

citscapes

C&IT SKILLS: CURRENT SITUATIONS, AVENUES OF POSSIBILITY, EMERGING SOLUTIONS



Citscapes Self-written Case Studies

University of Aberdeen

Weymouth College

University of York

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Introduction

The case studies reviewed here were written at the invitation of the Citscapes Project to broaden the picture that emerged from the in-depth study phase of the project. Universities and colleges of further education were invited to submit a brief profile of the ways in which ICT induction is provided at their institutions and to say how this links to ongoing information skills developments.

The paper summarises the contents of the specially written case studies submitted by Weymouth College and the University of Aberdeen. They both followed the template provided. The University of York supplied an additional paper, originally written for the Big Blue Project. Information from this document is only incorporated where it corresponds with the template headings.

University/College Profile and Background

1.1 Introduction and locality

The University of Aberdeen, founded in 1495, is the major higher education provider in the North of Scotland. In 2001-02 there were 12,096 full-time students, comprising 9,577 undergraduates and 2,509 postgraduates. The University aims to lead educational development and research across the region and beyond. Weymouth College in West Dorset is a further education college with approximately 10,000 students and offers a broad range of vocational and academic programmes. The University of York currently has in excess of 9,000 students and was founded in 1963.

1.2 Organisations and Structure

The University of Aberdeen has five faculties, three of which are currently being reorganised. Weymouth College recently appointed a new principal and deputy principal and is also being restructured.

1.3 Mission and Strategic Aims

Weymouth College aims to meet the education and training needs of the community by providing a quality service to achieve positive outcomes. One of the College's strategic aims is to 'use ICT to provide maximum e-learning opportunities'.

The University of Aberdeen aims to create, develop, apply and transmit through the work of all its members, knowledge, skills and understanding at the highest levels of excellence.

1.4 Trends and Student Profile

The Weymouth area is somewhat dependent on tourism and has two wards classified as disadvantaged. The working population is forecast to grow markedly in the coming years which will have a direct effect on the College. Aberdeen's school population may fall by as much as 25% in the next 12 years and to counter this the University intends to try to attract more overseas students and to develop e-learning methodologies for off-campus students.

1.5 Student Support Services

At Weymouth College all students are assigned a personal tutor and the College provides a comprehensive support system including diagnostic testing, counselling, careers advice and services for students with special needs. To retain as many students as possible the

University of Aberdeen has created an Academic Learning Support Unit and a Retention and Progression Team. Also a 'one-stop shop' is planned that will bring together all the support services in the form of a Student Advice Centre.

1.6 Strategic Partnerships and Funding

Both Weymouth College and the University of Aberdeen have developed strategic links with schools and colleges as well as the public and private sectors. The University of York's Information Literacy In All Departments (ILIAD) programme received funding in the early stages from Arthur Andersen Consulting and York College of Further and Higher Education. This has now ceased and students pay £15.50 to participate.

2.0 Strategic Objectives in ICT Skills Provision

2.1 ICT Strategies and Policy

Weymouth College has a new ICT strategy covering e-learning and information systems whilst the University of Aberdeen has formulated a policy intended to equip all students with appropriate ICT skills. This policy emerged as part of the development of the University's Information Strategy. The University of York's ILIAD programme has the stated aim of 'enabling students to become proficient in receiving, processing and presenting information', thereby equipping students with basic transferable information handling skills for their studies.

2.2 Role of Senior Management in ICT Skills Development

Weymouth College has senior management involvement in promoting and developing e-learning and the ICT infrastructure. Aberdeen University's senior managers are represented on all the important policy shaping committees and they have a Vice Principal with particular responsibility for teaching and learning.

2.3 Student Induction Policy

The mandatory induction programme for students at Weymouth College includes a computerised diagnostic test covering communication, the application of number and ICT. All of the University of Aberdeen's students also undergo an induction to familiarise them with the available facilities. Although the programme is not applied uniformly throughout the University, all departments and faculties provide for their students appropriately. The ILIAD programme, operating since 1996 at the University of York, is not compulsory but students are encouraged to participate.

2.4 Quality Assurance

Weymouth College employs a learning technologist to maintain the quality of learning materials. The University of Aberdeen's academic standards and other committees monitor the quality of all its programmes.

2.5 Strategic Approach to Teaching and Learning

Weymouth College has set itself the task of gradually integrating e-learning into all curriculum areas whilst developing a portfolio of specialist distance and open learning courses. Also an e-learning qualification is being developed for staff. At the University of Aberdeen teaching and learning are enhanced through a continuous cycle of staff training and development.

3.0 Current Situation - Practice

3.1 History and Current Initiatives

Weymouth College has been developing open and distance learning systems for a number of years and runs ECDL through a commercial managed learning environment (MLE). They have also created their own virtual learning environment (VLE) and used it in a number of innovative situations. Students quickly became disenchanted with online discussion and debate but feedback from lecturers proved to be more successful. The VLE has also been tried in a number of situations such as teaching basic skills and delivering interactive tests.

Undergraduates at the University of York are invited to register for the ILIAD programme before they formally enrol. Forms are sent to their homes and a short questionnaire is used to establish whether they would benefit from the course. The programme began as a 12 hour generic ICT course run by three faculties. It now operates for eight hours between weeks three and six of the autumn term and University validated certificates are awarded for successful completion. The University of Aberdeen's programme has evolved over the last seven years and a specially written information skills course is now provided.

3.2 Student ICT inductions

ICT diagnostic testing is used at Weymouth College to establish the existing skill levels of new students. Communication, application of number and ICT are assessed and the results are used to plan each student's learning programme. Irrespective of this all students receive an ICT induction which provides log on and e-mail tuition as well as information on the available software and open learning material.

The University of York's course has four elements:

- i. computing at York
- ii. researching and evaluating information sources
- iii. word processing for academic purposes
- iv. presenting information using a computer.

The preliminary session may be regarded as ICT induction but the programme goes on to provide training in a range of valuable skills considered vital to the successful completion of the undergraduate curriculum.

All Aberdeen University's incoming students undergo induction during the first week of term. This includes information about the library service, the ICT resources and an introduction to the skills they need to tackle their course. As with the University of York this follows on to more formal ICT skills training.

3.3 Infrastructures and ICT Funding

For a second successive year the continuing development of Weymouth College's VLE is partially supported by an HEFCE project fund. The ICT network now connects all the College's teaching machines including those in the outreach centres. The University of Aberdeen's Directorate of Information Systems and Services is responsible for ICT infrastructure and computer hardware is now replaced on a four-year cycle. Student related ICT initiatives are generally funded by faculties and the University's Information Skills Course (SK1003) is financed by the Faculties of Arts and Divinity, Social Science and Law.

3.4 Integration of ICT into Teaching and Learning

Weymouth College has a learning technologist who coordinates the work of a number of ILT champions with the aim of developing a broad spectrum of online learning materials.

