

The University of Surrey

Championing e-Learning with the help of the JISC e-Learning programme

Context

The University of Surrey is linked to institutions worldwide through its partnerships with US universities and the Dongbei University of Finance and Economics in China.

The University is justly proud of its consistently outstanding graduate employment record and emphasises the benefits to all who study and work at Surrey of its enterprising spirit and distinctive blend of academic knowledge and professional insight.

Discovering the JISC e-Learning programme

Anne Irving, Faculty e-Learning Adviser and Vicki Simpson, Head of Learning and Technology at the University of Surrey, have been members of JISC's Learning and Teaching Practice Experts Group since 2005. In their individual roles, they have both made extensive use of the JISC e-Learning programme, its associated resources and the knowledge and networking opportunities provided by JISC's Learning and Teaching Practice Experts Group.

Evaluating the impact of e-learning

The Language Centre was one of the first departments at the University of Surrey to pilot the University's virtual learning environment (VLE). From 2001, technology-enhanced learning had been considered to be a potentially powerful tool for teaching languages through the provision of interactive online practice and the encouragement of discussion and collaboration within the language being taught. In 2005, Anne was asked to conduct an internal evaluation of the Language Centre's varied uses of technology for different modes of distance and blending learning, to gauge their impact upon the quality of the learning experience and to make recommendations regarding the best way to deliver the Language Centre's courses.

Making the most of resources from the JISC e-Learning programme

Anne accessed information from the JISC publication, *Effective Practice with e-Learning* (JISC, 2004), which helped to provide a credible, research-based framework for her evaluation process. A study written by Professor Terry Mayes and Professor Sara de Freitas, (*Review of e-Learning Theories, Frameworks and Models*, 2004), also proved particularly helpful, enabling Anne to use the eight key issues that influence the successful implementation of e-learning, listed below, to structure her evaluation:

- Effectiveness versus efficiency
- Costs
- Quality assurance
- Tutor/student ratio
- Staff development
- Student support
- Technical support
- Management support

Anne's report also highlighted the six key areas in which e-learning is known to have delivered benefits to student learning (referenced within Effective Practice with e-Learning, JISC, 2004). These include:

- **Connectivity** – access to information is available on a global scale
- **Flexibility** – learning can take place any time, any place
- **Interactivity** – assessment of learning can be immediate and autonomous
- **Collaboration** – the use of discussion tools can support collaborative learning beyond the classroom
- **Extended opportunities** – e-content can reinforce and extend classroom-based learning
- **Motivation** – multimedia resources can make learning fun

Lessons learned: The benefits of blended learning

Feedback obtained from students and tutors over 5 semesters was supportive of the development of blended learning (a combination of technology-mediated activities with face-to-face learning and teaching) within the Language Centre and its courses.

Key findings from the evaluation process include:

- Teaching costs remain the same, but collateral benefits include reduced demand for teaching space and flexibility for part-time tutors. Most tutors felt that e-tutoring was no greater burden, in terms of workload, than classroom teaching
- A majority of students (70-81%) consistently favoured the blended learning approach
- Deeper learning was promoted via assessed tasks, which reward reflective engagement with course content plus collaboration with peers

The conclusions from Anne's report have made a positive impact upon the wider University, and, although different areas of the University have reached different stages in their development of e-learning, the report's findings have provided valuable evidence for the University's management team, enhancing their understanding of e-learning practice.

'Through discussion at the University's Learning Technology Management Group, Anne's report encouraged a deeper and more thoughtful consideration of the role and impact of e-learning.'

Head of Learning and Technology, Vicki Simpson, University of Surrey

Key points for effective practice

Anne's recommendations include:

- The provision of staff development courses in which tutors are encouraged to reflect on their experiences as online learners and in which they can develop appropriate teaching techniques
- Consideration for the payment of e-tutoring and what this entails beyond teaching, in terms of preparation, assessment and pastoral care
- e-learning should be incorporated into modules at different levels of intensity: i.e. tailored to each module and responsive to the varying cycles of student motivation and workload

'The JISC e-Learning Programme has made my role easier. If I didn't have that link I don't know where I'd get the information from.'

