

Effective Practice with e-Learning Evaluation Report





Effective Practice with e-Learning

Evaluation Report

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CD ROM

Evaluation report
Evaluation analysis
Questionnaires
Interviews
Email responses

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Executive Summary

The JISC publication 'Effective Practice with e-Learning' was built around a sequence of ten case studies illustrating practitioners' solutions to day-to-day challenges. Launched at the Learning Journey Conference in Wolverhampton on 18 October 2004, the publication was made available in both print, on an accompanying CD-ROM and downloadable on-line.

This first publication from the JISC e-Learning and Pedagogy Strand illustrated some of the key implications in designing for learning for practitioners in the UK post-16 sector and offered an insight into how e-learning could be integrated into established practice to benefit both learners and practitioners.

A supporting series of workshops on 'Planning and Evaluating Effective e-Learning' took place from September 2005 to January 2006.

In September 2005 JISC commissioned an evaluation to 'develop an understanding of whether, and if so how, the Effective Practice with e-Learning publication and accompanying CD ROM is being used by practitioners, staff developers and other intermediaries to support effective pedagogic design with e-Learning.'

This report describes the design, implementation and outcomes of that evaluation. The evaluation methodology was based on the gathering of information from practitioners using the publication through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

A sample group was created of 70 practitioners who were judged to be active users of the publication. A balance across sectors, roles and regions was built into the sample.

Questionnaires were circulated to the sample group and requests for interviews, both face to face and by telephone were made. At the end of the exercise, 40 questionnaires had been completed and 35 interviews had been carried out. A total of 65 practitioners had provided information about their use of the publication and its effectiveness.

The outcomes demonstrated that the publication was well received and widely used as a resource by practitioners with responsibility for staff development in the areas of ILT and e-Learning. It was most valuable for those people relatively new to e-Learning who appreciated a number of key features:

- The clarity, succinctness and authoritative nature of the materials. This, together with the quality and design of the document, gave users confidence in the messages it contained.
- The case studies that, provided reassuring evidence that other people's experience was similar to theirs and raised their awareness of new ways of using technology to facilitate learning.
- The effective planning and evaluation tools and the workshops that used them. The workshops were valued for enabling practitioners to network and feel part of a community of practice.
- The variety of media that catered for different user preferences and the fact that it was all available on-line and able to be downloaded.

The overall recommendation to JISC arising from the evaluation was that this approach to dissemination was very effective and, with some of the refinements suggested here, future publications would be welcomed by practitioners.

Introduction

This report describes an evaluation of the JISC publication 'Effective Practice with e-Learning'¹. The purpose of the evaluation was to develop an understanding of whether, and if so how, the publication and supporting CD ROM was being used by practitioners, staff developers and other intermediaries to support effective pedagogic design with e-learning.

The overarching aim of the JISC e-Learning Programme² has been to identify how e-learning approaches might be used to facilitate learning effectively. This has been addressed through a combination of funded projects, evaluations and case studies, the outputs of which require synthesis for presentation to the different audiences in the post-16 sectors.

'Effective Practice with e-Learning' was designed as a practitioner-focussed synthesis of the project outputs and the purpose of this evaluation was to determine whether it had proved an effective way of disseminating the results of JISC development activities.

An analysis was carried out of the distribution of the publication across the UK. This documented the distribution by roles, sectors and regions and the outcomes are presented here in terms of the numbers of copies supplied to each. A sampling plan was created that was representative of the FE, HE and ACL sectors and also collected feedback from the JISC advisory services, regional support centres and partner organisations.

This report describes how information was gathered using questionnaires, face-to-face discussions and telephone interviews. It presents the outcomes in terms of the roles of the practitioners that made use of publication, the context in which they used it, the relevance it had to their context of use, the influence it had on their practice and the value of the format in disseminating effective practice with e-learning.

The report concludes by summarising the key messages that emerged from the evaluation about the use of the publication and its effectiveness. It also makes recommendations, based on these messages, about the dissemination of future outcomes of the JISC e-Learning Programme.

All of the questionnaires and interview transcripts are included in the CD ROM that accompanies this report, together with the evaluation analysis spreadsheet. To maintain confidentiality, all personal and institutional information has been removed from the documents.

¹ http://www.jisc.ac.uk/elp_practice.html

² <http://www.elearning.ac.uk/>

Methodology

The evaluation methodology was based on an analysis of the distribution of the 'Effective Practice with e-Learning' publication, the creation of a representative sample of practitioners within that distribution and an evaluation of the views of that sample on how effective it had been in the use to which they had put it.

The sampling strategy was centred on those practitioners demonstrating active use of the publication. Three categories of users were included in the initial trawl for information: Those who had requested multiple copies of the publication from JISC, those who had attended the regional workshops based on the publication and those known by JISC to be actively using the resource.

The sampling strategy sought a balance between the HE & FE sectors as well as a good representation of ACL. The RSCs and HEA subject centres were also represented and a range of roles and responsibilities were chosen. As far as was possible, the sample covered all regions across the UK.

It was anticipated at the beginning of the project that there would be a substantial amount of information available for analysis from the JISC on-line questionnaire about the publication. This proved not to be the case and the first project activity was to circulate the sample group with a new questionnaire for them to record their experiences.

A series of appointments were then made with members of the sample group that now included a fourth category of practitioners who had indicated on the questionnaire returns that they were willing to participate in a follow-up discussion. A target of 40 telephone interviews was set, supplemented by 10 face-to-face interviews.

Both the questionnaire and the interview template were set up as spreadsheet documents that allowed a level of automation in the gathering and presentation of quantitative and qualitative information.

The practitioners were asked about their use of the document and resources and were invited to agree or disagree with a number of statements about its effectiveness. The responses for each statement from all of the questionnaires were aggregated in a single evaluation analysis spreadsheet and the outcomes presented graphically.

Similarly, the comments made by the practitioners about their use of the publication were also extracted from the questionnaires and interview transcripts and presented together for easy comparison of opinions and experience.

Document distribution

The document and CD ROM have been widely distributed to institutions and individuals across the UK. There were two print runs of 10,000 copies each, and a third of an additional 3,000 copies for use in the Effective Practice with e-Learning workshops.

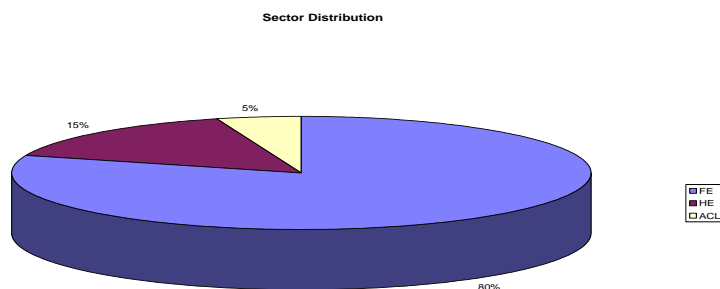
5,000 were sent to post-16 educational providers across the UK: 5 to every FE/Sixth form college in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 4 to every FE college in Scotland, 2 to every specialist college in England, 3 to every Adult and Community Learning provider and 4 to every HE institution in the UK.