The University of Aberdeen's approach has been to offer academic staff training in the available software via an IT Training Unit and to fund a Learning Technology Unit which helps staff to make the transition to creating learning materials for delivery using ICT.

3.5 Nature of ICT Skills Provision for Students

Full time students at Weymouth College learn ICT skills as part of their keyskills training. There are tutor led sessions as well as open learning materials. Other students may be enrolled on one or more of the many award bearing ICT training programmes. These are offered in a variety of locations and use a wide range of teaching and learning methods.

At the University of York the ILIAD programme uses a workbook and tutor led approach; alternatively more able students can use a self-study route. The activities are generic except for some information sources which are subject specific. The programme is not offered uniformly across the University since some departments prefer to deliver their own specialist training. Librarians, postgraduates, junior lecturers and adult education teachers provide ILIAD's taught sessions. Approximately one third (600) of new students take part and others receive induction sessions provided by their departments. Course evaluation takes the form of feedback questionnaires, focus groups and meetings of tutors. One fifth of participants felt the course was too easy while another fifth failed the assessment.

Students attending the University of Aberdeen need ICT skills to access their course information which is often provided via web pages or WebCT. These basic techniques are built into the early stages of courses and SK1003 is designed to develop abilities still further. ICT skills requirements are incorporated into the learning outcomes of all undergraduate programmes and students are able to request further help in this area if they feel they need it. The University of Aberdeen's approach is to specify the ICT skills required of graduating students and these include knowledge of Windows software, e-mail, word processing, web browsers, some spreadsheet, presentation and database experience as well as basic web authoring skills.

3.6 Staff ICT Training

Hitherto Weymouth College's staff ICT training programme has concentrated on teaching the use of generic software, however, some staff have recently piloted a teaching with ICT qualification. The University of Aberdeen too concentrated on teaching staff generic ICT skills before creating a Learning Technology Unit to help translate course material into online formats and once competent, staff will manage the process themselves.

4.0 Emerging Directions

Weymouth College sees ICT developments as additional to, rather than in place of, traditional teaching. ILT Champions have recently been reappointed to continue their work with staff and the College hopes to expand the use of its own VLE. Also a learning hub is being formed to provide a national resource for learning materials.

The paper from the University of York suggests that in terms of ICT induction and further training 'one size fits all' is no longer the case and it suggests new ways be found to provide individuals with tailor made programmes to meet their needs.

The University of Aberdeen states that the standard of ICT literacy is rising amongst new students and they too propose that efforts should be made to provide skills training that is matched to the needs of individuals. They also suggest that new technological developments are set to change approaches to teaching and learning.

5.0 Conclusions

Weymouth College's vision of the future relies on ICT developments as it will assist them to attract students from rural areas and allow learning to take place free from the constraints of place and time. The University of York concludes that as far as ICT induction and skills training are concerned the 'one size fits all' approach is no longer viable and that efforts should now be made to provide solutions matched to the needs of individuals. The University of Aberdeen recognises that ICT skills are vital for all its students and has therefore made a clear commitment to ensuring that they have a baseline of ICT skills on which to build.

Citscapes Project self-written case studies

The CITSCAPES PROJECT is seeking self-written case studies from universities and colleges of further education that will help to inform its research into the ways in which ICT/ILT is introduced to students. To augment the in-depth case studies and the survey this JISC funded enquiry is now looking for authors willing to write short case studies of between 3,000 and 5,000 words using the detailed template below. The key facts on which to focus are the ways in which practical ICT/ILT skills training is provided for students, how this affects student induction and how the situation might change over the next three to five years. Any new or innovative approaches in this area should also be highlighted.

To be sure that the information you provide can be incorporated into the Citscapes final report your self-written case study would need to be completed and submitted not later than 19th August 2002.

The University of Gloucestershire is coordinating this phase of the project and further details can be obtained from Lyn Oates at the University or the researcher, Stuart Boase.

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NB

Sections 1 and 2 should be short and concise.

Sections 3 and 4 should contain more depth and detail.

University of Aberdeen

Appendix 1

1.0 Profile and Background

1.1 Introduction and Locality

The University of Aberdeen was founded in 1495 and remains the major institution of Higher Education in the North of Scotland. From this distinctive position our aim is to lead the development of education and research across our region. While much of our activity is properly directed to the region and nation it is always defined by an international context of outlook, scope and interest, with academic activity taking place in an increasingly competitive and borderless environment.

1.2 Organisational Structure

The University is organised into five Faculties. One, the Faculty of Education, was created as a consequence of merger, in 2001, with the Northern College of Education. Three of the other Faculties are in the process of reorganising from a department structure into Schools, to consolidate small units and remove their disproportionate administrative burden, as well as to nourish new and interdisciplinary synergies. The 'chief executive' of the University is the Principal and Vice Chancellor, who is assisted by a Senior Vice Principal and two Vice Principals, each with specific cross-institutional portfolios (resources, research, teaching & learning). A University Management Group, comprising the Principal, Vice Principals, Deans of Faculty, Secretary and senior officers (e.g. Director of Finance, Director of Information Systems & Services, etc.), work together to develop and direct the progress of University strategy. The institutional governing body is the University Court, which has representation from the academic, student and lay communities. Academic affairs are debated within the body of Senate, prior to their consideration by Court.

The business of the University is dependent upon a committee structure that is regulated by Court. For ICT/ILT, the principal fora are the Information Management Committee and the University Committee for Teaching & Learning, both of which are responsible for the formulation and recommendation of policy and both of which are convened by the Vice Principal with responsibility for Teaching & Learning.

1.3 Mission Statement and Strategic Aims

The mission of the University of Aberdeen is to create, develop, apply and transmit through the work of all its members, knowledge, skills and understanding at the highest levels of excellence. In many areas achieving international excellence depends at least in part upon acquiring an appropriate level of critical mass and we recognise that our current size inhibits opportunities to become internationally excellent in all areas. Given our breadth of coverage, we believe the way ahead lies in pursuing a policy of institutional alliance with other regional and national providers, with the expressed intention of becoming a full-spectrum university and meeting a range of imperatives from widening access to outstanding research.

1.4 Trends in the Regional/National Employment and Student Profile

The University has a well-founded reputation for providing high quality generalist and specialist graduates. We offer over 450 first degree courses, demand for which continues to grow (home undergraduate applications have risen this year by a further 2%, building on the substantial 20% increase achieved in the previous year). In 2001-2002, the number of full-time students at the University was 12,096, comprising 9,577 undergraduates and 2,519 postgraduates. 115 nationalities were represented and one third of our postgraduate

students came from countries outside the UK. A gender analysis shows that 48% of the student population was male and 52% female. 19% were mature students.

