

## *Community of Practice:*

### *Outline of the Scheme:*

Six staff from the participating institutions were to be released from teaching for 6 hours over a course of 17 weeks, in the development of skills and materials to support teaching and learning within the institutions.

The project would devote funds to encourage staff to work together in the generation of learning materials as part of a collaborative community of practice. A pilot scheme was targeted for the start of the autumn term.

It was intended to release staff from teaching, however most of the participants chose to make use of their Admin time or develop materials in their free time, than lose contact with students.

The scheme ran from the middle of October 2004, until the Easter Holidays 2005 as close to the original 20 weeks as possible, barring holiday periods for which they would not be paid release funding (Half term weeks and the Xmas holidays). These meetings had a slightly staggered start the Tresham staff meeting for the initial meeting a week before those from UCN. This was as a result of initial members identified at UCN choosing to withdraw from the scheme and alternatives being found. In a revision to the planned layout, following consultation with both sets of staff, meetings were held once every third Wednesday, alternating venues in the initial stages of the project, but then, following requests from the staff, reverting to the staff training room at Tresham Institute, due to the facilities available for ILT work. In total 7 meetings were held, with five members meeting on a regular basis. The meetings clashed with the 6<sup>th</sup> member's teaching schedule, which was unable to be rearranged. As a result she was only able to make one meeting in the early part of the second term.

In the interceding weeks, staff worked upon materials to be used within their teaching. This allowed them access to their own resources and materials. These would then be evaluated by students and staff would complete a case study for their own reflections of their work, and what they had learnt.

### *Review of the sessions:*

The initial plans were to have a strict schedule of working, which when presented to the interested parties at the initial launch meeting was met with stiff objections. Of the original UCN line up several people chose not to participate, and others were selected not to participate as they did not like the idea of collaboration and sharing and meeting regularly.

A compromise was met in arranging for the group to meet once every 3 weeks, alternating the venue. This meeting would last a maximum of 3 hours, allowing for a further 3 hours development work within that week. Despite the early warning and best intentions of the scheme it proved to be difficult to arrange the cover and nearly all the staff chose to use their 6 hours either in admin time (to be made up afterwards) or as additional hours to the nature of their employment contracts with their institutions. Several of the staff were not full time lecturers.

Originally it had been proposed to have all the meetings in the ILT development suite at Tresham Institute because of the facilities available for the staff. To make the scheme fairer, meetings were alternated between UCN and Tresham Institute for the first term. However by the start of 2005, the participating staff stated a preference to have the remainder of the meetings at Tresham Institute because a room with facilities such as those at Tresham was not readily available at UCN. The 6<sup>th</sup> member of the group had teaching commitments on the date of the regular meetings. This was flagged repeatedly, as a problem, and there was debate within the Steering group as to whether to keep with just 5 members. Additionally the 6<sup>th</sup> Member did not have a functioning email address making the concept of collaboration as well as standard communication difficult. However the 6<sup>th</sup> member was retained as the lack of collaboration proved to be a useful measure of how collaboration may have affected the materials generated by those meeting regularly.

The nature of collaboration evolved differently to original thoughts – instead of staff creating materials together, the composition of the group and their specialisms was to diverse to

accommodate this, instead the collaboration evolved from the meeting sessions. During these meetings there was a period of review of the materials, allowing the member of staff to explain their choice of methods and thinking with their choices, and stimulating conversation from this. Initially in these sessions the group was led by the project coordinator in a facilitator role, providing training on using software such as PowerPoint, and advanced techniques within this to add additional interactivity in the materials. One point that all seemed keen to use was the use of action buttons for navigation within presentations, to provide a visual clue for students to move through (either forwards or backwards) the presentation. Additionally there was a period of introduction into how they could use ILT enabled materials – using coaching and mentoring techniques. As the sessions progressed this lessened and the CoP led the sessions themselves.

The volume of work generated in this period differed greatly amongst staff. All completed at least one learning object. Often these learning objects were comprised of many smaller presentations linked together in a larger theme.

When the group was not meeting to review materials or undertake latterly ad hoc training, they were to create materials using the 6 hours to fit in with their schedules.

