

2 Strategic Management

Benchmarks

STRATEGY

1. The e-learning strategy should be embedded within the teaching and learning strategy of the institution.
2. The institution should have e-learning policies and a strategy for development of e-learning that are widely understood and integrated into the overall strategies for institutional development and quality improvement. Policies should clearly state the user groups and include all levels of implementation, infrastructure and staff development.
3. Investigating and monitoring emergent technologies and developments in the field of e-learning and anticipation for integration in the learning environment.

MANAGEMENT

4. The resourcing of developments in e-learning activities should take into account special requirements over and above the normal requirements for curricula. These will include items such as equipment purchase, software implementation, recruitment of staff, training and research needs, and technology developments.
5. The institution should have an e-learning system integrated with the management information system (registration, administrative system and VLE) which is reliable, secure and effective for the operation of the e-learning systems adopted.
6. When e-learning involves collaborative provision, the roles and responsibilities of each partner (internal and external) should be clearly defined through operational agreements and these responsibilities should be communicated to all participants.



2.1 Policies and Plans

The institution should have defined policies and management processes that are used to establish strategic institutional objectives, including those for the development of e-learning. An institutional strategic plan will be the uppermost tier in a planning hierarchy and will shape the plans of academic, administrative and operational units of the institution. The strategic plan will be regularly monitored, evaluated and revised in line with experience and developing requirements.

The strategic plan should encompass a vision for the use and development of e-learning within the institution and provide a timescale for the achievement of strategic goals.

The strategic plan should address the provision of the human, technical and financial resources necessary for implementation.

Due account should be taken of key strategic issues such as relationships with other institutions, funding and regulatory bodies.

Indicators

The institution has an identified group of key staff responsible for formulating, evaluating and developing institutional policies and plans relating to e-learning. These policies and plans are set out clearly for the benefit of all participants and stakeholders.

At excellence level:

Understanding of the role of e-learning is widespread within the institution and there is an institution-wide engagement with the development of policies and plans for its achievement and enhancement.

2.2 The role of e-learning in academic strategy

The institutional strategic plan should identify the roles that e-learning will play in the overall development of the institution and set the context for production of the plans of academic departments, administrative and operational divisions.

The institutional plan should outline options for the use of e-learning in teaching that may define a spectrum of "blends" of e-learning and more established pedagogic mechanisms.

Faculty and departmental plans should aim to best match the student requirements of their particular market sector (national/international focus) in presenting e-learning/blended learning options.

The institutional strategic plan should ensure that plans of academic departments are consistent with each other. Student mobility between departments should not be restricted by major differences in policy or implementation with respect to e-learning.

Indicators

The e-learning strategy is part of the general educational strategy of the institution and there is consistency between the approaches to e-learning taken by individual departments and faculties in line with institutional plans.

At excellence level:

There is a widespread understanding of and engagement with the implementation of e-learning policies across the institution.

2.3 Policy on infrastructure

Institutions developing and delivering e-learning programmes should have a comprehensive set of policies that relate to the provision of an effective infrastructure for delivery of teaching materials and student support services.

The policies should address issues of:

- Financial, physical and technical resources
- Staffing and staff development
- Management, responsibility and accountability.

Implementation of e-learning may require an institution to review and revise its policies on the deployment of resources to ensure that it has in place an adequate technical and physical infrastructure.

The administrative aspects of e-learning programmes may require significant changes in administrative systems to enable students to access information regarding their status, progress, *etc* on-line. Equally the "system" must have the capability to distribute appropriate materials to students. To meet these needs the institution must ensure that its management information system is capable of operation to appropriate standards of reliability, security and effectiveness.

Indicators

Departmental and faculty plans address issues of resourcing, staffing and staff development for those involved in delivery and support functions.

Appropriate operating and security standards for all aspects of the provision of on-line services are defined.

At excellence level:

Institutional plans make provision for the resources necessary to install and maintain the physical and technical infrastructure needed and allocate responsibility for the delivery of services to specific departments.

Resourcing plans embrace both initial investment in equipment, software, etc and also set appropriate targets for cycles of updating, renewal and replacement.

2.4 Policy on virtual mobility

E-learning provides opportunities for presenting programmes that offer considerable flexibility in terms of place and time of study and equally provides opportunities for students and staff to participate in virtual communities.

Programmes encouraging the physical mobility of students are commonplace and receive considerable support from agencies such as the EU. The development of policies that facilitate virtual mobility is desirable for institutions operating e-learning programmes.

Policies for virtual mobility should be designed to provide students with opportunities to study programmes from institutions geographically remote from the student's home base and across national boundaries.

Institutions participating in virtual mobility programmes should develop policies that embrace academic, professional and social aspects of student mobility.

Institutions participating in virtual mobility programmes should ensure that assessment of student outcomes is consistent, well documented and interchangeable between institutions. Wherever possible, student performance on a virtual mobility programme should be recognised for the purposes of an award of the home institution in the same way as for other programmes.

Indicators

The institution recognises the benefits of e-learning for virtual mobility, has assessed the problems, and has an explicit policy on virtual mobility.

At excellence level:

There are exchange agreements with other educational institutions providing e-learning programmes and inter-operabilities have been agreed and set out with these providers.

The institution evaluates the virtual mobility policy and its results regularly.

2.5 Collaborative ventures

The infrastructure and developmental costs of e-learning may create circumstances in which collaboration with other institutions provides an attractive route for the development and delivery of e-learning.

The development of collaborative ventures, whether initiated through top-down or bottom-up processes should be formally agreed and ratified prior to the course design stage.

Contractual arrangements between the collaborating partners should define the scope of the collaboration, the responsibilities of partners, financial arrangements and the relationships with third parties particularly students and teachers.

All collaborative ventures should be subject to stringent risk analysis and appropriate contingency planning should be in place in the event of the collaboration breaking down.

Indicators

All collaborative ventures are formalised through contractual relationships.

Service level agreements are in place for all collaborative arrangements.

Clear reporting lines exist for all those employed in collaborative ventures.

Contingency plans to protect student and institutional interests are in place for each collaborative arrangement.

At excellence level:

A risk analysis is conducted on each potential collaboration.

2.6 Research and innovation in e-learning

Policies on research and innovation in e-learning need to cover both technical and pedagogical aspects.

While not all institutions with e-learning programmes will be in a position to conduct fundamental research into these areas, institutional management needs to ensure that there is a clear policy framework through which new developments and emerging techniques may be identified, evaluated and adopted.

Indicators

There is a policy framework and an agreed set of planned activities directed towards the improvement of e-learning programmes through more effective use of technology, improved pedagogical approaches, *etc.*

Activities will be linked in with the institution's processes for continuous improvement based on monitoring, feedback and self-evaluation but will also take account of developments elsewhere given the rapid pace of progress in e-learning and its applications.

At excellence level

The institution has a research and innovation policy which supports the development and/or evaluation of new technical/pedagogical approaches to e-learning, and a planned programme of activities in support of the policy. These activities may be determined by the needs of the institution's own e-learning programmes but will usually be of relevance to e-learning programmes at other institutions and the results published accordingly.