Demographic predictions for the region indicate declining birth rates that could produce a 25% reduction to the school population by 2015. In this context, globalisation and borderless education provide a significant challenge and we aim to maximise opportunities to use e-learning technologies to widen participation, both on and off-campus. During 2001-2002 we have increased our postgraduate overseas student population by 15% and increased our undergraduate overseas population by 20%; in 2002-2003 we aim to achieve a further 15% increase in overseas student numbers.

At the close of 2000-2001, 96% of our graduates entered directly into work, further study or training. However, the decline of North Sea oil and gas reserves and anticipated changes to the industry over the next twenty years will impact the overall economy of the region. Nonetheless, it is recognised within the University that we have the capacity to contribute to Government ambitions to develop alternative, knowledge-based industries as a locus for the sustenance and development of the regional economy.

1.5 Student Support Services

The North of Scotland lacks large conurbations but includes major rural areas where access presents distinctive challenges, and we have already given priority to support for students once recruited. In that context, our student support organisation now includes an Academic Learning Support Unit and a Retention & Progression Team. Notwithstanding these innovations, and given our aspirations particularly with regard to overseas students, we also seek to ensure that all students have access to an integrated support service enabling them and their families to seek advice and support prior to joining the University and throughout their studies. Following the restructuring of the Student Support Services, liaison between its various offices has been enhanced and the Student Support Forum, involving Student Support staff, Students' Association (including Joblink and the Money Adviser), the Registry, Faculties and the University Medical Practice has added great value. We remain committed to establishing a one-stop shop Student Advice Centre and are currently reviewing possible locations.

In late 1999-2000, the University confirmed a policy of achieving specified levels of IT competence for all graduates. This has been pursued increasingly through the embedding of skills acquisition within course programmes. As a necessary counterbalance, in 2001-2002, a Knowledge Economy Initiative Task Force was established with the objective of achieving awareness by all academic staff of the benefits of using learning technologies; to provide them with the necessary skills to apply C&IT in their teaching; and to increase the number of courses that make appropriate use of learning technologies by 15% each year over a three year period.

1.6 Strategic Partnerships and Funding

We believe that our strategic aim to engage in alliances will enable us to achieve the critical mass necessary to be internationally excellent in those areas in which we pursue research. It will also provide a range and breadth of coverage that enables us to respond to Scottish Executive, Government and Council priorities for Higher Education. Consequently, the University is in discussions with a number of institutions in the Further and Higher Education sectors, including those within the Aberdeen Research Consortium and the UHI Millennium Institute.

A higher level of institutional funding has been awarded for 2002/03 but this must satisfy an increasing range of priorities, activities and objectives. The competing needs of the institution in relation to financing appropriate ICT, research and teaching infrastructures simply to maintain the status quo continues to intensify. This funding position drives us, properly, towards higher levels of selectivity in our internal allocation of resource. It should be noted that the mobilisation of ICT initiatives such as that described at 1.5 has been wholly dependent on short term, non-core grants.

2.0 University Strategic Objectives in ICT Skills Provision

2.1 ICT Strategy and Policy

The Director of Information Systems & Services is responsible for the development and management of ICT strategy and policy. Policy issues and programmes are brought for discussion and agreement to the Information Management Committee, having previously been tested in established user fora and, where appropriate, related Committees. Ratification of institutional policy recommendations is subsequently provided by Court (having been routed through Senate when appropriate).

A policy to equip all students with ICT skills as a fourth literacy was formulated by the Director and his staff, the need for it having been identified during creation of the institutional Information Strategy, an exercise designed to meld pedagogic, research and financial business with the effective use of information and ICT. It was developed further with active teaching members of the University Committee for Teaching & Learning, and endorsed by the Information Management Committee. It was then considered in Senate before being approved and legitimised by Court. The strategic aims and actions arising from this policy have subsequently been described in successive iterations of the institutional Strategic Plan, which is submitted to the funding council.

2.2 The Role of Senior Management in ICT Skills Development

Senior management, as represented by the University Management Committee, is present at the point where policy issues are explained, debated and, where successful, confirmed. A sub-set of the University Management Group, composed of Vice Principals and Deans, has full membership of the Information Management Committee and will be present at Senate and Court debates. The role of senior management is generally confined to the consideration of policy recommendations rather than in the active direction of skills development programmes. Two exceptions are the Vice Principal with responsibility for Teaching & Learning who, through his committee convenorships, is active in the direction of specific programmes, and the Director of Information Systems & Services, who has line management responsibility for the University's IT Training team and strategic ownership of the Information Strategy.

2.3 Student Induction Policy

All students entering the University undergo an induction process. The aim of the induction process is to familiarise the student with the facilities available and ensure they are aware of, and know how to meet the requirements of studying in a University environment. With the emphasis on widening student access and the use of C&IT gaining in importance an induction policy is vital. Three Faculties follows a broadly similar pattern of a front-loaded course in the first teaching week. This covers use of the Library, IT resources and IT skills, ensuring that all students are given access to computing facilities and are aware of the importance of the web to access their Web-based course information and Portal accounts. The course also indicates how the Learning Strategies element of their course will be met. The other two Faculties cover similar ground but in slightly different ways and the School of Law have designed their own course.

2.4 Quality Assurance

The University is responsible for maintaining and enhancing the quality of its educational provision and for safeguarding academic standards. Its success in this regard is monitored externally by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), which coordinates two types of review activity: Subject Review and Institutional Review. The former will result in judgements on academic standards and the quality of provision at the subject level. The latter will result in judgements on the relative success of institutional systems for managing standards and quality.

Essential C&IT Skills are incorporated into the learning outcomes of all undergraduate degree programmes. In some programmes, the skills will be embedded within core courses that relate to the academic discipline being studied. In other programmes, students will acquire the skills by completing specific C&IT courses.

From the above platform, all undergraduate students will be able to acquire a range of additional C&IT Skills before graduation. Where these are not embedded within an individual programme of study, students may work through, in their own time, C&IT course, exercise and self-testing material provided on the Web.

Internally, quality is monitored by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning [which is responsible to the Senate], and at undergraduate level, two Academic Standards Committees and the Faculty Planning committees supported by three or four Undergraduate Programme Committees supported by a Students' Progress committee.

2.5 Strategic Approach to Teaching and Learning

¹The University is committed to the continuous enhancement of quality through the promotion of a culture of critical reflection on learning and teaching, informed by best practice, in which soundly based innovation is embedded in everyday academic practice and teaching continues to be informed by scholarship and research. Policies and practices have been reviewed and revised in a number of areas in the light of the guidance contained in the QAA Code of Practice and there are plans to complete this process in the coming year. A number of structural changes have been made to improve the capacity to manage the continuous improvement of learning and teaching. These include a revision of the remit and composition of the University Committee for Teaching and Learning to strengthen its links with the academic community, and the establishment of a Quality Enhancement Strategy Team to develop policy and monitor our performance in this critical area. However, this commitment to the continuous improvement of teaching and learning has only been achieved through the substantial investment of academic staff time. Three key elements will therefore underpin all new procedures: a clear focus on quality enhancement, an imperative to reduce the administrative burden on academic staff while retaining the robustness of our procedures; and the need to ensure that consideration is given to the resource implications (not just in terms of staff time) of implementing new procedures.

