understand where it works, how it works, in what conditions and contexts it works.'

The agenda for each visit was agreed collaboratively and we aimed to get the right mixture of 'show and tell' sessions and discussion: 'it's a balance between trying to show people interesting stuff and having time to talk about it'. The opportunity to get hands-on experience of some new e-learning tools was one of the most popular elements of the visits.



If you really want to share stuff it's not just a talking shop – it has to be integrated with a social existence as well

The social aspect can't be underestimated. It is really important

If you know each other on a social level it's easier to relate on a professional level as well

Another important feature of the visits is that the necessity to travel, which meant participants arriving the night before or holding the visit over two days, allowed time for people to get to know one another socially. During evaluation of the project this came up many times as a significant factor. Comments included: 'It is really important to sit around a table and eat and tell stories and get to know people, on a social or semi-social level, in a way in which you can't just by turning up and sitting in a room and listening to something.' and 'You only gain that trust by sitting down with people, breaking bread with people and engaging people on a social level and then things really start to happen.'

This may appear obvious in hindsight but it is a factor that is very often ignored in projects and many other collaborative activities.



You only gain that trust by sitting down with people, breaking bread with people and engaging people on a social level and then things really start to happen

We shared enough
in common to make
our differences
interesting



You can learn from
people who aren't
your most obvious
peer group that
very different
institutions all
exhibit good
practice

Who was involved?

The CAMEL partners were chosen from a range of people who responded to a call to participate. A deliberate decision was taken to include a diverse range of partners including two Universities and two FE Colleges as study visit hosts. This seemed a potentially risky approach at the start but proved to be a success: 'You can learn from people who aren't your most obvious peer group that very different institutions all exhibit good practice.'

A core of participants attended all of the study visits and each partner brought in specialists from their own institution and from their collaborative partners to discuss particular aspects of their work during their home visit.

It was noted that an important feature of the group selected was that they were not in competition with one another. The absence of a regional element to the project is probably the most significant divergence from the Uruguayan model and this was deemed to be necessary in this context. 'The other thing that has been very useful in terms of selecting institutions is making sure people are not in competition with one another because if they were competitive you wouldn't get the same sort of disclosure and sharing that has been happening.'

The fact that participants covered both the FE and HE sectors and had very different student populations and approaches to e-learning generated some interesting outcomes that are discussed further in the section 'What did we learn?'. 'I have been working in HE for 16 years now and in FE for longer than that and I have learned so much from this project about both sectors.'

The model was not one of a typical Community of Practice built on a particular special interest or job role: 'I guess you could say we're putting goat farmers with cattle farmers in a sense and it's harder to find the similarities in that respect.' There was however a sufficient degree of commonality to make the experience worthwhile: 'We shared enough in common to make our differences interesting.' Much of the commonality had to do with a shared feeling of 'decreasing budgets and time in short supply because we have to meet more targets and teach more students and prove the value of courses from year to year.' There was however also the commonality of 'sharing a passion', 'about e-learning good practice as well as issues relating to pedagogy and lifelong learning, good governance and leadership.'



The following summarises the institutional partners and the key topics we considered at the study visit to that location. Some of the core group involved their collaborative partners in the visits so we had representatives from 11 institutions in all. You can find out more about each of the partners from the CAMEL web pages:



- working with a particular industry sector (printing) and how use of e-learning has reversed a decline in enrolments
- supporting non-traditional students studying via distance learning
- the costing of courses delivered using e-learning



- working with regional partner colleges and using ICT to share resources
- the importance of policies and staff support
- the difficulties of engaging staff in new practices and in embedding e-learning



- partnering with industry on course development
- collaborative ventures with local university and schools on e-portfolios to support lifelong learning
- simple but effective tools that make a difference to tutors and students



- use of a wide range of tools to support distance learners
- celebrating diversity at a local level whilst having central support
- working closely with regional partners to share experience and improve pedagogic practice in the use of ICT in learning and teaching

It's certainly not one-way traffic



Each has learned and benefited from the others in really quite unexpected ways

Through our CAMEL discussions we have really been able to look with a bit more focus and decide where we want our e-learning strategy to sit within the wider learning and teaching strategy

Someone else in a similar environment was looking at your strategy and analysing it for you in a way that you couldn't because you couldn't take that step back



What did we learn?

Strategy and Policy

All of the participating institutions had strategies involving ICT and learning and teaching and the mix of centralised and devolved approaches to applying the strategies was interesting. Leeds College of Technology (LCT) and Staffordshire University have a centralised approach whilst Loughborough College and the University of Greenwich are very decentralised. LCT has e-learning embedded in a single directorate and recognises that this can lead to issues in terms of getting other directorates engaged. Staffordshire University has integrated its Library, IT and MIS functions and Learning Development and Innovation and Learning Support are key parts of this. The Learning Development team is involved in the validation and design process to proactively consider how learning will be delivered to the required quality and in a sustainable manner. The aim for Staffordshire University is that by 2010 e-learning will be 'just learning'.