As the group worked through the sessions and attended the meetings it was possible to see an increase in confidence and the growth of skills in using a simple tool such as PowerPoint effectively to produce their learning materials. Observation of the group did notice an increase in skills even in the very basic knowledge. As the group met there was also a pattern of confidence in offering suggestions, so that the facilitator's role become more obsolete, and that they could bounce ideas off one another. Initial sessions were heavily concentrated on training, but this dropped off markedly after the first three group sessions, with perhaps ten minutes towards the end where a surgery of problems or tips would be held. These were usually backed up with a crib sheet of how to carry out actions that they could refer to at a later date.

Skills analyses were conducted at the start and end of the scheme to compare on the levels of personal reflection felt by the staff during their participation.

As 5 of the group met regularly it was interesting to note the difference in the style and standard of the initial work presented by the 6<sup>th</sup> member of the group – the development which had been received either as formal coaching or through the mentoring or by group review and discussion was missing, and conclusions can be drawn that this was as a direct result of the lack of interaction. Therefore collaboration as a group allows the individuals to share experiences and to actively reuse and repurpose ideas from others.

The original scheme also called for a weekly progress report be submitted, either using the institute's VLE or through a group email. However despite repeated reminders the group did not provide this and communication outside of the meetings was sporadic. The group did use the project coordinator to ask questions or try and source information for them.

### *Issues:*

There is still a huge problem when it comes to getting staff to acknowledge their sources particularly with reference to images. Whilst they are aware of copyright problems and the need to cite, they still fail to do so.

One of the training sessions focused on online resources of information/images. Similarly when the group outlined their Initial plans the project coordinator did try and identify places where copyright cleared images may be available. However many of the best examples for staff were still to be found from books and scanned in. In these cases finding copyright cleared alternatives is immensely time consuming, often futile and any results found are not usually exactly what the lecturer has in mind to demonstrate a particular concept.

To avoid copyright issue, many of the group chose to demonstrate processes and produced their own photos as there was nothing extant which would explain it clearly, and others used photos of work they had taken themselves. However for 90% of the work, the extant collections did not provide the images which were required for these materials. In one instance – the history of the alphabet and printmaking process we did manage to find examples of printmaking, typesetting and illuminated manuscripts within SCRAN which were exceptionally useful for the presentation.

Again help was offered in suggesting alternatives to using non-copyright cleared images, but some of the group just inserted images direct from the web into the presentations, again not acknowledging the sources. These images which had been taken from the web were more apparent because they had been enlarged within the presentation and had begun to pixelate.

### *Recommendations:*

It would have been preferable to have stuck with many of the ideas within the original Plan for the scheme, which had been changed to accommodate the wishes of the staff involved. Weekly communication needs to be enforced, as there were concerns about the differences in the volume of work being created. As an expensive scheme to find funding for outwith the research and development stage, it would be preferable to monitor progress on a regular basis, either by the completion of an online log or through the weekly email which was stated as one of the main conditions of the programme.

The staff failed to maintain this despite regular prompting by the coordinator and Steering group members.

The regularity of meetings may also be increased. Whilst once every three weeks did prove to be better than once a week, it may have been beneficial to do this every other week, whilst still being feasible for staff to attend.

Other elements of the original scheme did eventually return to plan – the most notable being the choice of venue for the meetings – it was intended to originally hold all meetings in the ILT Development room at Tresham Institute, because there was a suite of pc's and other equipment for the staff to use, including interactive whiteboard, projector and specialist software. At the kick off meeting held with the CoP they originally stated they wanted to alternate between venues – UCN and Tresham. Midway through the project UCN staff requested to have the remainder of the meetings at Tresham Institute, because the facilities were better for the meeting sessions.

### *Future of the scheme:*

Additional applications for funding have not been successful so the project will end in July. However, both establishments are keen for the Community of Practice to continue in some form. The focused materials development time has enabled them to have a target to work towards, whilst providing a forum to bounce ideas and see what other people are doing. This collaboration towards reuse and repurposing ideas, could be taken forward through Teaching and Learning groups present in the HE partner. There is usually a sum of money available towards development and research, which could be targeted at continuing the scheme in house. Within Tresham Institute, a teaching and Learning group or similar structure does not currently exist. Staff from the scheme have spoken to their Director of programmes about how it could work within FE, and recently a teaching and Learning Forum has been established on the Virtual Learning environment.