3.0 Current Situation – Practice

3.1 History and Current Initiatives

The introduction of a Study Skills course in week 1 of session for all new MA students was approved by the Boards of Studies for Arts & Social Sciences in 1995. This was ratified by Senate soon after and a working party was set up in October of that year to implement it. The first course ran in October 1996. 900 students, who were registered for the MA and

¹ Aberdeen University quality assurance web pages and Student Handbook

BD and BTH courses, took the compulsory front loaded course, which covered three elements – C&IT, library and learning skills. A mixture of academic and postgraduate students taught the C&IT course.

Learning Skill testing went through various modifications over the years as it changed from a special generic exercise marked by course administrators to academics marking an essay or report they had already received in normal subject work. The library element comprised two computer aided learning packages called the Student Survival Guide and a Library Guide. In addition a tour of the library was provided for all students.

The IT element provided information on what computing facilities were available, documentation on email, word processing and web basics and an exercise to complete. In the light of evaluation and feedback, it became evident that the course needed to be overhauled.

A working party on C&IT was set up by the University Committee on Teaching & Learning. Its recommendations were ratified by Senate in June 2000 who further emphasised the need for C&IT training across the entire university. Senate spelled out that the skills all students leaving the university should include: familiarity with Windows-based software, e-mail, word processing and effective use of the Web and progress to use of spreadsheets, presentation and database software and basic web authoring skills. The revamped Information Skills SK1003 course was seen as one of the first steps in this process

3.2 Student ICT Induction

In 2001, the Learning Strategies element of SK1003 was devolved to teaching departments to be fully embedded in the curriculum. All participating departments/schools were asked to embed the teaching of C&IT skills in course work. Departments were to indicate in course handbooks the skills they expected students to acquire and show how these skills would be assessed/monitored. .

The Library Skills element was semi-embedded, in that the exercises and supporting documentation were made subject and course specific. Testing was done through a specially devised Web-based package using WebCT, which marks the exercises.

The C&IT element alone retained its front loaded and generic format with its content designed to provide a foundation on which department specific C&IT skills could be built. Testing was done both during Week 1 and subsequently with a test submitted via-email and marked by course administrators. In 2001 over 1100 students took the course with an overall pass rate of 65%. As the course is not credit bearing, students either pass or have not achieved on their academic record.

In the Faculty of Medicine & Medical Science, all new students follow a similar C&IT course to SK1003, using much of its material, during the first two weeks of teaching...The IT skills, however, are not assessed, and there is no library element or embedding of learning strategies.The Medical Faculty make great use of Computer Aided Learning to provide teaching materials for their students and their emphasis is on ensuring students are able to access this material.

The School of Law offers a Computers in Law course to all its new students in the 2nd semester. While it is optional, virtually all students take it. The course runs for a full semester. The C&IT part is run by the Computing Science Department and the one hour exam is marked by them. The library element is in the form of a literature research exercise which is assessed by academics by means of written reports and a group presentation.

The Faculty of Science & Engineering has a different focus as it offers a course called Tools for Science which is aimed at those students who are perceived to require more assistance than others in Computing, Physics and Mathematics. The computing element covers PowerPoint, Spreadsheets and Word Processing. Meanwhile Chemistry, Physics and Engineering students who form the bulk of all students in the faculty, receive library instruction and a compulsory exercise which is marked by library and academic staff. Some 700 students are involved

3.3 Infrastructure and ICT Funding

The basic classroom and departmental computing infrastructure is provided by the Directorate of Information Systems and Services (DISS). This is supplemented by additional resource from each of the Faculties as they find resource. Classroom provision is moving in 2002 to a 4 year replacement cycle.

The funding of the various student ICT initiatives has generally been dependent upon Faculty initiatives. The SK1000/SK1003 course has been funded since 1996 by the Faculties of Arts & Divinity, Social Science & Law. As more of the assessment and course material has been embedded at departmental level the funding has been heavily reduced. Medicine and Science and Engineering have funded their particular approach. The Faculty of Education takes part for the first time this year and their approach is to make the students' learning process more self directed and the financial provision is consequently smaller. As Faculties have moved towards common software, the funding of material is being provided more centrally as each Faculty contributes towards the provision of a common body of C&IT teaching material.

3.4 Integration of ICT to Teaching and Learning

The University Strategic Plan 2002-06 states that

“The drafting of programme specifications by departments.... has also focused attention on transferable skills . These include the development of C&IT skills, a number of which are now incorporated into the learning outcomes of all our programmes.”²

The plan develops this further in the section on teaching and learning to specify as one of its main objectives

“- equip our students with the knowledge and understanding, attitudes and skills required for lifelong learning and employment, including independent study skills and an appropriate level of C&IT competence.”³

To ensure that students have such skills the teaching staff must have the appropriate skills and support from central services. The university has established a Knowledge Economy Initiative Task Force whose remit includes

“a programme to provide academic staff with the necessary skills to apply C&IT in their teaching and to increase the number of courses that make appropriate use of learning technologies...”⁴

Support for academic staff in C&IT is provided by the IT Training Unit, within the Directorate of Information Systems & Services, as they provide day and half day courses

² University of Aberdeen Strategic Plan, 2002-06, p4, 3.8

³ Ibid,p10, 2.2

⁴ Ibid, p10, 2.2

on a wide range of computing packages from the standard Microsoft applications to complex financial software, MIS applications, a range of web authoring courses and statistical and questionnaire software to support for and the creation of complex databases.

The Learning Technology Unit (LTU) within DISS provides support, workshops and advice for staff who wish to deliver teaching via C&IT. Twice a year academic staff are invited to submit plans to LTU for course work they wish to be delivered by WebCT or the Web. Since its inception in 1998, over 60 major teaching projects have been developed. The Medi-CAL Unit performs a similar function for the Faculty of Medicine & Medical Sciences.

The picture is completed by another arm of DISS- the Web Design Unit – who design and maintain many of the departmental Web pages containing much course information

3.5 Nature of ICT skills provision for students

As teaching resources are increasingly delivered through IT, the provision of library skills focuses more and more on Web based databases, both full-text and bibliographic. Few students receive no library instruction. Virtually all receive induction in level 1 and most will receive instruction at honours level prior to dissertation work.

At level 1 the emphasis is on developing both basic and more advanced searching techniques on the library catalogue and effective use of the Web through subject gateways/portals and Boolean techniques on search engines. More advanced instruction focuses on bibliographic databases and full-text databases such as e-journals. Instruction is provided by Faculty Information Consultants who liaise closely with teaching staff regarding content and delivery.

