

‘What next for online learning?’ seminar – 25 June 2010

1. Over 100 delegates attended the Online Learning Task Force (OLTF) seminar, ‘What next for online learning?’, at the British Library on 25 June 2010.
2. Copies of the presentations given by Dame Lynne Brindley (Chief Executive of the British Library and Chair of the OLTF), Stuart Hamilton (Chief Executive Officer at Open Universities Australia), Roxanne Stockwell (Group Innovation Director at BPP) and Martin Bean (Vice-Chancellor, Open University) can be found on the [OLTF page of the HEFCE web-site](#).
3. The seminar confirmed that the task force is considering the correct areas, and that these are relevant and important to the sector. Delegates did not identify any new areas or issues, but they signalled the following key emphases for the OLTF to discuss in relation to the final report and recommendations:
 - re-affirming the importance of engagement of academic staff and staff development and not assuming that they are unwilling to learn or develop
 - further consideration of shared services as a mechanism for improving collaboration and reducing costs
 - highlighting that online learning should not be driven by technology.

Breakout sessions

4. Delegates were divided into three breakout groups and we have annotated themes from the discussions below. Please note that these do not necessarily reflect the views of the OLTF.

Question 1 – What are the three most exciting opportunities for UK higher education (HE) nationally and internationally?

- Using the recession as an opportunity to be innovative
- Greater student emphasis – increased mobility and offering a stronger role in shaping HE
- Flexible routes into HE (for example, flexible provision and credit transfer)
- Pedagogic innovations – re-thinking how we teach and how this links to the student experience
- Making better use of existing intelligence and/or connections
- Institutions becoming more open to sharing of good practice

Question 2 - What does the higher education need to do to fulfil/or enhance the student experience?

- There needs to be better understanding of student needs
- Engaging more closely with students (for example, being clear about course expectations and the level of support they can expect from teaching staff)
- Focus on the pedagogy and the strategic design of learning
- Staff development needs are of fundamental importance in the enhancement of the student experience
- The curriculum needs to build flexibility into the design of courses

Question 3 - What are the best opportunities for collaborating with others in the sector? Where can or should HE collaborate more?

- Staff development
- Sharing services and data between institutions
- More collaborative projects supported/funded by bodies such as JISC and the Higher Education Academy
- Sharing technologies to save money and improve efficiencies
- Sharing content (using open educational resources)

Question 4 - Are there any gaps in the work of the task force or new areas of recommendation?

- Would like to see funding addressed in the recommendations. In particular, there was a feeling that collaboration is closely linked to funding and credit and that sector can only do so much if changes are not made. Also, delegates commented on the need for extra funding to support online learning.
- Give more recognition to professional staff development. This includes recognising the role that the Leadership Foundation could play in educating middle management.
- Review of the HEFCE policy and strategy on technology-enhanced learning and follow-up over time.
- Consider the introduction of brokers for collaboration.

- Consider the influence of online development on campus-based HEIs.
- Communicate internationally the strengths of HE in the UK.
- Recognition that company firewalls can prove to be a barrier to work-based students accessing HE online.

Other issues that arose during the discussions

- Staff contracts are an issue – could HEFCE fund experimental innovations?
- Many current successful examples involve private investment. Will this lead to public funding being invested into private organisations? Is that an issue?
- Should HEFCE be persuasive or discursive? We need to accept that not all HEIs will do well, and some will be much better. However, collaboration is expensive.