Faculty e-Learning Coordinator for the Language Centre, Anne Irving, University of Surrey

Championing e-learning across the University

The knowledge gained at JISC Learning and Teaching Experts Group meetings, and from the e-Learning programme publications, has also been used to encourage further developments in e-learning at the University of Surrey.

Vicki Simpson is responsible for a programme of academic development courses relating to the use of e-learning and new technologies. In 2005, she attended a JISC e-learning workshop on Planning and Evaluating Effective Practice with e-Learning, which introduced some of the tools and resources that were being developed by JISC. The e-learning programme publications and associated materials have since become a valued resource and are employed in a variety of ways, for example:

- Using the 'Active Collaborative Learning' video from 'Innovative Practice with e-learning' (JISC, 2005) within a workshop about active learning and electronic voting
- Using the Effective Practice Planner (Effective Practice with e-Learning, JISC, 2004 and Effective Practice in a Digital Age, JISC, 2009) as an in-class activity on an introductory technology course
- Including theories and e-learning models from the Review of e-Learning Theories, Frameworks and Models (JISC, 2004) in the PG Certificate in Academic Practice for new academic staff

'The JISC e-learning programme has been very valuable to me and a great time-saver, both in terms of providing high quality and useful resources which support our activity, and in keeping me up to date with new developments and ideas.'

Head of Learning and Technology, Vicki Simpson, University of Surrey

In 2007, the institution began to consider e-portfolios for Personal Development Planning (PDP) and, during this time, Anne attended a JISC Learning and Teaching Practice Experts Group meeting which included a presentation about the use of e-portfolios at the University of Wolverhampton. The Learners' Voices: Jenny and Emma's video (2007) was one of the resources used to illustrate the potential of e-portfolios. Subsequently, the University has invested in an institutional e-portfolio system and Effective Practice with e-Portfolios (JISC, 2008) has been used to provide further illustrative examples for staff about how e-portfolios could be used.

Designing Spaces for Effective Learning (JISC, 2006) has also proved to be a valuable resource, influencing and informing the development of the University's physical spaces. The Head of the University's Library used its recommendations to help inform the development of refurbishments within the Library building.

'Designing Spaces for Effective Learning (JISC, 2006) ... inspired and informed the refurbishment of part of the Library; transforming it from an area housing print journals into SPLASH, a Student Personal Learning and Study Hub providing integrated support for student learning development. This refurbished space opened in 2007. Subsequently, we built on the practical experience gained from the development and use of SPLASH, together with the JISC work, in arguing the case for the current, larger project to redevelop and extend the University Library. The current detailed plans are an acknowledgement that "Spaces are themselves agents for change. Changed spaces will change practice" as identified within the JISC studies and publications.'

Head of Library, Jane Savidge, University of Surrey

Links

Effective Practice in e-Learning (JISC, 2004)

www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/effectivepracticeelearning.pdf

Effective Practice in a Digital Age (JISC, 2009)

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/effectivepracticedigitalage.pdf>

Innovative Practice with e-Learning

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/innovativepe.pdf>

Effective Practice with e-Portfolios (JISC, 2008)

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/effectivepracticeeportfolios.pdf>

JISC e-Learning Models Desk Study, Stage 2: Review of E-Learning Theories, Frameworks and Models (T Mayes and S De Freitas, 2004)

http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Stage%20%20Learning%20Models%20%28Version%201%29.pdf

The Learners' Voices: Jenny and Emma's video (JISC, 2007)

http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/avfiles/programmes/elearning_pedagogy/jenny_emma.mov

Designing Spaces for Effective Learning (JISC, 2006)

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/learningspaces.pdf>

E-learning in the School of Arts: Evaluation by the Language Centre of three modes of delivery (Anne Irving, University of Surrey, 2010)

<http://www3.surrey.ac.uk/Arts/ulearn/e-learning-evaluation-irving.pdf>