In the specific case of the Information Skills SK1003, teaching staff are consulted and in some cases provide questions for the subject exercises. Students must complete an exercise of 7 questions for each subject they study in semester 1. They can resit if they fail. Questions relate to the catalogue, the Web, reference material and library services. To monitor progression in library skills, students fill in a pre-course evaluation of their skills and one after they have completed the exercises. 2001 results showed a clear progression in all skills tested.

C&IT skills are vital for students to access their course information which is now often provided either via web pages or through the more controlled environment of WebCT and FirstClass. The provision of front loaded courses is designed to ensure preliminary skills are acquired at the start of the student's University career. These are then built on, within a subject based context, at departmental or school level. The intention of is to provide a firm and consistent basis which will enable students rapidly to acquire any additional skills departments/schools require so that students can maximise their potential. The skills acquired vary from basic MSOffice applications to complex programming and statistical analysis software.

3.6 Staff ICT Training

For a number of years staff ICT training has been delivered in a generic form. This was to ensure that all staff had the opportunity to acquire basic skills that would give them the confidence to experiment and apply their skills to the academic environment. The policy has been successful and many staff now have the requisite skills to move to the next stage. As part of this progression, a Learning Technology Unit was created which has provided the technical help to enable academic ideas to be translated into practice. The next stage will be to give academics the independence to create and maintain their own web and

WebCT sites and to take ownership of this process. The improvement of student C&IT skills and the requirements of Senate for C&IT literate graduates, has provided an impetus for staff to acquire similar skills to meet student expectations.

4.0 Emerging Directions

The overall C&IT abilities of students entering Higher Education is improving. Once students' abilities have been assessed the emphasis of induction courses can move towards ensuring that they are aware of the location of web based course information and access to it, what is available and what is expected of them. Greater resource can then be provided for the less advanced students and more specific assistance provided. With the advent of a very varied mobile phone technology, video conferencing, web based resources, VLEs and MLEs C&IT will almost certainly evolve again. What is important is to be aware of new directions and remain sufficiently flexible to take advantage of them.

5.0 Conclusion

Through all its teaching committees and institutional strategic documentation, the University of Aberdeen has made it clear its commitment to ensuring that all its students have a baseline of C&IT skills in line with QAA benchmarks and the standards expected by employers. Through Academic Standards Committees and various courses already in place this is being delivered and measured.

As it develops its MLE and thence VLE strategies and further refines and develops its teaching programmes Aberdeen University will be producing students across the academic spectrum with C&IT skills which have not only supported their teaching and learning at university but which will enable them to participate fully in the marketplace.

Resources, bibliographies and notes

SK1003 home page is currently <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/infoskills>

[This will change to be a general link to Information Skills and WebCT links for all 5 Faculties by October 2002]

SK1003 library skills <http://webct.abdn.ac.uk/public/sk1003lib>

SK1003 IT testing database <http://webct.abdn.ac.uk/public/itskills>

www.abdn.ac.uk/diss/news/directs/d8/ittu.htm for a description of the revised SK1003 Information Skills week

www.abdn.ac.uk/~com045/acedskil for the overall evaluation form and the pre and post IT skill evaluation questionnaires

www.abdn.ac.uk/infoskills/generalinfo/skills.htm for the IT skills students on SK1003 are expected to acquire

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Weymouth College

Appendix 2

1.0 College Profile and Background

1.1 Introduction and Locality

Weymouth College is located on the coast in West Dorset. It is a General FE College and has around 10,000 students. It offers a very wide range of vocational and academic curriculum areas from pre-entry to Level 4. It occupies newly built and refurbished premises near the centre of Weymouth.

1.2 Organisational Structure

The College has just appointed (April 2002) a new Principal (Sue Moore) and Deputy Principal (Finance) and is currently in the process of reorganisation.

1.3 Mission Statement and Strategic Aims

The College Mission Statement includes guiding principles “To meet the needs of the community and to provide a quality service based on equality of opportunity for all and to enable students to learn effectively by providing thoughtfully designed, well-delivered and sensitively supported programmes in a caring and safe environment.” Its strategic aims are:

- To provide a wide choice of opportunities for the local community to engage in learning;
- To work with others in partnership to provide learning opportunities and best value;
- To ensure that those choosing Weymouth College experience the highest quality service;
- To establish Centres of Excellence in academic and vocational areas;
- Use ICT to provide maximum e-learning opportunities

1.4 Trends in the Regional/National Employment and Student Profile

Weymouth College’s catchment area has competitiveness and productivity levels below national average with a heavy dependence on tourism. Unemployment is fairly stable but the immediate environment has the highest unemployment rate in the county of Dorset. Two Weymouth wards in particular are rated as disadvantaged. The working population in Dorset is forecast to expand by 17% in the next 19 years.

1.5 Student Support Services

The College has an excellent support service for students. All students have a designated personal tutor from a central team. The college provides guidance and counselling, careers advice, diagnostic assessment, chaplaincy and access to additional support for specific needs.

1.6 Strategic Partnerships and Funding

The College works collaboratively with its local feeder secondary schools, with Bournemouth, Plymouth, Kingston and Bath Spa Universities, with other local providers – Dorset Adult Education, Bournemouth & Poole College, Kingston Maurward College, Yeovil College and Salisbury College, and with Weymouth & Portland Community Partnership. It receives ESF funding for its Bridges project which links the college with 44 partners in reaching hard to reach learners. It receives Hefce funding for its DSW partnership with the other colleges, Bournemouth University, Exeter University and the Open University.

2.0 College Strategic Objectives in ICT Skills Provision

2.1 ICT Strategy and Policy

Weymouth College has a newly drafted ICT strategy covering both e-learning and Information systems. It has developed its own virtual learning environment from component parts; it has well developed assistive learning technology and has been the main driver in ensuring the interconnectivity of community learning centres across Dorset.

2.2 The Role of Senior Management in ICT Skills Development

Weymouth College has senior management involvement in driving ICT forward. This is covered in e-learning developments through the virtual learning environment; learning centres and class based ICT delivery. It is also covered through the ICT infrastructure (both internally and through project funding for community learning centres and other providers throughout Dorset) and Information Systems through DITA, Tokairo and an in house devised system to calculate value added.

2.3 Student Induction Policy

All students, as part of their induction, have a computerised diagnostic test for Communication, Application of Number and ICT and are provided with individual log ins and e-mail accounts. Students are encouraged to use ICT both as part of their curriculum and also through learning centres.

2.4 Quality Assurance

The College employs a Learning Technologist to maintain the quality of the materials on its virtual learning environment and work with curriculum staff to develop further suitable materials. IT curriculum is managed through one Division of the college which enables quality standards to be monitored regularly. Provision based in the community offered by the college is also monitored in this way.