Loughborough College has a deliberate policy of using its ILT strategy to drive cultural change and new ways of working through a structure of self-managed curriculum teams. The high degree of autonomy of the teams is good for motivating staff. It takes the view that the teams are all going to the same destination and college doesn't interfere with how they get there. The challenge is to mainstream e-learning developments across teams with less developed IT skills and to avoid developing 'silos'. By choosing the right team and getting them to sell ideas to others rather than promoting them from the centre the team approach can however help push innovations. Past experience of innovation staying within silos means that the dissemination strategy is now an essential part of the approval process for a new project.

The University of Greenwich operates a philosophy of 'managed diversity' and facilitates flexible responses from Schools, the key academic structures, in a large and complex organisation with a history of mergers and different cultures. Though some elements of the course validation process are decentralised there is continuous interaction with central departments which manage and update regulatory and policy documentation. The University has recently agreed a renewed Learning and Teaching Strategy informed by the debate about its e-Learning Strategy adopted earlier this year and all Schools are required to respond with their own strategy to ensure that pedagogical principles are aligned with e-learning and are focused at a local level and respond to the needs to their learners.

Some institutions, including Loughborough College, noted that involvement in local collaborative ventures had helped develop their strategy and policy. Others illustrated how their approach had developed over time e.g. Stoke College used to have a 70 page ILT strategy and this is now reduced to 5 pages and promotes an integrative approach to class delivery and VLE content authoring.

At the final study visit participants did an exercise of comparing the various institutional strategies with what we had seen in practice and undertook a SWOT analysis on each of the approaches. Common threads were:

- Working out the relationship with the Learning and Teaching strategy.
- Weaknesses in implementation.
- Concern over how much innovation to allow.
- Concern that diversity can become a weakness if not properly managed yet central strategies may not respond sufficiently to diverse needs.
- The need to understand local drivers, both cultural and financial.

Staffordshire University is unusual in having an e-learning policy (which has been commended by QAA although it is not universally popular with academics). They decided to look at policy on the basis that people's lives are geared by the rhythms of the organisation and doing something outside this is difficult as organisational routines can get in the way of innovation. People may have good ideas and be enthusiastic but if the organisation makes it hard for them they will go back to doing what they have always done.

Quality Assurance was one of the first policy areas to be looked at as there was a concern that it had become mechanistically focussed on content rather than on the learning experience. The focus of validation is now on indicative learning outcomes (which allows for negotiated learning courses that don't have content). Another development was to recognise the difference between e-learning and e-support and to specify a 'threshold' whereby if a student can't meet the course outcomes without engaging with electronic media then it is an e-learning course and subject to the e-learning validation process in which staff have to work with the Learning Development team prior to validation. In the case of e-supported learning, such as putting course notes on the VLE, there is a more lightweight process. However in all cases the principle is to ask why e-learning is included rather than just assuming it is a good thing. Tutors should be clear how notes on the VLE add value to the course. Good learning design is good learning design and there is nothing special about e-learning. Staffordshire takes the view that e-learning is a good tool and policy is an important instrument.

Despite these efforts it is still the case that institutional rhythms impinge in certain ways e.g. there is still a fixation with the academic year. Distance Learning students who start in February can't enrol for all their modules at once. They have to re-enrol for modules that start in September and do extra paperwork.

Comparing our strategy with the other institutions makes you realise there are several markets out there and there may be something you are not tapping into

There is diversity of practice in terms of e-learning and I believe this is a good thing rather than a bad thing

One of the things I brought back and reflected on was that they had geared a particular mode of delivery to a particular group of students

The beauty of having real relationships with other institutions is that you're forced to listen to others' viewpoints and hear about new practices.

Application of e-Learning

There were equally diverse applications of e-learning with some partners primarily supporting distance learning and others innovating with e-learning in the classroom. The pedagogies behind the approaches made for some interesting differences.

Most institutions felt they had learned much from past mistakes in the development of e-learning. LCT found its early courses were very media intensive, difficult to upgrade and contained too much material. Student feedback helped them improve and recognise it is a mistake to develop e-learning with the same structure as a taught course. For FE provision however they face the ongoing issue of costly changes when the syllabus changes. Staffordshire University's early e-learning similarly fell into the 'content trap' as well as the trap of developments led by technology not educational needs where accessibility was viewed as an add-on: 'We've done it, now is it accessible?' Active pedagogy is now more important than active content e.g. where notes are provided on the VLE this may be as part of a problem based learning activity such as 'Compare your lecture notes with those on the VLE.'