Copies were sent to the JISC Regional Support Centres, Techdis, JISC InfoNet, CETIS, the Higher Education Academy, funding bodies across the UK, and copies to all those involved in the production of the publication. A significant number of copies were distributed to those who pre-ordered the guide.

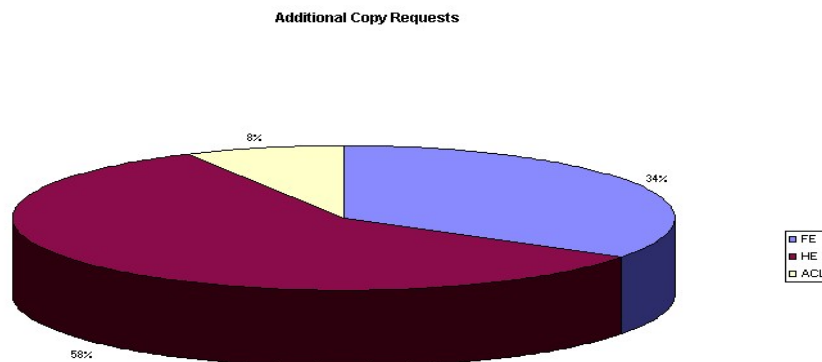
Copies were also disseminated at conferences across the UK and there have been many requests for additional copies. As a result of the demand, the second print run was ordered and over 21,000 copies have now been distributed, some outside the UK.

Sector Distribution

The sector distribution was as follows:



By far the largest number of copies went to the FE sector, mainly because of the larger number of FE institutions. It is interesting to note the contrast with a similar analysis of those institutions requesting additional copies:

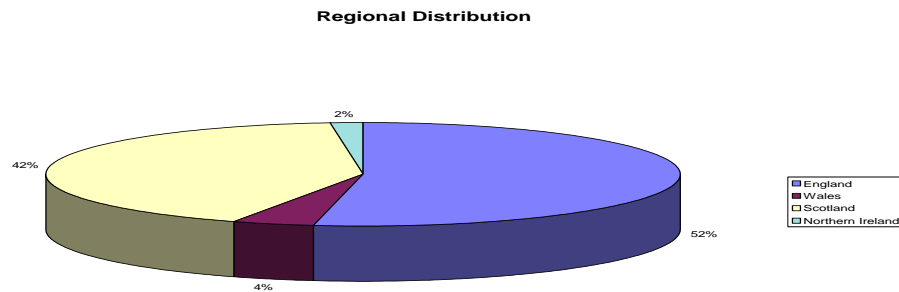


indicating that the active use of the document was predominantly in the HE sector. This observation is supported by the questionnaire and interview responses presented later in this report. However, it is known that FE institutions have had a

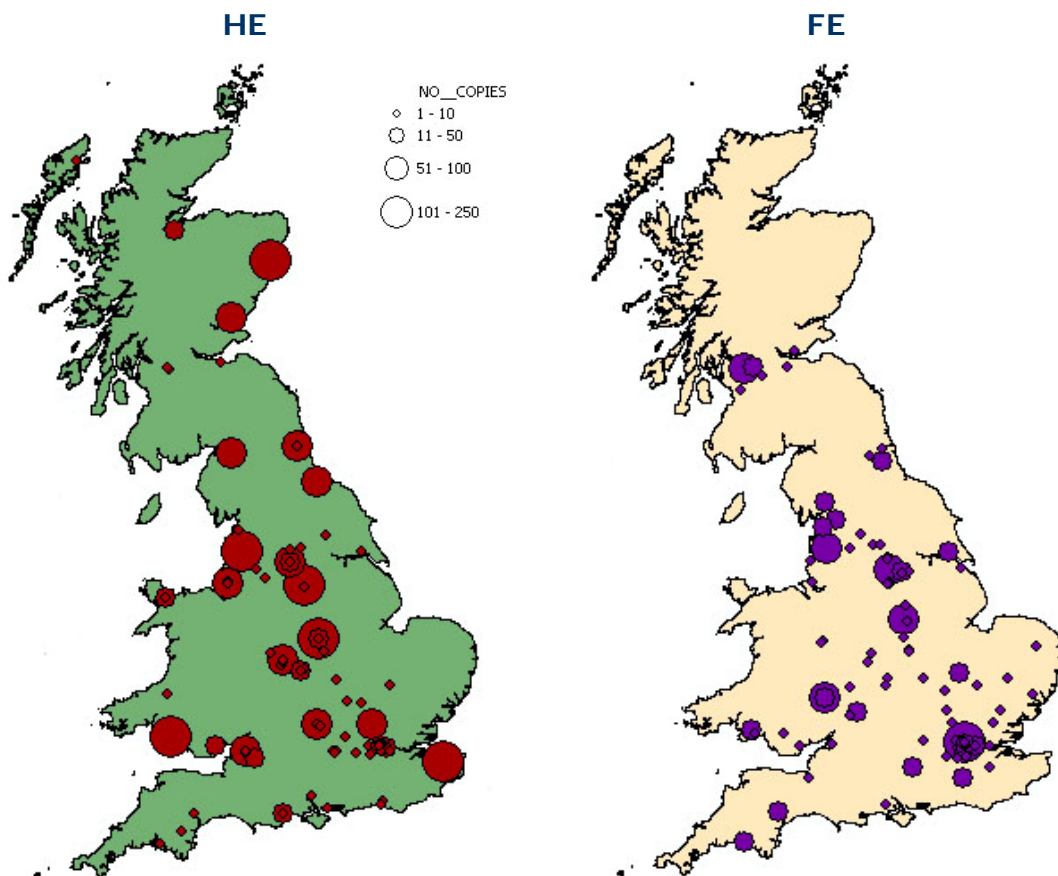
large amount of staff development support using the document through RSCs and LSDA, so perhaps their need was satisfied through these activities.