2.5 Strategic Approach to Teaching and Learning

The Colleges ICT strategy and main College Strategy involves moving to integrate e-learning in all curriculum areas as well as developing its existing portfolio of distance and open learning course materials. It is also developing e-learning teaching qualifications, which are offered to both its own staff and local LEA staff.

3.0 Current Situation – Practice

3.1 History and Current Initiatives

The college has been proactive in open and distance learning for a number of years through its Enterprise Connection arm and has successfully run projects to develop this area. It has run ECDL on-line for a number of years through a commercial managed learning environment. It has also been involved in projects to develop an understanding of teaching and learning on-line.

The college has now developed its own virtual learning environment (VLE), funded through the DSW partnership, a Hefce project in conjunction with Bournemouth University, the Open University, Bournemouth & Poole College, Kingston Maurward College, Salisbury College and Yeovil College. This has been developed using a component based route and, for the project, used with HND Video Production students. This was used to stimulate academic debate for the Media and Society module. Students received online feedback to their discussion forum from a top national broadcast journalist

and television documentary researcher (for John Pilger : Nick Broomfield) as well as Middle Eastern affairs specialist for the Independent on Sunday national newspaper. Initially students were keen to use this medium. They used it as a whole group in a computer room and it was noted that many of the less confident students grasped this methodology to make insightful and comprehensive inputs that had not happened in oral group work. The students, however, quickly became bored with this discussion board and only used it sufficiently to achieve pass criteria for their assessment.

The discussion board was then used to monitor a pre-production module where students, working in pairs, posted progress reports. The tutor was then able to give well-considered feedback at a time convenient for him. The students had the benefit of being able to post updates on a regular basis and receive feedback without trying to catch the lecturer in the corridor or wait a week for a tutorial appointment. This was much appreciated by the students and the fact that others could monitor their progress (or lack of progress) acted as a spur to some of the less organised groups. The discussion board was therefore extended into the production phase of the assignment and was used also to post general advice supporting taught classroom sessions.

The discussion board was then used for a scriptwriting module. Students produced scripts, which were commented on by both the internal tutors, and also a professional London based scriptwriter who has written for Channel 4 and the BBC. The students were able to read and respond to each other's screenplays, which emphasised the groupwork/peer stimulus that this forum has encouraged. This has enhanced the learners' experience and given greater value and authenticity to their end product. By using outside professional input in an online environment great value has been added to both the student and staff experience. By this being on-line the college has been able to attract high calibre players on the national stage and are not restricted to time and place availability that had previously been the case. As can obviously be seen a London based scriptwriter would have had to spend 3.5 hours each way by train alone to meet with the students and this would have resulted in the short time at Weymouth being used for a general discussion only.

Other curriculum areas are also developing learning materials and resources using the VLE in many useful ways, such as health & safety modules for carpentry and brickwork students, basic skills worksheets and interactive tests, PowerPoint presentations with hotlinks to relevant websites for AS/A2 courses.

This learning material has been developed with student input and is proving extremely successful in developing new teaching methodologies and increasing student support.

3.2 Student ICT Induction

All students are given an ICT based initial diagnostic to determine their level of essential skills (communication, application of number and ICT). These are then followed through with individual learning plans to enable the students to receive the best support for them. Students are given an ICT induction – with log ons, e-mail accounts and access to open learning materials to support main microsoft software programmes. The college has a large Open Access Computer centre with 80 computers which students can then book at their convenience. All are internet connected and all have access to the college VLE.

3.3 Infrastructure and ICT Funding

The college is currently increasing its ICT capacity in line with the VLE usage (funded through standards fund and second year of Hefce project.) It currently has a network that

embraces all teaching machines, including those at college outreach provision. Mainstream funding has been used to support ILT champions, update software and hardware and develop staff expertise in the use of ICT. The college has appointed a webmaster and learning technologist who are responsible for the development and population of the VLE.

3.4 Integration of ICT to Teaching and Learning

Working through the ILT Champions, co-ordinated by the Learning Technologist, many curriculum areas are now using ICT as part of their mainstream curriculum. This varies from a complete induction package for computing students to self-assessment quizzes prepared by students with learning difficulties to help improve their essential skills. These pockets of good practice are now expanding as other curriculum areas take this on board.

The VLE was launched to all staff on 10th July 2002 after its pilot stage. The ILT champions are for 2002-3 tasked with working on 12 projects across the college which will have outcomes of 2 - 5 hours of learning materials for each project.

The VLE is also incorporating National Learning Network (NLN) materials, which are now available.

The college has worked in conjunction with Bournemouth & Poole College of Further Education to trial the next round of NLN materials for Travel & Tourism, Performing Arts, Engineering and Construction.

3.5 Nature of ICT Skills Provision for Students

All Weymouth College LSC funded full-time students follow a keyskills package. For most of these students IT is the most appropriate keyskill and through curriculum areas and the KeySkill Centre students are encouraged to develop these skills – both through taught sessions and by use of open learning materials.

The college also runs computing and ICT vocational courses and several other curriculum areas incorporate part award AVCE in ICT as additionality.

Part time students are provided for in a holistic way. The college uses laptops to work with parents in schools, with old people in residential homes, with women's institutes groups, with both patients and staff in hospices, with townswomen's guilds groups, and other local community groups. It also runs a Mobile Learning Centre in partnership with Bournemouth University, Dorset Adult Education Service, The Early Years Childcare Partnership and Kingston Maurward College. This Mobile Learning Centre travels to rural West and North Dorset to set up in small towns and villages to provide ICT tasters and offer progression routes through local community centres and on-line course provision. The college currently runs 4 outreach centres and this provides progression routes both in the centres and at the main college site. The college manages an ESF project called Bridges. This enables students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those in receipt of benefit or low incomes with additional advice, guidance and support, which includes payment of course fees and examination fees.

The college has 4 learndirect centres and is integrating learndirect ICT materials into its mainstream ICT courses at these centres.

The college is currently working with wireless technology to enable students to access the VLE from home with no cost implication. This is particularly important for the large cohort of HE students who are mainly in commercial residential accommodation.

3.6 Staff ICT Training

To date most staff ICT training has been about learning the various software packages. The college has piloted a teaching with ICT qualification with a staff cohort and this is now being recommended for all lecturing staff. The college is also now offering this qualification to local LEA staff through their staff development programme.

4.0 Emerging Directions

The College sees the use of ICT as a useful additional teaching methodology for many of its student cohort. Feedback from the Hefce project has been extremely positive - with many lessons learnt as to how and when to use ICT. Champions have been re-appointed to continue to support staff in curriculum areas and have been focused into supporting specific projects - many of which will have cross curriculum value, eg induction and health and safety.