LCT and Staffordshire University also shared the driver that some innovation came as a result of financial imperatives - using e-learning to save courses or departments and hence jobs. The level of distance learning at LCT is unusual in FE but e-learning has allowed it to maintain its Print Department, which is one of only a few in the UK, as most had to close because employers could no longer afford to send students for block release. Similarly, the Staffordshire Geography Department's Masters Degree in Sustainable Development has saved the department and jobs.

The use of e-learning at LCT shows clear benefits both in terms of widening participation and in making the college itself competitive. Many of its students wouldn't otherwise have had the opportunity of education as companies wouldn't pay to release them for study. The mode of study fits better with shift working, which is a feature of many of the industries in the college's market, and trainees are gaining qualifications more quickly with some qualifications that previously took a year now taking only 6 months. The college is also now attracting overseas students. Loughborough College similarly introduced an e-learning course for a UK wide business that had a staff of night workers and in this case Loughborough feels that the electronic element has improved course administration, for the company and the college, as well as learning, which is increasingly moving towards Moodle.

LCT's view of its e-learning provision is that it has to strike a pragmatic balance between pedagogic ideals and the demands of the competitive environment in which the college exists. The focus on exam results is of considerable commercial importance. Employers value qualifications, even though more reflection might prepare learners better for the world of work, which can lead to an emphasis on what is needed to pass the exam rather than on the educational experience with the result that some courses are heavily text based rather than activity based. This is not an unusual situation - Staffordshire faces similar issues in professionally accredited modules and notes that the difference between learning and training often causes tensions.

LCT therefore does not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to e-learning and we saw considerable differences between courses for different student groups e.g. between the Print courses and those of the Professional Development Unit where evidence of professional reflection is an important aspect of the curriculum. The approaches recognise that the needs of someone who has done a job for many years and now needs a certificate to prove their abilities are different from those of someone taking an 'improving' course. The differences extend to their approach to course structure and assessment. The former group like to have all of the material available to 'dip into' rather than have it released in a way that mirrors delivery of a face-to-face course. They also like some form of online assessment and will often go straight to the quiz at the end to see if they need to do the work. This approach would not however be suitable for all groups – Staffordshire University tried this with a distance Masters course then decided to roll out the modules in a structured way as students were going straight to the end and being 'freaked out' by the difficulty of the material because they hadn't done the prior learning. Loughborough College also responded to feedback from distance learning students on the Leisure Management Foundation Degree that they wanted to do modules one at a time rather than in parallel.

Loughborough College had some slightly different drivers for introducing e-learning into Sports Science. It developed a DVD for a distance learning course for gym instructors because the tutors didn't feel that existing manuals or VLE materials they had seen were effective. They chose the DVD format because it can be used by people without a home PC as well as students in prisons who don't have internet access. The development involved a number of up-front costs for equipment which meant the course did not initially make a profit but the college believes the experience gained from developing the material in-house will be valuable for the future. The College also felt that Sports Science is an area where there is considerable potential for e-learning to deliver more effective evaluation and feedback. The college is using some sports analysis software which uses video footage of students and allows the tutor to easily pick out areas on which to give feedback. It shows people what they are doing rather than just telling them. The tutor can overlay ideal shots/movements etc over the clip of what the student was actually doing to illustrate the difference.

Assessment of e-learning courses raises issues, especially for FE. City and Guilds has introduced assessment by laptop for some courses delivered at LCT but it has to be taken on a laptop with proprietary software that has to be booked with 2 weeks notice and logged in within a specific 2 hour time slot. This means a tutor travelling to the student with the laptop and work-based learners often have distractions that mean they can't meet the login deadline. Loughborough faced issues when it replaced exams and presentations by reports for distance learners. Quality Assessors wanted to reinstate exams as they thought it unfair on the college-based students. CAMEL participants agreed that assessment of different modes of learning isn't a level playing field however you do it: the important thing is equity – not making it the same.

It made us think about some of the targets we had ... and we are now looking at more of a customer focus in terms of what people actually want

It's almost like an informal benchmarking process

Hosting a study visit meant we spotted gaps in the pedagogy of what we were doing

Getting to know someone else quite closely you're more likely to be inspired by them

It has allowed us to avoid using things that wouldn't have actually been effective in our own institution

Great for trying out new tools in a comfortable environment so you don't feel such a fool for asking simple questions

You start to really understand where it works, how it works, in what conditions and contexts it works

We can take advantage of the experiences of other institutions

e-Learning Tools

One of the most valuable aspects of the CAMEL project was the opportunity to see a range of e-learning tools in action. As might be expected the range of tools was as diverse as the strategies and approaches. It was noted that 'Technology can expose people to pedagogic approaches they may not be familiar with'.