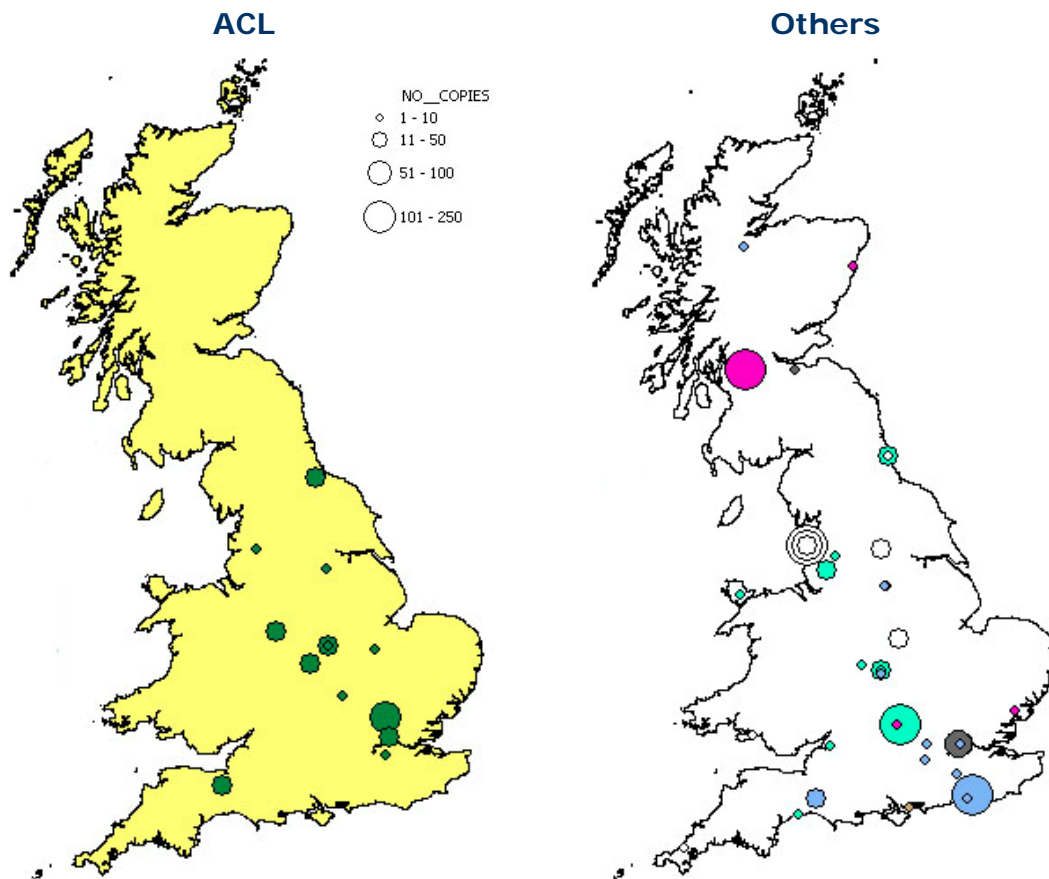
Regional Distribution

The regional distribution across the UK was:



This reflected the number of institutions in each region. A measure of the active use of the document regionally is indicated by the location of institutions requesting additional copies:





This is only a crude indicator, but it does show that the majority of requests came from English institutions and, again, this is reflected in the questionnaire and interview responses.

Roles of Document Users

The copies were addressed to post-holders within the institutions rather than named individuals. In FE for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, these were:

- VP/Director of Curriculum
- Staff Development Director/Manager
- Learning Resources Manager
- ILT Development Manager
- ILT Champion

In Scotland the Principal was sent the document rather than the VP/Director of Curriculum.

The HE post-holders were:

- Head of Staff Development
- Learning Technologists
- Head of e-Learning
- Head of Educational Studies

The roles of staff actively using the document and resources, as evidenced in the questionnaires and interviews, did indeed include the post holders above.

The most common use of the document was as a resource in staff development activity. The roles of the people involved included staff development officers, learning support officers, learning and teaching fellows, learning technology advisors and e-learning development officers.

The second most common role was that of a senior academic manager, typically head of department with responsibility for ICT and/or e-learning. Additionally, there were a number of project managers within institutions responsible for developing e-learning who were using the document as a resource when working with academics.

There was a small but significant number of individual academics who were developing e-learning out of personal interest and motivation. They were using the JISC publications for their own professional development and valued the associated workshops for the opportunity to network with other practitioners.

The final group of users identified were non-academic contributors to e-learning development and delivery including librarians and LRC managers, instructional designers and multimedia developers.

Sampling Plan

The evaluation methodology was based on gathering information about usage from known active practitioners, rather than a representative random sample of the document distribution profile.

The rationale for this approach was based on the fact that only those working with the publication would have a story to tell about its usage and would be in a position to comment on its effectiveness.

Three groups of practitioners were targeted for an initial survey based on a questionnaire distributed by email. These were:

- Practitioners who had requested multiple copies of the publication
- Delegates at the regional workshops based on the publication
- Practitioners known by JISC to be actively using the publication

The questionnaire invited the respondents to indicate whether they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview by telephone or face-to-face. The interview plan was based on that response, together with selected individuals from the groupings above.

The interview plan sought to cover as representative a sample as possible of the e-learning practitioner community. It was based on an equal number of FE institutions as HE institutions, as large a number of ACL practitioners as possible, as broad a geographical spread as possible and an input from agencies such as the JISC RSCs and the HEA subject centres.

A list of 70 names was assembled and invited by email to participate. There were 40 positive responses and the invitation schedule was organised with agreed dates and times. At the end of the exercise 35 interviews had been completed and documented, 25 of whom had also completed questionnaires. A further 18 people had also sent in completed questionnaires and 12 people sent email message responses rather than a questionnaire. The total sample for the evaluation was 65 practitioners.

The geographic distribution of the sample was as shown below. It can be seen that the majority of responses came from England, where the majority of 'active' users were based, although the other three other UK countries were represented.

The map does not show Northern Ireland as the mapping software didn't cover that region. Three questionnaires were completed in Northern Ireland and two telephone interviews were carried out.

Sample Distribution



Questionnaire and interview design

Both the questionnaire and the interview template were constructed as Excel spreadsheet documents. They were designed to capture quantitative and qualitative information about the use of the publication and its effectiveness. The general format is shown below.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Evaluation of 'Effective Practice with e-Learning'							
2								
3	JISC would welcome your feedback on the use being made of the published guide							
4	'Effective Practice with e-Learning'. As a recipient of the document or a participant in							
5	the workshops based on the document, you will be able to provide valuable							
6	information about how you used it or plan to use it.							
7	It would be greatly appreciated if you could complete this brief questionnaire and							
8	email it to:							
9	ttoole@glam.ac.uk							
10								
11								
12	This form draws on the work of Dr. Rhona Sharpe, Oxford Brookes University, and is based on the							
13	questionnaire accompanying the on-line version of the document.							
14								
15	1. ABOUT YOU							
16								
17	Where do you work? (Please select all that apply)							
18	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Higher Education							
19	<input type="checkbox"/> Further Education							
20	<input type="checkbox"/> Adult and Community Education							
21	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)							
22								
23								
24	What is your job title?							
25	Senior Learning and Teaching Fellow							
26								
27	2. YOUR USE OF THESE RESOURCES							
28								
29	Effective Practice with e-Learning consists of four elements: the main text of the							
30	publication, the case studies, the CD-ROM and three additional resources							
31	downloadable from the CD-ROM. These are: the Effective Practice Planner, the							
32	Effective Practice Evaluator and the Case Study Template. In what contexts have							
33	you/do you intend to use these elements?							
34								
35	<i>(please select all that apply)</i>				Text	Case Studies	CD ROM	Additional Resources
36								
37	Use these for my own information				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
38								
39	Use these in my own practice				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
40								
41	Use these to support others e.g. through training or staff development				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
42								
43	Use these to inform policy and planning for e-learning				<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
44								
45								
46	Please comment on your responses:							
47	I have been running a staff development programme and mentoring scheme within my Faculty since							
48	January 05 and found the resources very useful. We used the case study template as a basis for							
49	"progress report" posters from the mentees at an elearning day held on 3rd November.							