The college is now seeking to work with local schools (with whom a new 6th form partnership has just been set up) to share access to the college VLE through a Weymouth & Portland educational portal, so that students start using this while at secondary school. The college is also seeking to support staff in these schools with the necessary knowledge and qualifications to use ICT effectively and in particular to be able to develop their own materials to be placed on the VLE. It is hoped that in this way that the students will become used to the use of the VLE over a number of years and be able to use this as an effective back up to more traditional learning methodologies.

The college is also forming a Jurassic Coast learning hub which it is hoped will be a national resource for learning materials and knowledge with this theme.

5.0 Conclusion

Weymouth College sees ICT as being the cornerstone of its future vision. Through this medium it is hoped to attract new learners from rural Dorset (where transport is often unavailable), from their homes, local libraries and community learning centres and from the college mobile learning centre.

One size fits all? Iliad - The University of York Information Literacy Programme

Appendix 3

Susanne Hodges, Iliad Programme Manager and Gareth J Johnson, Sciences Subject Librarian, University of York

The effective use of information underpins all aspects of academic life. Students are being encouraged to carry out work that requires independent research and to produce assignments using a wide variety of information resources. Yet many students are ill equipped for such work. They may possess comprehensive IT skills but lack the ability to handle and evaluate a wide range of information.

This paper(1) details the initiation, evolution of and challenges faced by the University of York Information Literacy programme, Iliad (Information literacy in all departments). It considers the benefits of providing a generic rather than subject based programme and aims to provide useful information for those wishing to set up a similar programme in Higher Educational institutions.

The underlying ethos of Iliad for University (the Programme includes a more advanced strand called Iliad for Work, with which this paper is not concerned) has remained unchanged for the past six years. However, it can be extremely challenging to provide a programme to suit all levels of ability and knowledge, given that students arrive with varying skills levels. Over the years, Iliad has had to tackle a number of issues, namely

- how to provide an introductory generic information literacy course whilst still challenging those students who possess some basic information literacy skills
- how to increase the complexity of content but remain true to Iliad's underlying philosophy of bringing all students up to a baseline of IT and information literacy competency
- how to address a gradual increase in average baseline student skills
- how to address an increase in transferable skills training within academic departments
- how to address developments in online educational environments.

At the end of 2001 the programme was reviewed and the question asked, 'Do we still need a generic foundation information literacy programme?'

Background Information

In the early 1990s University of York staff in the Computing Service and Library became aware that many incoming students had problems with information handling and with the use of IT tools. In 1994 an Information Literacy Course Designer was appointed. Her brief was to research, design and develop materials for a course that would teach information handling skills, including retrieving, processing and presenting information in its many forms. She was to report to a Steering Group consisting of the Computing Service Director and Head of User Services, Subject Librarians, Director of the York Award Programme (York's transferable skills award) and a student representative. The programme was to be aimed primarily at undergraduates but would be available to postgraduates, as required. For marketing purposes it was promoted as Iliad.

The stated aim of the programme was to enable students to become proficient in retrieving, processing and presenting information in its many forms. The objectives were to provide students with basic, transferable, information handling skills to enable them to be more effective in their studies and to provide an awareness of potential implications of continuing developments in information technology to prepare students for future employment. These aims and objectives are maintained to this day.

After discussions had taken place with academic staff in a wide variety of departments, a standard, generic 12 hour programme was designed. An assessment was designed and a University validated certificate was to be awarded for successful completion of this. A workbook and tutor led approach was chosen to best facilitate self paced learning. In addition the programme was offered via two routes – a taught course or self study. The self-study route was targeted at those students who felt more confident with IT but still wanted additional skills.

The programme was piloted on a compulsory basis in History, Chemistry and Economics Departments in Autumn Term 1995, with three hundred participants taught in single subject groups. The following year the programme was launched University wide. It was financed through a variety of routes including sponsorship from Arthur Andersen Consulting, a negotiated deal with York College of Further and Higher Education and support from the University. In recent years this sponsorship and funding has been lost and students now pay £15.50 to take the programme, with Computing Service funding any shortfall.

In 1998 the Iliad for Work programme was launched. This consists of a menu of courses – Database Systems, Design of Web Pages and Office Skills. In 2000 Designing Computer Graphics was added. Like Iliad for University, Iliad for Work courses are assessed and a certificate is awarded. The Iliad for Work programme is a much smaller initiative and has not suffered the challenges that have beset Iliad for University.

The Iliad for University Programme

In September of each year incoming students are sent a registration leaflet which includes a list of questions, such as *do you know how to save files onto a networked filestore?* If they answer no to more than two questions, they are advised to participate. Sending registration leaflets to home addresses has proved to be an effective marketing strategy. In addition, Iliad is promoted in some departments during induction week. The extent to which some departments actively encourage students to take the programme varies.

The content and level of the programme is constantly reviewed and major updating takes place as a result of technological changes, eg the change from the Corel Suite to Microsoft Office. The original format of the programme has remained unchanged but has been reduced to 8 hours, consisting of four two hour units: Computing at York, Researching and Evaluating Information Sources, Word Processing for Academic Purposes and Presenting Information Using a Computer.

All units are generic except the Researching and Evaluating Information Sources session, which contains subject specific examples. This workbook is written by the Iliad Liaison Librarian, with subject examples provided by the appropriate Subject Librarians, who deliver this session free of charge. Tutors for the other three sessions are bought in and are from a variety of backgrounds, eg postgraduates, junior lecturers, adult education teachers.

Each session is supported by workbooks which contain worked examples that gradually increase in complexity. Students are advised to omit sections with which they are familiar and to concentrate on new areas. For the duration of the programme, a weekly Help Session is provided and students may also call at the Iliad Office or, if appropriate, the Library Enquiry Desk for help and advice. Student feedback has resulted in exercises and the assessment being reformulated to make them more relevant to student's current course work. Originally students were set subject related topics to research and evaluate for the assessment. Now they are encouraged to take a topic of their own choice relevant to their current studies.

A University validated certificate is awarded for successful completion. Students may also gain points toward the transferable skills qualification, the York Award. The assessment, which is optional, requires that students describe and critically evaluate their strategy for researching a topic of their choice and includes citation of references for books, journals and web pages.

Presentation of work using a word processor is also marked. Assessments are marked by tutors, with students having to fulfil eight out of ten key criteria.

Delivery and Participation

The programme runs from weeks three to six of the ten week Autumn Term. A Computing Service classroom is block booked for four weeks and the two hour sessions run back to back from 9.15-5.15, Monday to Friday. Students tend to be taught in mixed subject groups but some departments block book making it easier to tailor sessions to specific subject interests.

Some departments make different arrangements with Iliad. For instance, the Archaeology Department purchases Iliad materials and delivers the programme itself. Other departments, such as Psychology, provide their own courses, taught by departmental staff, based partly or entirely on Iliad materials. A further option is for departments to take parts of Iliad and build them into their own transferable skills modules. Several departments, such as Biology, run skills modules that overlap with the content of the Iliad programme.