Loughborough College is the only one of the partners not to have an institutional VLE having moved away from limited use of a single VLE to a website for each curriculum area. The college adopted a staged approach to the cultural change required. The first stage was to have information available in electronic format and to make it available to students (achieved via a content management system). They then had a reason to go to the next stage when people were actually using electronic resources and could see the need rather than going for an all-singing, all-dancing system at the start. The College believes that not having a VLE has given them more of a journey and made them explore more so it has been enabling. There is an ongoing debate about the need to move to some kind of VLE in the future and the current arrangement is not viewed as a particular barrier to change. The self-managed teams existed before they had websites so they don't see the sites as a fundamental part of their identity and therefore difficult to change. Other than in their websites the teams have 'autonomy within boundaries' as they are provided with set tools and equipment and the autonomy is in how they use them.

Staffordshire University is the only partner to have gone through the pain of migrating from one VLE used on a mainstream scale to another. As a result of this it puts a lot of emphasis on re-use and repurposing of materials in order to make the job easier if they ever do it again and has worked with its partners on the sharing of resources through the JISC Exchange for Learning (X4L) programme. As well as addressing interoperability issues Staffordshire desires to prevent a lot of 'reinventing the wheel' with regard to basic course content by making material available in ways that allow people to repurpose it and put their own stamp on it.

The University of Greenwich supports the principle of managed diversity and an emphasis on sound pedagogy by supporting a range of e-learning tools and some of its Schools have developed their own VLEs. There is also an emphasis on experimenting with 'free stuff' i.e. many of the free or open source collaboration tools available under the banner of 'social software'. The approach is to give such tools to the students and their teachers and empower their use rather than make it 'something else the institution does to them via the VLE'. Greenwich staff are finding interesting results as a result of letting stakeholders, including students, have some control. The university terms this an 'e-toolkit' strategic approach enabling different tools to be used in different situations within a context of fitness for purpose. The fact that students will inevitably find their own ways to use tools is borne out at LCT where one group of students used the calendar as a bulletin board because it flashes new information better.

The University of Greenwich demonstrated the use of the LAMS (Learning Activity Management System) tool for learning design to the CAMEL participants. Greenwich has used both LAMS and Moodle to good effect in the JISC-funded eLISA project which produced learning sequences to support the development of Study Skills for use across a range of partners. Much of the evidence for the benefits of e-learning in terms of improving the learning experience is anecdotal thus it was interesting to see that Greenwich Community College was able to demonstrate a measurable improvement in student performance as a result of the eLISA project. The Study Skills module was used with a group of nursing students, mature and out of education for a long time, by a tutor who had no previous e-learning experience or interest in technology. The group was asked to write a personal statement in the knowledge that all students were at pre-Access level and not at all ready to do it. The group then completed the e-learning module (still with no tutoring) and then redid their personal statements. The improvement was considerable even without any tutor input and has convinced that particular tutor that e-learning can aid learning.

A number of the CAMEL partners are using the RELOAD tool developed as part of the JISC X4L Programme. RELOAD is a toolkit that facilitates the creation, sharing and re-use of learning objects and has sequencing tools to support the creation of pedagogically sound learning designs. Loughborough College is currently using RELOAD as a knowledge management tool and Greenwich, in particular, suggested that there is additional value to be gained by making use of the learning design features.

LCT demonstrated the Horizon Wimba synchronous collaboration tool that was trialled on one of its Professional Development Courses, where students have to evidence professional discussion, and is now used widely as part of a blended approach to reduce the number of face-to-face sessions. The need for effective facilitation of such online interactions was highlighted as was the need for the tutor to maintain similar discipline with regard to timekeeping as they would in the classroom and the need to be aware of 'at risk' students who need extra support to develop reasoning and higher order thinking skills. As well as offering opportunities to hold 'classes' at times convenient for the students the tutor felt the tracking facilities helped to cut down on administration and offered her the opportunity both to evaluate student input accurately and to reflect on her own input. This had raised for her the potential of 'paperless portfolios' and of assessing groups online rather than physically visiting individual work-based learners. Questions were raised about the suitability of such tools for use with dyslexic students. It was suggested that provided you slow down and use plenty of graphics/video this need not be a barrier. The students should also have the online notes for later reference.

At Loughborough College we saw a range of simple e-learning tools suitable for use in the classroom and in other situations. Personal response systems or voting pads are used to engage students in the classroom by allowing them to vote on the correct answers to multiple choice questions.