All of the tick box responses were aggregated from the separate questionnaires and interview templates and presented graphically to show how the publication was used across the sample and a comparison of views on how effective its different components had been.

Similarly, all the comments about different aspects of the publications use were extracted from each of the questionnaires and interview scripts and presented together for comparison and analysis.

The questionnaire captured quantitative and qualitative information relating to:

- The sector and role of the respondent
- The context in which each of the four elements of the publication was used
- The use made of the materials
- The relevance of the materials to the institution and sector
- The influence the materials had on e-learning design
- The usability of the materials

Respondents were also invited to identify the aspects of the publication that were most effective, and those that were least effective.

The interview template was based on the same areas of evaluation but included details of the e-learning developments at the institution involved and the nature and extent of the respondent's involvement with that development.

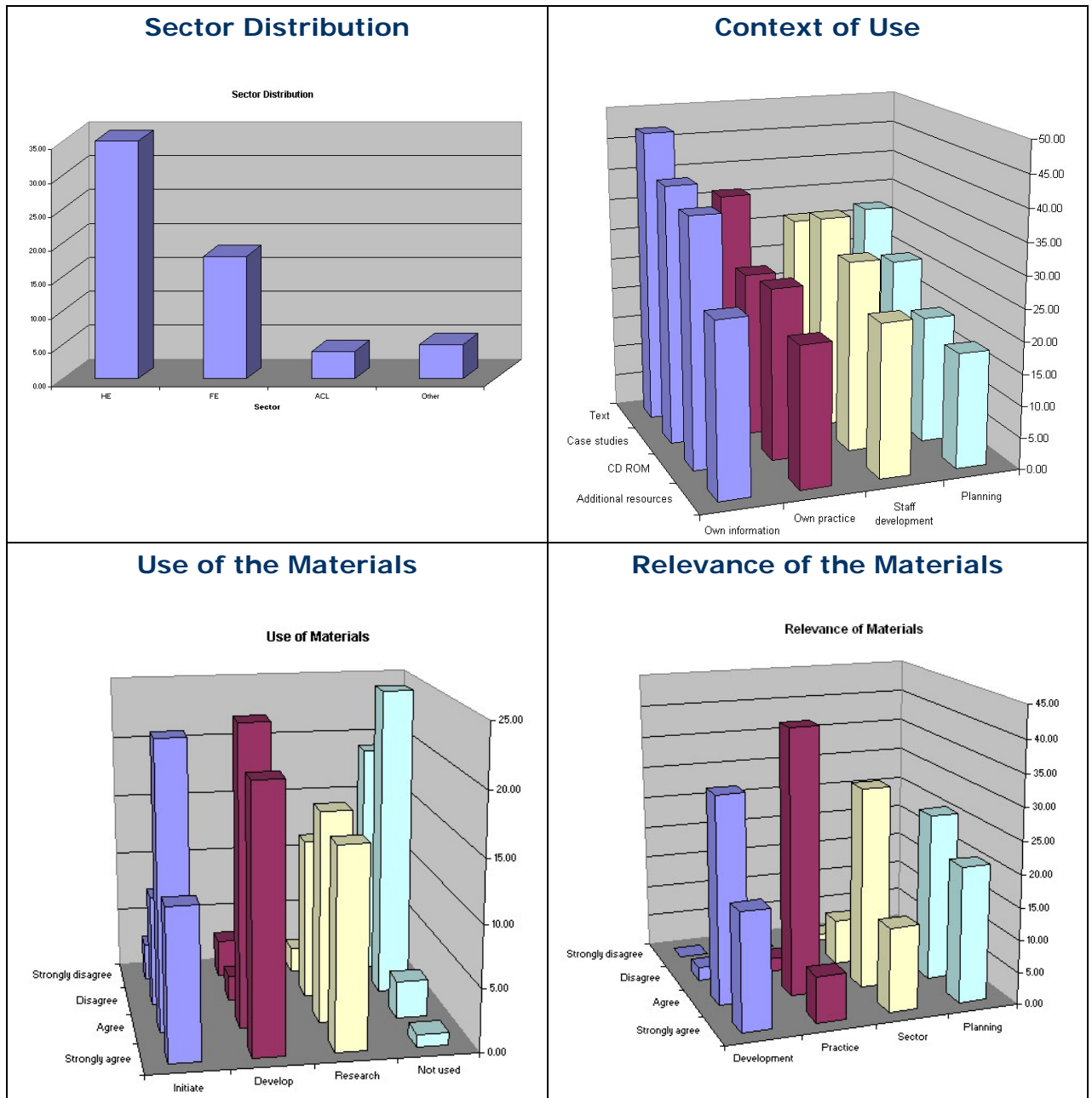
The interview also invited the respondent to tell the story of their use of the publication: how they came across it, how they used it, how effective it was in that use etc.

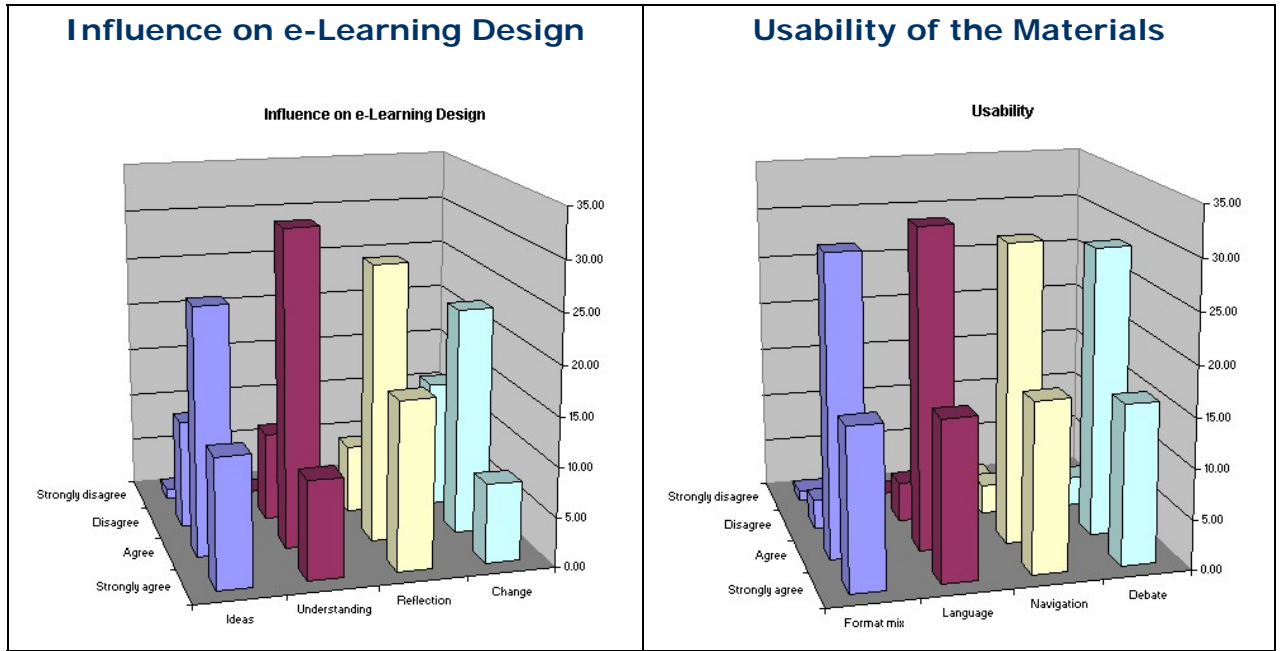
Following the interviews the templates were completed by the interviewer in a standard way, so that corresponding comments could be extracted and presented together for comparison. Where respondents had not already completed the questionnaire, the interviewer also completed the tick boxes for each evaluation area where the information was clear from the interview responses.