Both sides are keen to continue the exchange of information and ideas between institutions. As a result of the scheme student visits have been made to UCN and lecturers from UCN have gone into Tresham to talk to students about continuing their studies. These visits may not have occurred without the networking facilitated by the CoP.

### *Training undertaken:*

- PowerPoint training – basic and advanced skills
- Ad hoc sessions covering SRS equipment, Learnwise VLE (to get them to collaborate)

Things which didn't work: it proved impossible to get the group to provide a weekly email - many not comfortable on the email system. Email was chosen as an easier alternative to using the colleges' Virtual Learning Environment. However staff forgot how to use and access this very quickly so using email was preferred. Some staff did use the VLE to upload their sample materials.

## *Interview Questions for Community of Practice Scheme*

### *1) Tell me about your experiences of the Community of Practice scheme*

SG found it useful to work with UCN through collaboration and to foster development for future HND courses and creating a good working relationship. The entire group have specialist knowledge and expertise and it has been interesting to learn about other things. MD echoed this – was going to have a go at stretching a canvas  
PG also stated was a god grounding and hoped there could be some future project collaboration.

The group all concurred they had warmed to using PowerPoint

### *2) What prompted you to agree to be a part of this scheme?*

- Look at contemporary printmaking fit around area - progression
- The money
- Not previously had any time or opportunity to generate materials
- Learning skills – though the extra cash has helped fund a lap top.

### *3) What impact has participating with the Cop had on you and your teaching?*

SG has always been sceptical about using PowerPoint & digital projectors over 35mm slide projections.

Provided focused time and the pressure so that they had to do it. It has also been very useful to gauge evaluation from the students – to hear them say that they find the materials useful is great and encourages to do more.

MD enjoyed using PowerPoint as it can allow you to create quick presentations and to build the slides up. It's also easy to adapt, update and change

PG – can see how PowerPoint can be useful to record student work – and get the students themselves to make portfolios

MD echoes this - at TI students are already encourage to have jpegs of their work to put together as a slide show.

PG also felt helped provide a link between practice and theory.

### *4) Is there anything you would have changed about the scheme?*

PG did fear at first that the gap between technical assistance and developing the materials would be too great to surmount given the time and restrictions of the team, but has been pleasantly surprised

MD - the differences between Macs and PCs within the discipline and the changing from different machines. However this relates more to institutional discrepancies than to the scheme itself.

### *5) Do you feel this has affected your skills? Confidence? Likelihood to use ILT within teaching?*

SG – Yes!

MD – welcomed any opportunity to use more within her teaching

PG& SG both have begun to use PowerPoint where as before they didn't, they haven't just learnt the skills, they have begun to apply them.

### *6) What aspects have helped the most?*

Support and direction

MD – finding sources for Copyright cleared images.

Using a room and its facilities which are better than perhaps those found within own office space

MD has found the regular meetings useful as they increase and sustain the impetus to develop – it's a shame this can't really continue.

PG hoped that it was possible to find some ways in which the scheme could continue – keeping the collaboration going

Simple items that they were unaware of before the scheme such as the memory sticks have meant that they can be more mobile with their teaching and some of the restrictions faced with ILT - such as fitting it onto a floppy disk drive or requiring a PC with a CD burner can be side stepped

7) *What aspects have caused the greatest problems*

All: Outside of the sessions, using office or personal pcs which may be older and not have the same software as those within the sessions. Finding/ gaining access to delivery equipment permanently within the teaching facilities.

8) *What will you take away with you?*

SG - Knowledge and applied learning. Student feedback has already been positive and responsive giving encouragement to continue.

9) *What would you like to follow up with in the future?*

PG would like to see meetings on how they are getting on after the project has finished

MD search for alternate sources of funding – projects such as this should lead to helping to improve the intake of students

10) *How do you see the group continuing in the future?*

Looks at how can disseminate it further – to Learning Resource Centres, and marketing  
PG – use the HE L&T groups to see how this works equally within FE – can sometimes source funding through this to continue the scheme in some fashion to recognise how it can be used in a broader context.

Matched funding

But ultimately it's all about money – institutional support for continuance time and money

11) *Did the group interaction and reviewing of materials help you?*

Yes – ST remarks that you can see a process of refinement from the initial ideas to the updated versions, and how this can be compared to those outside the group.