It's been very interesting to hold my institution up as a mirror against other institutions

When you actually talk to a teacher delivering something using those technologies you get a more honest assessment of how effective those teaching practices are

It's giving people the confidence to go on and try things

You get insights from other people's reactions to what you're doing

Setting aside time
to tell ourselves
what we are doing
within the institution
was an eye-opener
for members of
senior management

Such tools can be useful with young people who may be technically 'savvy' but not keen on paper exercises. Harrow College used LAMS as part of the Greenwich eLISA project with a group of 16-19 students with poor literacy skills who didn't like anything on paper. The students used the 'Taking Notes' module and immediately took to the technology and were trying things out before the system was explained to them.

Loughborough College also demonstrated digital pens and notepaper that functions like a normal pen and paper except that the results can be downloaded to a PC or sent to a mobile phone as text. The pens are used by NVQ assessors evaluating students in the workplace who previously had to transcribe notes and are good for students who can't type and find this a barrier to using IT.

The University of Greenwich held a session on podcasting and some of its staff hold the view that this is 'already mainstream'. Whilst few people have a primarily auditory learning style there can be advantages in students having the flexibility to listen at different times, supplement their notes and use podcasts for revision. It was suggested that the technical issues involved are secondary to concerns over intellectual property and the fact that staff think it is more difficult than it actually is although it was noted that podcasts will be of most value where the lecturer is a good, motivational speaker.

There were various discussions about the extent to which institutions should provide tutors with templates as well as tools. Staffordshire University does provide 'vanilla' templates for material in the VLE, due to concerns over accessibility issues and the effect on students of having many different interfaces, although it does allow additional websites as well. LCT has attempted to introduce various templates and desktop tools for developing materials but all attempts to tell people 'how to do it' have been resisted. Burton College on the other hand would like the 'luxury' of maverick staff who develop their own websites as this at least denotes a high level of IT literacy.

The University of Greenwich questions the necessity for a standard look and feel to course materials but it is using a portal project to address some of the tensions of diversity as research shows that students want a single interface to core information. The project is being led by an academic member of staff. Schools initially didn't want to give up their own systems but agreed to participate if the centre could deliver the same level of service and they could devise their own content. In terms of user requirements it is notable that 'funky stuff' comes way down the student priority list – exam timetabling was top. The portal project leader noted two major difficulties in defining requirements, especially from staff: 'The fact people want stuff when you ask doesn't mean they'll use it when you deliver' and 'Also they don't know what they want. If you had asked somebody 50 years ago "Do you want an iPod?" they would have said no. When cashpoints first came out they paid people to use them.'



Student Support

Support for e-learners, particularly those on distance learning courses, was a major feature of the Greenwich meeting but came up in all of the visits. LCT has statistics which show that students do better after a face-to-face induction so this is now compulsory. Loughborough College has made a residential element compulsory for distance learners (including overseas students) so they do have contact time and Staffordshire University also has a face-to-face induction for distance learners (and for Masters students before starting their dissertation). One reason in this case is the avoidance of plagiarism. The face-to-face sessions allow the tutor to develop a profile of the student to match against their assessed work and establish that they are who they say they are.

LCT uses free assessment tools available via the web to evaluate students' IT skills if they can't attend induction and it was noted that HE tends to do very little assessment of people's IT skills before they start online courses.

None of the partners currently offers 24x7 support but LCT and Loughborough Colleges in particular try to have tutors available at times when distance learners are working and Staffordshire University has 'chat room surgeries' at set times. Distance learners at Loughborough College complained that they didn't get feedback as quickly as college students so they now get email feedback before a marked assignment is returned to them. LCT tried to implement service level agreements for students but found it impractical as tutors work in different ways depending on the particular needs of their group. Staffordshire University has a standard university policy that feedback should be given within 25 days but realistically students need the feedback in 2-3 days for it to be most useful.

The University of Greenwich demonstrated various support services for learners through its OSCARS (Off-campus Services Contact And Remote Support) service. A very conscious effort is being made to ensure that the library is not remote to distance learners and services range from 'movie tutorials', so that students get to see a face as well as information, and postal borrowing of books to live online help. The live support via instant messaging means that students don't need to interrupt online work to get help and at the end of the session the student gets a transcript of the chat via email. This service is currently offered daytime only so expectations are managed by ensuring that the option only appears on students' screens when staff are present to assist them. The University is also trialling an e-support tool that allows a member of the IT support team to control the user's PC so they can reach out and help students at any time from any location. The student doesn't have to install anything they simply open an email and click on a java applet. This form of support gets round issues of assessing the student's level of IT literacy so that instructions are neither overly complex nor patronising. It is also possible to record the session and email it to the student so that next time they need to carry out the action for themselves they can play back the sequence of actions.