Evaluation Outcomes

All of the quantitative outcomes of the questionnaires and interview transcripts are presented here graphically. Samples from the qualitative outcomes are also presented to indicate the range of comments used in the evaluation analysis. All quantitative and qualitative outcomes may be viewed in the evaluation analysis spreadsheet on the CD ROM.

Quantitative Outcomes





Qualitative Outcomes

The comments made about each issue from the questionnaires and interviews were presented together as shown below. Note that when there is a zero, it indicates that the respondent made no comment on that issue.

Context of Use (Questionnaire)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1	Comments on Context of Use of Materials (questionnaire)											
2												
3	Q1	I did not get a CD-ROM. I was invited to download the text only. Is there a website with the CD materials to download?										
4	Q2	0										
5	Q3	I have been running a staff development programme and mentoring scheme within my Faculty since January 05 and found										
6	Q4	I plan to use these materials in the way shown once we have set up our training and development programme										
7	Q5	The case studies provide useful examples of the potential of e-learning in a very practical way which helps to illustrate how										
8	Q6	This was forwarded to partners in Socrates Grundtvig Partnership as good practice examples. We also used as case stud										
9	Q7	Used as part of an e-Laerning Staff Development Day that organised										
10	Q8	0										
11	Q9	Could do with a little more 'theory' and background in the case studies e.g why they chose a certain tool and the implicat										
12	Q10	0										
13	Q11	They were very useful, and I am particularly keen to make use of the Case Studies (both written and video) to inform staff c										
14	Q12	Not sure about using the CD yet and haven't looked at the additional resources										
15	Q13	I use the Effective Practice Planner in workshops I run on activity design. I use the publication as a whole in our new Embe										
16	Q14	I am using the book as a reference and guide to structuring my present e-learning work. I am finding it extremely informat										

Context of Use (Interview)

54	Comments on Context of Use of Materials (interview)											
55												
56	11	The context was staff development workshops for FE lecturers and presentations for HE staff to stimulate discussion. The										
57	12	The main usage was for personal development. The text reassured that own practice reflected what was going on elsewher										
58	13	Used for own development and will be used for formal staff development of others. Relatively inexperienced in the developm										
59	14	The document and resources were used as support resources for staff development and teacher training.										
60	15	The institutional context was an agenda for widening participation, the inclusion of e-learning in teacher training provision a										
61	16	The context was the development of flexible and distributed learning and widening participation. There were ambitious and										
62	17	The Effective Practice Planner was used in activity design workshops and in design consultancy exercises with academic										
63	18	The context is staff development in e-learning for academic and non-academic staff at Imperial. The institution is moving fr										
64	19	The context was education for education professionals. Consequently, the content of the booklet covering how learning hap										
65	110	The e-learning context was staff development and the implementation of e-learning strategy. The materials were circulated										
66	111	Primarily staff development and dissemination in the wider ILT community. Also as resources for teacher training course a										
67	112	Institution at early stage of e-learning development with funding to support staff training. Resources were needed to underp										
68	113	Primarily used for staff development and at meetings discussing and planning e-learning. This development was in the Law										
69	114	The materials were regarded as excellent and the video case studies 'great'. The context of use at present is in guiding the										

Most Effective Aspects (Questionnaire)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1		Most Effective Aspects (questionnaire)										
2												
3	Q1	The case studies										
4	Q2	The Planner										
5	Q3	The effective practice planner & evaluator										
6	Q4	Case studies										
7	Q5	I have valued the case studies and also the additional resources featured.										
8	Q6	0										
9	Q7	Practice and Effective Practice Planner										
10	Q8	Fig. 4 (Understanding your practice), because it listed specific examples.										
11	Q9	The CD										
12	Q10	The effective practice planner tools, which I plan to adapt for use with the CETL and so will help others in learning develop										
13	Q11	I was particularly interested in the video case studies - they are a nice length to be able to show to staff and stimulate disc										
14	Q12	I like the sections on learning activity design - they provide a clear and usable model and analysis pitched at a suitable lev										
15	Q13	The activity desin framework and tools for planning and evaluating e-learning practice. These are most effective for me beca										
16	Q14	At the moment I find the publication most effective in guiding me and enabling me to produce an organised and structured :										
17	Q15	0										
18	Q16	the case study videos, the help the book gives in reflecting on the ingredients that make for good learning (learners, outcor										

Most Effective Aspects (Interview)

54		Most Effective Aspects (interview)										
55												
56	I1	The CD□The Case Studies□The regional workshops										
57	I2	The Planner										
58	I3	The publication generally, its professional appearance and the planning tools.										
59	I4	It's value as a resource in supporting staff development and teacher training.										
60	I5	The 'e-learning in perspective' section of the document was regarded as particularly useful.										
61	I6	The planning and evaluation tools										
62	I7	The planning and evaluating tools.										
63	I8	The booklet										
64	I9	The most effective aspect was the workshop that accompanied the publication										
65	I10	The way it covered complex issues in a readable way.										
66	I11	General quality and readability. It was an excellent way of efficiently and effectively disseminating information.										
67	I12	too early to judge.										
68	I13	Case studies relevant to my own practice										
69	I14	The most effective aspect of the document was the way it stimulated thought and discussion about learning, pedagogy and										

It can be seen from these examples that it is very straightforward to compare responses in this format and to identify trends, commonality and differences in view.

Email Responses

A number of email messages came from people who preferred to respond this way. In many cases this was because they had not used the publication or evaluated its effectiveness sufficiently to complete the questionnaire. For example:

*Dear Tony
I did ask for several copies for members of teaching staff here. As yet I have not evaluated the usefulness of this. I have had more requests for the Learning Technology Advisers team since circulating the material. I would draw the assumption that therefore it has been useful. I would not be able to provide any more detailed information than this. I hope this is helpful in some way.
Best wishes
Freda*

Others used email to provide a brief overview response:

*Dear Tony
I thought that it would be more informative to explain than to complete the questionnaire which may have appeared very negative.*

I have read 'Effective Practice with e-Learning' and I consider it to be an invaluable document for new adopters. However, we have well developed strategies to evaluate our work to inform further development. Our approach is to disseminate our development and findings with workshops, presentations and publications to attract collaborators who have identified their needs and are seeking opportunities to adopt a blended learning approach. By the time we make contact they will have researched their needs and most likely identified us as a possible way to proceed to implementation.