Overall, there has been a slight decrease in the percentage uptake. Around 600 students signed up for Iliad in 2001-02, which represented almost a third of the intake. If numbers of students from the departments that buy into Iliad are included, coverage was nearer to 50%. Due to resource levels (mainly availability of computing rooms) it would be difficult to accommodate more in the taught sessions. However, all students are able to take the materials for self-study.

The course is evaluated by means of feedback sheets filled in at the end of the course. Additionally students are invited to take part in focus group discussions. Iliad tutors meet after the course to share comments and exchange observations. In this way a complete picture of the course's strengths and weaknesses can be built up to inform the course's development and evolution.

Iliad staff consists of the Information Literacy Course Manager, who deals with strategic planning, day to day administration, creating and producing course materials, booking tutors and demonstrators. A half-time Assistant provides clerical help. The Course Manager reports to the Iliad Steering Group and to the Coordinating Group for Supplementary Programmes. The latter Group reports to the University's Teaching Committee. Any major changes in course materials have to be approved by the Teaching Committee.

The programme has faced several challenges over the past few years and, as a result, a review(2) was carried out at the end of 2001.

Challenges

Participation

The major challenge has been how to provide a foundation information literacy course that still challenges more IT competent - but less confident - students. With the increasing level of IT teaching in schools it was felt that the numbers of participants might fall dramatically. There *has* been a slight decrease in numbers but generally they remain at around 600 – which, as the numbers of incoming students have risen, means that the overall percentage of uptake has dropped. Feedback has shown that many students still have a low level of experience and a self perceived need for skills - last year a traditional student admitted that she had never used the Internet before. There may have been a gradual increase in average baseline skills but there are many non-traditional students who have few or no skills. Moreover student self perception is often flawed and a student may be competent at IT but have few information literacy skills.

Not all students complete the course and this needs to be addressed. It could be that the course is too easy – feedback showed that 20% of those who completed the course felt that it was.

Conversely, this still means that the course enjoys an 80% satisfaction rating. Despite some students finding the course too easy, 20% overall regularly fail the assessment.

Another challenge has been that only a small number of students complete the assessment which, importantly, is designed to make students reflect upon their information literacy skills. This is to be partly addressed in future by embedding the assessment as a task in the Word Processing for Academic Purposes session. Those who then wish to gain the certificate may develop their work to hand in.

Over the years there has grown a clear tension between three separate groups of students: those with few or no skills; those with competency but who want to know about University of York network and those who only need bits of the programme. The recent review attempted to address this issue and its findings will be discussed later in this article.

The nominal fee is not thought to dissuade students from signing up. However, charging does mean that the programme cannot be advertised as 'key' or 'fundamental' to university study.

Generic or subject based?

At York there has been a rise in departmental subject based skills training. As discussed earlier, some departments have developed their courses using Iliad materials. However, other departments have developed their own skills modules, with no reference to Iliad and some departments provide no skills training at all. There are concerns here over duplication of work, not to mention equal educational opportunities issues.

There have been problems with overlapping materials and some students have resented paying for Iliad when their department provides such training free. However other students have commented that they were glad to have Iliad to take them along at a more sustainable pace.

The advantages of offering Iliad as a separate information literacy programme are:

- Students can choose to attend Iliad sessions that fit in with their timetables.
- Students work at their own pace through the workbooks and have support from help sessions, the Library Enquiry Desk or the Iliad Office, if necessary.
- It gives students an opportunity to work outside their departments and to meet other students.
- Iliad provides a safety-net for students. The learning environment is supportive and separate from the department, so students feel less inhibited about asking basic questions.
- There is currently no alternative virtual learning environment at York to deliver such a programme. Also a virtual learning environment is not seen to be appropriate for an introductory course as the staff and student interaction is seen to be beneficial for students, allowing them to build up confidence and feel comfortable using different technologies.
- Departments may pick up part or all of the course materials and fit them into their own teaching.

Disadvantages include:

- The programme could be by-passed by students seeing it as non-compulsory and non-academic, or by students who do not recognise their own skills gaps.
- The overlap with departmental teaching.
- The quality of teaching if provided by departmental staff, as opposed to the usual Iliad tutors, could be variable.
- The difficulty of getting the right person onto the right course.

The future

The recent Review of Iliad suggested the following recommendations:

- Alongside the main programme, each module should also be offered separately, so that those students who have specific skills gaps can select individual units according to need.
- A rolling programme to run all year round should be initiated.
- A closer dialogue with departments should be instigated, to clarify the role of Iliad in departmental teaching.
- Information literacy skills be emphasised rather than information technology skills. This would encourage students not to race through the workbooks and would ensure that they saw the relevance of the course to their studies.

Developing a generic information literacy programme

At a strategic level, it is essential that the programme gains University acceptance, is fully integrated into the University structure and is seen as a core service. A collaborative and integrated approach to curriculum design and delivery must be encouraged, based on close co-operation between Computing Service, Library, Department, Career and Transferable Skills Programmes. On a practical level, ensuring availability of appropriate teaching rooms and facilities for producing printed materials etc are fundamental.

It is essential that generic information literacy skills required during the degree programme be highlighted as part of a Teaching and Learning strategy at an institutional, faculty and departmental level. The information thus gleaned should be used by the course provider, who should develop a range of effective broad brush and short courses that are part of a rolling programme.

It is important that a departmental contact is established. Departments should also ensure that students are directed to appropriate skills training courses. It is worth noting here that Iliad has been significantly instrumental in aiding departments at York to score highly in the Learning Support section of Subject Review.

Finding appropriate accreditation can be difficult but is necessary to make the programme appeal to students.

Finally, it is essential that the programme is branded and marketed effectively.

Conclusion

Clearly the original need for the Iliad programme still exists, both for some traditional students (“...before I came to University I’d never used the Internet”), for overseas/non traditional students and for those with computing experience but not at University standard.

However, a ‘one size’ course is no longer viable in that it cannot meet either departmental or individual student’s changing information literacy needs. Nonetheless a large amount of generic material is still of value to students, provided enough contextual learning material is embedded within the course.

We may not have it exactly right at York but many students are very grateful that the programme is available. The student Alternative Prospectus in 2000 wrote of Iliad

If you come to York go on this course. Iliad trains you how to use the network and some of its programs and is vital to your success at the University. Communication is increasingly done by email and most tutors expect word processed essays, so for a mere eight hours of teaching you can benefit a great deal. This is a genuine student view and everyone who didn’t do this course doesn’t know how valuable it could have been...

Footnotes

1. Parts of this paper are based on the Big Blue project report on Iliad. To see the full report visit: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/bigblue/>
2. The review was conducted and written by Debra Fayter, former Iliad Programme Manager, University of York.