It helps in understanding more about the nature of students coming from FE and what kind of learning and teaching background they are coming out of

It has helped colleges see what HE institutions are looking for in students

Bringing together the one type of institution with the other bridges the gap, usefully for teachers but ultimately for learners themselves in terms of progression from one to the other



Technology offers opportunities to improve administrative support to students as in the case of the night workers at Loughborough. The College also uses electronic lesson planning so that a person covering absence can view the lesson plan and access the supporting resources and the system generates PDF Schemes of Work for students. LCT has students put their shift patterns in a calendar to help with scheduling exams and tutors note down learner activity in an online tracking tool, developed to overcome some of the limitations of the VLE. This is used as an audit trail to claim funding for distance learners as there are no class registers and is also useful for support purposes as tutors can flag it to send an alert if it is n days since a student logged in. Although it can often be difficult to contact a failing student if they have stopped logging on there is resistance at LCT to using text messaging as this is viewed as invasive and tantamount to 'hassling' the student.

The various ways in which tutors respond to student queries generated much debate. Often the emphasis is on the student/tutor interaction and emails are private between the two as is the case on some courses at LCT and Staffordshire. Loughborough noted 'students say they don't mind others knowing their email address but don't make use of 'reply to all' when responding to emails.' Some tutors noted the tendency to work harder with hard-working groups hence the need to record and manage their time. Greenwich actively discourages the use of email responses partly to avoid this 'swamping' but particularly because it feels the lack of a distributed learning model is a missed opportunity and that students should benefit from one another's questions. Some Greenwich tutors will therefore only respond to questions via a bulletin board.

The use of bulletin boards varies. LCT finds that younger students are more willing to use them (although often for social messages) than mature students whereas Staffordshire University finds that they are more often used by postgraduate groups with a lot of shared experience than by first years. The need to monitor and facilitate bulletin board exchanges was noted. This is a particular issue in FE since the Learning and Skills Council will not recognise facilitation of such interaction as Guided Learning Hours whereas responding to emails is counted.

Loughborough College demonstrated an advanced e-learning system for student guidance and support in the form of its e-Progress File developed as part of the JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme. This helps students to develop an understanding of their skills, evaluate their abilities and plan for the future. It also helps to prepare them for Personal Development Planning (PDP) at university and appraisal at work. The system was developed with Loughborough University and the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) and interoperability of data across FE and HE and accessibility for the visually impaired are key features of the system. The college has developed versions suitable for Key Skills stages 3 and 4 and is piloting this with local schools and developing a version for adult learners with less emphasis on guidance and more on self-appraisal. FE students at Loughborough have a progress tutorial once a week and can access the e-Progress file at all times. The system saves time and money during the formative stages, although the student may still want a paper summative record, and the induction to progress tutoring now takes 2 weeks instead of 4.

Staff Development

Development of, and support for, staff delivering e-learning also featured heavily on the visits although it was noted that 'We (i.e. the sector) still have a largely untrained workforce and a lot of room for improvement.'

The University of Greenwich runs a professional development programme leading to a Certificate in e-Learning, Teaching and Training (CeLTT) to help staff understand both technology and pedagogy. The course was originally offered fully online but it was found that people can feel disempowered without a face-to-face element so it now also offers a blended approach for learners able to attend. The portfolio in e-learning includes BSc (e-Learning), MA Education (e-Learning) and EdD provision and attracts local, national and international learners including some from Greenwich's partner colleges.

It was noted that there seems to be a high degree of IT literacy amongst staff in Loughborough and the college feels it has achieved 'buy-in' by demonstrating that IT makes things easier. Loughborough's support staff are encouraged to do ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) but it was harder to find something suitable for academics. It was felt that IT qualifications aren't the way forward for this group and that it is best to give them small chunks that relate to something they are actually doing. This is very similar to Staffordshire University's approach of embedding staff IT development in development i.e. provide it as needed rather than run events so that people are working on their own course during the training. Shrewsbury College offers 'drop-in' support and specific training geared to specific needs not generic sessions.

Stoke College has 'Holy Hours' set aside for staff development whereby all tutors are meant to have 2 hours per week. They define the most important development needs as, 'The ones staff identify themselves'. They did a skills audit which revealed that many middle managers and above are ashamed of their IT skills and they have been submerged by requests for 1:1 training. The advice given to Stoke's support team is to take opportunities to disseminate new ideas, give pointers and engage staff further every time you interact with them. The college has had recent problems with its VLE and feels that the fact that staff are prepared to use 'workarounds' is a measure of their confidence in the support team.