The value in reading and attending presentations is to reflect on our practice by considering alternatives with an open mind.

Regards

Joe

All the email responses are included on the CD ROM.

Evaluation Analysis

The purpose of this analysis is to examine the outcomes of the evaluation of the use of the 'Effective Practice with e-Learning' publication and to draw conclusions about how the publication is being used, for what purpose and by whom. It will also look for evidence about the effectiveness of the publication in achieving the goals of the users and also the JISC dissemination objectives.

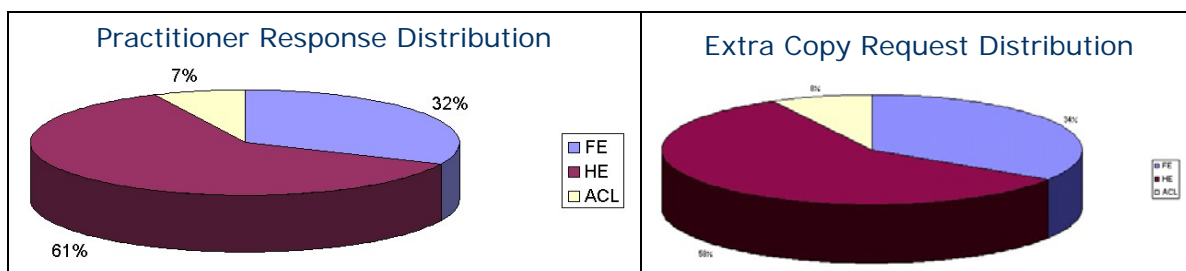
The analysis will be presented using the headings employed in the interview template and will report in terms of the key issues emerging.

1. User Information

This section covers information about the sample group and provides a context for the issues raised in the following sections.

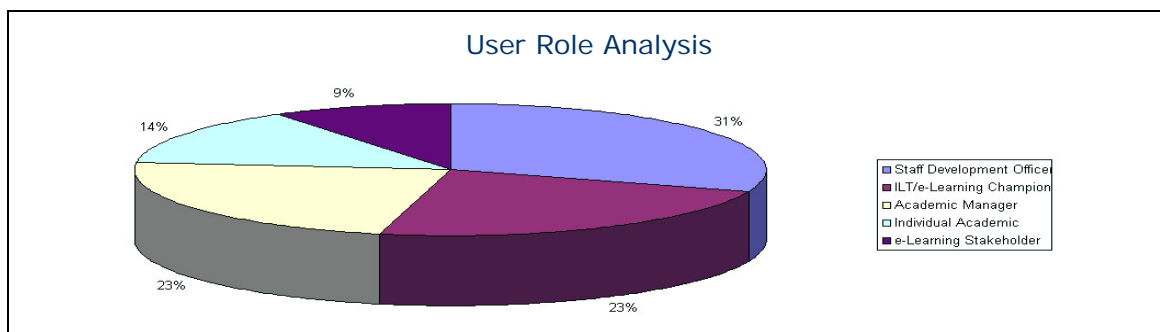
The sample group was chosen from the pool of practitioners that were most likely to have used the publication and would have a story to tell about it. The group was designed to be as representative as possible with an equal number of HE and FE institutions and as many ACL practitioners as could be included.

The actual response distribution was different to this, as shown below, and it is interesting to note that, within a percentage point or two, it exactly matches the sector distribution of institutions requesting extra copies of the publication.



This implies that, even within the selected grouping of publication users, HE representatives appeared more responsive and active in their use of the resource than FE representatives.

The roles of the users shows that the publication was used predominantly as a resource in a staff development context.



The staff development officer category included professional development coordinators and learning support staff and these, together with the ILT/e-Learning advisors, were using the publication in presentations and workshops with academic staff. The reason for requesting additional copies was to distribute them the staff attending workshops and encourage their use in planning and development.

The academic managers also had a staff development focus in attending the programme workshops and requesting extra copies, although there was also an element of information gathering for planning purposes.

The individual academics were typically practitioners with a personal interest in the development of e-Learning who wanted to expand their understanding of practical applications elsewhere, and to network with like-minded practitioners. They tended to be operating independently within their institution as a result, perhaps, of a lack of a coordinated strategy for e-Learning developments.

The e-Learning stakeholders were also engaging with the publication and associated workshops as individuals, but with specific responsibility as, for example, a librarian or multi-media developer. The workshops were valued here as opportunities to understand the academic design process and learn the language of pedagogy.

2. The Context of Use

The overwhelming context of use, then, was as a resource in e-Learning staff development activities, both personal and across the institution. A number of the respondents indicated that they and their institution were at an early stage in e-Learning development and that the publication and the associated workshops were valuable for:

- Awareness raising and learning about e-Learning
- Reassurance that own practice reflected practice generally
- Planning staff development and providing useful design tools

Even those institutions that had substantial e-Learning portfolios were using the materials to introduce on-line delivery to inexperienced academic staff. In several instances, this was through use in PGCE modules or Masters in Education programmes.

A common theme running throughout the responses was the use of the publication in staff development workshops. The majority of respondents were in a staff support role and had delivered e-Learning development workshops adapting and applying the publication resources. This also applied to the use made by the JISC RSCs in their regional support activities for institutions.

A strong message that emerged from the evaluation was the importance of the regional programme workshops in contextualising and providing value-added to the publication. A number of respondents described how the workshops 'brought the publication to life' and provided insights into how e-Learning could be applied to their sphere of practice.

Over 25% of the respondents received their first copy of the document at the workshops or at another JISC event. 50% received it through the mailshot and the remainder by having it passed on from a colleague or coming across it on the JISC website.

A number of respondents indicated the contextual limitations of the publication. For education professionals, the learning theory elements were less useful and for e-Learning experts, the case studies did not add anything to their knowledge. In each case they acknowledged the value of the publication for those who were inexperienced, but to be of use to themselves it needed much more detail and analysis.

3. Use of Materials

The quantitative information shows that the main use of the materials was in e-Learning staff development activities, with use in the initiation of e-Learning ranking next. The use in e-Learning research was more limited as this was seen to

be generally the remit of the HE community who were likely to be more interested in the detail of the project reports on which the publication is based.

Only a small minority of respondents reported that they had not used the materials. However, a number did explain that they were only just beginning to use the resources, mainly for their own development. Typical comments were:

'I have used the materials for my personal research, but I have not yet seen evidence of how my colleagues have used the materials.'

'The materials were being used for used for self development. (I am) very enthusiastic about the document and felt that the discussion about how learning happens and pedagogic approaches was particularly valuable.'

'The materials have provided an excellent authoritative and pedagogical background for e-learning at HE level for me personally.'

A range of respondents confirmed that significant perceived value was through awareness-raising with staff new to e-learning:

'The materials were most effective with academics new to e-learning. They acted as a springboard to understanding the key issues of e-learning.'