12) *Have you found JISC materials/sites to be of use?*

SCRAN – need to have the Dryden and the Carr on to see its use

*Appendix A: Progress notes through meetings*

**CoP Meeting – 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2pm, UCN, Avenue Campus – MR5**

**Agenda**

**Project requirements and communication**

1. update on payment etc (from Steering group meeting)
2. Date of Next meeting
3. Review of work/ideas so far

SG	Art	Looking at the environment -how urban art fits in with the urban environment  A visual tour of contemporary terminology – ppt presentation illustrating key terms  Introductory lecture on the theme of absence – ppt  A case study of content – The Heidelberg project Own images, ppt presentation or web pages.	Or  Or  Or
MD	Graphics	Dictionary of typographic terms: A best practice guide to typography - delivered over pdf or ppt, complete with practical exercises. Potential use of the student response systems to collate formative student assessment. Theory is supported with how-to and tips for using Quark Express	
AE	Art history	A tour of London's post War Architectural features. To create own images of key buildings (internal and external shots) within the Capital. Supporting information to help plan the student's field trip prior to undertaking the exercise.	
ME	Fine Art	Painting and digital print Possible collaboration on the terminology for fine art Putting on an exhibition Stretching canvas	
PG	Fine Art	Etching History and process Link in with fine art – illustration/graphic context Stills/ step by step Plate processing print production – Rembrandt, Goya, Ian Mckeever, David Hockney	
KE	3D design	Workshop practice Health and Safety Architecture Interiors Furniture Jewellery Product Design	

1. ST to provide electronic copy of the hours form – keep a record of when you are working on your projects – cover costs will be paid to 6hrs a week and this time also includes meetings.
2. ST to get Steering group to produce letters outlining and clarifying the terms for participants payment on the scheme.

3. ST to get MD's contract sorted out.
  4. Group to send one email a week outlining what they have been working on – until the next session when training will be provided on the Virtual Learning Environment – use the email addresses above.
  5. Date of next meeting: 1<sup>st</sup> December 10am SMR Room 31 (Map attached) Follow signs for ILT development suite once inside the building with the stone front – I'll arrange car parking spaces
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1<sup>st</sup> December 2004

1. SRS?
  2. Learnwise – getting on and using the discussion board
  3. Emailing – not performing
  4. Review of work
  5. Letters
  6. other skills analysis documents
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12/01/05 Community of practice meeting:

Present: SG , AE , MD , Mark , PG .

Reviewed work done to date.

Showed how to get hyperlinks into PowerPoint and action buttons. Using the master slide.  
Revisited discussion forum and how to access.

ME has completed his first project. SG aims to present his PowerPoint presentation on the environment within a week.

Work to be undertaken, isolating the key stations as a graphics for AE  
Bulk conversion for SG of slides and tiffs to jpegs for use within presentations.

2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2005

PG adding hyperlink buttons to slides

ME easy to work out

PG produced printing the plate the third section in the collection.

ST to send ME (and the others) the student release form template and evaluation form.

Suggested using the end show and close presentation buttons to close down the open windows for the different sections.

How can we get web pages to display before the presentation – usually it does it automatically.

SG reported how after showing the presentation to students is moving all the text before the image is presented

AE - Change the circle colour

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> march

1) Dissemination Seminar – interviews/quotes/case studies

On the day – role of CoP staff if available is to be about for Q7A of their experiences

AE – planning on using one of the students for evaluation

Dryden and Carr Collections – use cases, - the group couldn't see any use of the collections for their subject areas

Review of works –

MD – Copyright notices onto image – searching SCRAN for alternatives relating to printing presses

PG – copyright notices on images – acknowledge sources.

SG Heidelberg – learnt from environment and is putting the text before the images. All his own images.

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Meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> March

MD – has found SCRAN really useful for swapping over problematic images relating to printmaking and typography – particularly printing presses and illuminated manuscripts.

PG problematic copyright on Rembrandt prints – cos it is the plate how can tell which print is which?

Separate session with KE – showed SCRAN, tips and tricks within PowerPoint, including action buttons to revise the work completed so far. Gave a copy of the case study information and student evaluation forms.