Stoke College learned from the experience of a first phase of ILT champions that wasn't very successful. The champions were offered 3 hours remission or £1k on salary (the split between the options was 50/50) but the college didn't set any targets and just let them get on with it. The new phase of champions are project-oriented and time-limited and their negotiated projects are faculty-oriented and focus on areas of key impact.

Harrow College noted that using e-learning to support distance learners is a good learning experience for teachers as to how to give very clear instructions at the start of an activity since you can't follow that up immediately as in face-to-face sessions.

There are challenges which can benefit from a reflexive approach in which critical practices develop with people from the outside

Simply by presenting your activities for others to scrutinise you are forced to think about them so that's already a catalyst for change

It's less threatening for other people to help you move forward

CAMEL is not just about learning from each other it is about generating ideas

I wouldn't hesitate
to say it's been
extremely valuable

I've never felt I'm
not getting my
money's worth here
or we've invested
too much time and
effort for what we're
getting back



The approach was
shown to be
effective as close
relationships have
been forged within
the group

Even though so
thinly costed, it was
very influential and
effective

How did we measure success?

Even on a small scale project such as CAMEL the benefits of a structured, and if necessary critical, external evaluation should not be underestimated. In CAMEL's case we appointed Inspire Research Ltd following an open call for tenders and we are grateful to them for many of the quotes used in this publication.

To ensure the relevance of the evaluation participants were involved in establishing the focus of the formative evaluation during the first study visit and an evaluation session was held at the end of each visit with the following key themes:

1. Project Forward Review and expectations of the project
2. Matching expectations to date
3. Learning and actions from visits so far
4. Advice on future use of the CAMEL model

To supplement this information a series of 30 minute telephone interviews with participants was held.

The response to the project was overwhelmingly positive and the quotes throughout the publication show some of the benefits gained by participants. It appears from the feedback that people have taken away learning that they will act upon back in their own institutions. The key actions seem to centre around:

- Considering different approaches and the benefits of e-learning for different groups of learners
- Reviewing strategy and developing more formal approaches to policy
- Awareness of new tools and more diverse practices



Looking back at our original objectives we haven't yet answered the question 'Have we developed a Community of Practice?' If the interactions ended here most of us would still view CAMEL as a worthwhile experience. However with the partners starting CAMEL networks in their own institutions and the group having secured funding for a further CAMEL-based collaborative project (eLIDA CAMEL) under the JISC Design for Learning Programme it seems as if the CAMEL train will keep on travelling for a while yet.

We probably aren't a Community of Practice in the acknowledged sense (see references to Wenger's work) and frankly we're not too hung up on that right now. The group will ultimately have a natural lifespan but we feel we still have much to learn from each other and much to share with the wider community. We've decided to call what we're doing a CAMEL Network and we've produced a CD-ROM to tell others what we've learned about working with others in this way. Copies of the CD-ROM are available free from www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/publications

Final words from our external evaluators:

'Some of the achievements of this project, such as the strength of relationships built between partners and the group's ability to secure future funding, are significant given the relatively short timeframe and experimental nature of this pilot project.'

'... the approach was shown to be effective as close relationships have been forged within the group ...'

'... it was surprising the extent to which an ethos of open and trusting relationships had developed within the community.'

'... there are some encouraging signs which lend considerable weight to the likelihood of CAMEL's continued development.'

All of us here feel very positive about being involved in the project and have found it an immensely rich learning experience

I think HEFCE should be advised that their funding was very well spent on CAMEL

There are some encouraging signs which lend considerable weight to the likelihood of CAMEL's continued development

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to HEFCE for LGM funding and for the support of Pramod Philip and Alistair Townsend during the course of the project.

The Project Director and publication editor was Dr Gill Ferrell of JISC infoNet and the project was managed by Jacquie Kelly (JISC infoNet) and Rhonda Riachi (ALT). In a project such as this which relied so heavily on the contribution of all participants it is particularly difficult to single out individuals for thanks. There was however a core group who organised the visits and stimulated the enthusiasm of others and we would like to acknowledge our gratitude to: Nav Chohan and Phil Openshaw (Leeds College of Technology); Ray Heasley and Fiona Henry (Loughborough College); Mark Stiles and Gary Clay (Staffordshire University) and Jill Jameson, Malcolm Ryan and Simon Walker (University of Greenwich).

Thanks are also due to Seb Schmoller (and the Uruguayan farmers) for the original idea, to Rachel Harris and Alison Muirhead (Inspire) for their evaluation work, to Eddie Gulc (Higher Education Academy) and Lisa Gray (JISC) for gaining the support of their respective organisations and to Patrick Bellis, Janette Hillicks and Andrew Stewart (JISC infoNet) for their work on the design and development of the project outputs.