'The materials were used to broaden staff awareness of e-learning and to provide practical examples.'

'The materials provided a 'quick fix' introduction to the development and delivery of e-learning.'

The resources were reported to be less useful for experienced practitioners, particularly education specialists:

'For those who were involved in e-learning it tended to reinforce their existing experience.'

'Some of the materials are very basic, and in a number of cases the response has been: we already do this.'

There was a general consensus that the mix of materials in the publication provided an excellent set of resources for both academic and non-academic staff development. However, there was no evidence that any formal evaluation of effectiveness had been undertaken.

3. Relevance of the Materials

The graph shows that there was strong agreement that the publication was relevant to practitioners' development plans and activities and that it reflected the realities of their experience of e-learning practice.

Typical amongst the comments were:

'All of the materials were relevant, particularly for (my) role in ACL and work-based learning. The planning Guide was ideal for someone inexperienced in e-learning development.'

'The materials were all very relevant. The case studies will have a finite shelf life as technology and experience develops across the e-learning community, but for the moment the materials are appropriate and very useful.'

The graph also showed that there was a small but significant number of responses that indicated a lack of relevance to their sector of education. All of these responses came from HE institutions where a preference was expressed for HE, and in some instances, subject-specific case studies:

'There was some variation in the relevance of the case studies. A preference would have been more (or exclusively) HE case studies.'

'It was felt there were not enough HE case studies and there was nothing relating to WebCT or Blackboard, the two systems typically used by HE.'

'More HE case studies would have been welcome, especially examples related to Law.'

Although others felt there was transferability across the sectors:

'The case studies were sufficiently generic to be relevant. The materials generally referred more to processes for facilitating learning than on the technology itself, and this was welcomed.'

'There was transferability in principle across the sectors, but this required development by the user to re-contextualise.'

There was an implied (though not directly expressed) view that the document was addressing too broad an audience and that future publications might more effectively address experienced practitioners if they were focussed on specific sectors and/or subject areas.

Influence on e-Learning Design

There was a mixed response to questions about the influence of the publication on e-learning design. This was partly due to the fact that a number of respondents were not academics, but other stakeholders who were not directly involved in on-line programme development. Also, experienced practitioners from an educational background felt that the materials did not introduce any ideas about learning design that they were not already aware of (although it did cause them to reflect on their practice):

'The materials reinforced rather than influenced the way e-learning was designed. They acted as discussion prompts between support and development staff.'

'It was not felt that the document changed the way the team approached learning design, but that it would certainly guide staff seeking to develop e-learning.'

For those who were new to both e-learning and learning design the responses were much more positive:

'Learning design was not an area I was very knowledgeable about beforehand, so the guides introduced me to new ideas.'

'The materials were a useful resource for academic staff wanting to develop skills in learning design and also for awareness raising with non-academic staff who were student-facing.'

'The experience of the workshop and the use of the materials there definitely broadened thinking about pedagogy and e-learning design.'

The publication was reported to have been seen as an authoritative document that reassured those involved in learning design that their approach was similar to others and stimulated valuable reflection.

Usability of the Materials

The overall view of usability was that the quality, style and design all contributed to a general confidence in the content. The variety in media catered for users with a particular preference and the succinctness was welcomed by those with only limited time to assess the value of a resource.

Typical comments included:

'The document was excellent and well written. It was an attractive way to present research outcomes and was sufficiently brief to be actually read by academics.'

'All of the materials were easy to use. The text was great for running through with staff and the case studies in working with small groups to consider what would work in their environment.'

There were some concerns, however, about the language used for such a broad audience. Some were very happy with the text:

'The text was very readable and the use of real applications made it very good for staff development and to stimulate discussion.'

Others less so:

'I felt the language used was too academic for some members of my team to understand.'

'Style and language depends on the end user and it's difficult to get it right when the end users are so heterogeneous.'

There were some comments about specific needs and wants that were not met by the publication. Educationalists, for example, wanted more information in the case studies for them to analyse the implications in more depth:

'The materials would have been a much richer resource if they had drilled down to the 'how to's' and not stayed at the level of generalities.'

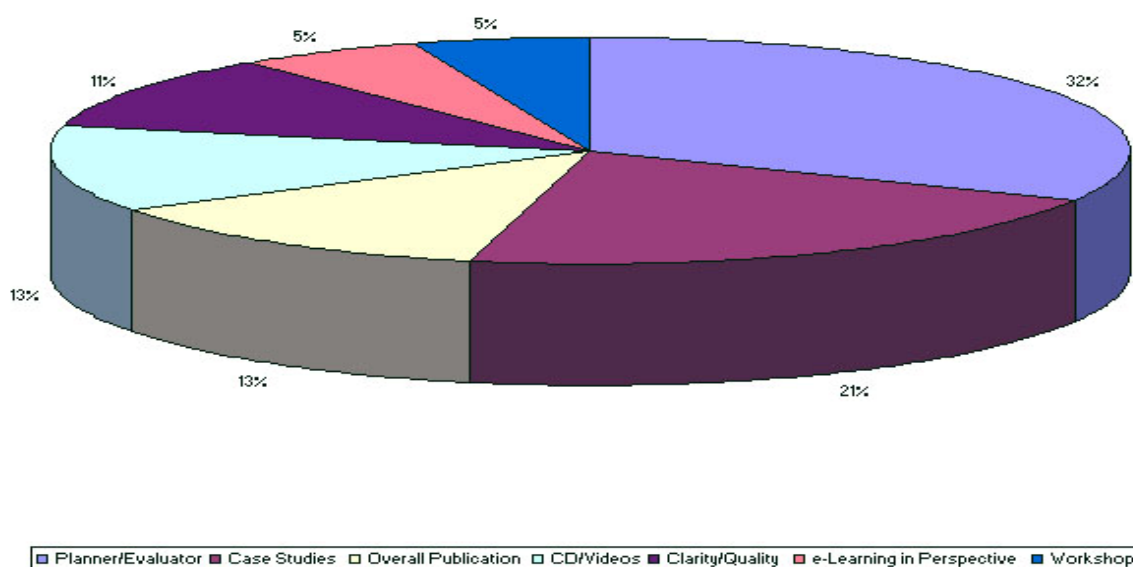
Others wanted instant solutions:

'A preference would have been for the case studies to have been more focussed on 'quick win' instances of effective practice.'

The general view, though, was that the materials were excellent resources, the text was clear, authoritative and non-threatening and the fact that the materials could be downloaded from the web was seen as a big advantage.

Most Effective Aspects

The effective practice planning and evaluating tools were identified as the most effective aspect of the publication by respondents, as shown in the chart below. The case studies also scored highly and practitioners praised the overall publication, it's quality, clarity and readability.