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Participating Organisations

Core Partner Institutions

Leeds College of Technology
Loughborough College
Staffordshire University
University of Greenwich

Associated Partner Institutions

Barnet College
Burton College
Greenwich Community College
Harrow College
Loughborough University
Shrewsbury College
Stoke-on-Trent College

Sector Organisations

ALT
Higher Education Academy
JISC
JISC infoNet

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Glossary

ALT	The Association for Learning Technology. http://www.alt.ac.uk
CAMEL	Collaborative Approaches to the Management of e-Learning. http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/camel
CeLTT	Certificate in e-Learning, Teaching and Training – University of Greenwich based Certificate of Professional Development in eLearning, Teaching and Training. http://greguns2.gre.ac.uk/PCET/PROGRAMMES/CeITT/CeLTTAdmin.nsf
CoP	Community of Practice
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
ECDL	European Computer Driving Licence
eLIDA CAMEL	e-learning Independent Design Activities for Collaborative Approaches to the Management of e-Learning. CAMEL-based collaborative project. http://www.gre.ac.uk/elidacamel
eLISA	JISC-funded eLearning Independent Study Skills Awards, Independent Lifelong Learning Project. http://elisa.cms.gre.ac.uk/index.html
FE	Further Education
GLH	Guided Learning Hours – time when staff member is present to give specific guidance towards a learning aim
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEFCE LGM	HEFCE Leadership, Governance and Management programme. Initiative to further enhance leadership, governance and management within the higher education sector. http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lgm/
Horizon Wimba	Synchronous collaboration tool - Voice technology for online interactive language teaching and learning. http://www.horizonwimba.com/
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILT	Information and Learning Technology

ILT champions	<p>“The role of an ILT Champion has always been to encourage/mentor staff to use technology in the management and delivery of the curriculum and to encourage good ILT practices and strategies...”.</p> <p>Source: Ferl.</p> <p>http://ferl.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?page=145</p>
IT	Information Technology
Java applet	<p>“An applet is a program written in the Java programming language that can be included in an HTML page, much in the same way an image is included in a page” Source: Sun Developer Network.</p> <p>http://java.sun.com/applets/</p>
JISC Design for Learning (D4L)	JISC Programme which builds on work in the area of e-learning, keen to develop further the community’s understanding of the principles that inform the design of effective learning activities which involve the use of technology
JISC MLE4LL	<p>JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme.</p> <p>http://www.jisc.ac.uk/mle_lifelonglearning_info.html</p>
JISC X4L	<p>JISC Exchange for Learning Programme. “The programme is exploring the re-purposing of existing and forthcoming JISC funded content suitable for use in learning. The programme also encompasses content created by other bodies and agencies active in this area where intellectual property rights allow for educational use in FE and HE, or can be negotiated. Part of this activity is to explore the process of integration or "plugging-in" of usable objects into online learning”.</p> <p>http://www.x4l.org.uk</p>
LAMS	<p>(Learning Activity Management System) tool</p> <p>http://www.lamsinternational.com/</p>
LCT	Leeds College of Technology
LSC	Learning and Skills Council – http://www.lsc.gov.uk
MIS	Management Information Systems
MLE	Managed Learning Environment
Moodle	<p>Open Source Software Course Management System.</p> <p>http://www.moodle.org</p>
NVQ	<p>National Vocational Qualification.</p> <p>http://www.qca.org.uk/610.html</p>
OSCARS	<p>Off-campus Services Contact And Remote Support – University of Greenwich service -</p> <p>http://www.gre.ac.uk/ils/oscars/</p>
PC	Personal Computer

PDP	Personal Development Plan
PID	Project Initiation Document
Podcast	<p>“A usually compressed digital media file (usually, but not always, music or - and – speech) which can be pre-selected and routinely scheduled to be automatically downloaded via RSS to a computer or mobile listening/player device, e.g. an MP3 player/iPod”</p> <p>Source: Derek Morrison, Director of the e-learning@Bath team –posted to The Auricle 2 June 2006. http://www.bath.ac.uk/dacs/cdntl/pMachine/morriblog_comments.php?id=P519_0_4_0</p>
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency. http://www.qaa.ac.uk
RELOAD	<p>Reusable eLearning Object Authoring & Delivery is a toolkit that facilitates the creation, sharing and re-use of learning objects and has sequencing tools to support the creation of pedagogically sound learning designs.</p> <p>http://www.reload.ac.uk/</p>
RNIB	<p>Royal National Institute for the Blind.</p> <p>http://www.rnib.org.uk</p>
RSS	Really Simple Syndication – also known as Rich Site Summary or RDF Site Summary
SWOT analysis	Strategic planning tool that looks at Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

JISC



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