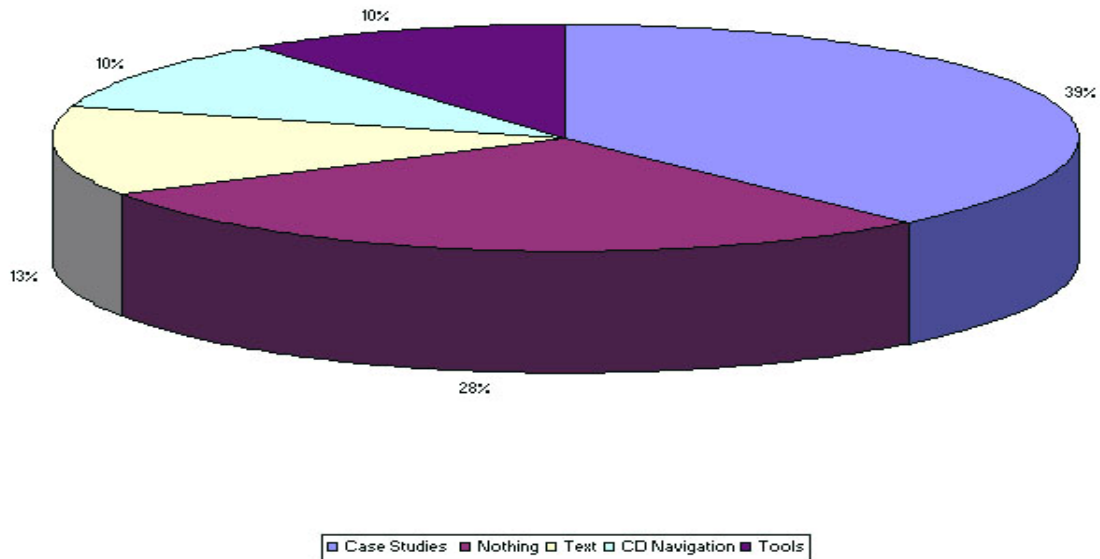


The CD and video case studies were also mentioned, as were the workshops based on the publication.

Least Effective Aspects

A number of responses to this question, as shown in the chart below, stated that there was nothing they could identify as being ineffective about the publication and that there was value in all of the different materials.

However, as well as scoring highly as the most effective aspect of the publication, the case studies were also cited by a number of respondents as the least effective aspect. These were mainly responses from the HE institutions about the lack of relevance to them of many of the FE scenarios and the desire for more detail.



Aspects of the text were also criticised including the font colour, the introduction and the designing for learning section. These appeared to be a matter of personal preference/opinion rather than a coherent message about effectiveness. The same applied to the comments about the tools: there were individual observations on experiences in using the planning tool, the effective practice cards and the workshops. The final issue raised was the navigation of the CD ROM that respondents felt could be improved.

Conclusions

The analysis above enables a number of conclusions can be drawn about the use of the publication 'Effective Practice with e-Learning'. It should be noted, however, that the sampling plan targeted practitioners known to be using the document and the outcomes should be viewed in this context.

The population from which the sample was drawn amounted to approximately 700 practitioners who, between them, accounted for around 5,000 copies of the publication. The total print run was 21,000 and hence, whilst valuable lessons can be learned about use and effectiveness from the evaluation, it is not possible to come to a firm conclusion about value for money.

In summary it can be said that the publication was well received and widely used as a resource by practitioners with responsibility for staff development in the areas of ILT and e-Learning. It was most valuable for those people relatively new to e-Learning who appreciated a number of key features:

- The clarity, succinctness and authoritative nature of the materials. This, together with the quality and design of the document, gave users confidence in the messages it contained and made it more likely to be read by people with very little free time.
- The case studies that, on the one hand, provided reassuring evidence that other people's experience was similar to theirs and, on the other hand, raised their awareness of new ways of using technology to facilitate learning.
- The emphasis on learning design and the effective planning and evaluation tools. The value here was enhanced by the workshops based on the publication which enabled practitioners to network and feel part of a community of practice.
- The variety of media that catered for different user preferences and the fact that it was all available on-line and able to be downloaded.

For those experienced practitioners without a remit for staff development, the publication was less useful. It was for this grouping that the relevance of the case studies and the level of detail was an issue, and an important message about dissemination arises.

An objective of this evaluation was to judge how effective the publication was at synthesising and disseminating the outputs of JISC projects. The answer to this question is that the publication is very effective at an awareness raising level and in providing a broad spectrum of applications.

What it does not do is provide specialists with the situated detail they are looking for and it is here that there may be an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of the dissemination methodology. This is taken up in the recommendations that follow.

It can be concluded that the approach to dissemination through an easily accessible and readable document, supported by additional resources, clearly works. The majority of respondents welcomed the format and recommended that it be continued.

However, there was a consistent message coming from discussions with those who had received the document and not read or used it, that even in this accessible form, practitioners will only use such materials if they directly contribute to their current work. The workshops that accompanied the publication were reported to have stimulated usage and continuation of these was also recommended.

Recommendations

The overall approach to dissemination designed into this publication was agreed by the practitioners to be effective and accessible. There were a number of areas where improvements were suggested that could make future publications more likely to be used and more cost-effective.

The recommendations may be summarised as follows:

1. The general format and mix of media in the publication worked well for the majority of respondents. The general consensus was that the approach should be continued for disseminating other JISC programme outcomes and that future publications would be welcome.
2. In order to broaden the usage of the publication it is suggested that links be included in the on-line resources and case studies that allow users to drill down to deeper levels of detail. This would be more structured than just providing links to project web sites or reports.
3. Each publication would be designed to distribute messages to a specific audience. In this case the scope was very broad, covered all sectors and was well suited as an awareness raising resource. Future dissemination publications might need to be more focussed and possibly sector or subject specific to have impact with practitioners.
4. Consideration needs to be given to the way in which future publications are distributed and publicised. The scatter-gun approach with the Effective Practice publication may have been appropriate where multiple audiences are targeted. However, the cost of such a large scale hard copy distribution needs to be taken into account, particularly with more focussed dissemination, and the use of downloadable resources actively promoted as an alternative.
5. The workshops based on the publication were widely valued and were significantly over-subscribed. A number of respondents indicated that they only became aware of the publication at the event. Clearly the event itself was the draw and the subsequent use of the publication the outcome. This should be taken into account when planning future dissemination activities.
6. The use of case studies to put messages across was broadly welcomed, although there were issues of relevance. Practical evidence of effectiveness was particularly valued and it is recommended that this approach be used in the future. When doing so, however, care will be needed to ensure that the application is relevant to the intended audience or that the outcomes are clearly transferable to different scenarios.

CD ROM

The attached CD ROM contains all the questionnaires and interview transcripts, together with the evaluation analysis spreadsheet that draws all the quantitative and qualitative data together and presents it in a structured way for analysis.

Viewing the Evaluation Analysis Information

When the evaluation analysis spreadsheet is opened, it will ask the user whether to update the links to the other documents.

- Click 'Update'

It will then indicate that some links could not be updated. This is not an error.

- Click 'Continue'

The spreadsheet will then be displayed. There are a number of worksheets identified by tabs at the bottom of the screen. Those to the left of the 'Quantitative Data' worksheet present all the quantitative data in graphical form. Those to the right of the 'Quantitative Data' worksheet present all the comments about the issues raised in the questionnaires and interviews.