

## 6. Staff Support

E-Learning institutions should provide their staff with the necessary facilities and support for delivering academic teaching of high quality. The fact that this is carried out using digital media places extra responsibilities on the institution. In this category the most important criteria are brought together and address the needs of both full time and associate staff who may be employed in a number of teaching and administrative roles. The objective of all support services is to enable all members of academic and administrative staff to contribute fully to e-learning development and service delivery without demanding that they become ICT or media specialists in their own right.

### Benchmarks

25. All staff concerned with academic, media development and administrative roles need to be able to adequately support the development and delivery of e-learning components. The institution should ensure that appropriate training and support is provided for these staff and that this training is enhanced in the light of new system and pedagogical developments

26. Pedagogic research and innovation should be regarded as high status activities within institutions with a commitment to high quality e-learning. There should be mechanisms within these institutions for the dissemination of good practices based on pedagogical experiences and research in support of e-learning (including institutional pilot projects or good practice developed elsewhere and/or through consortia), and for the training or mentoring of new staff in such practice. Career development incentives should promote the use of e-learning.

27. The institution should ensure that issues of staff workload and any other implications of staff participation in e-learning activities are taken proper account of in the management of courses or programmes.

28. Institutions should ensure that adequate support and resources are available to academic staff including part-time tutors/mentors. These should include:

- support for the development of teaching skills (including support for e-learning skills, collaborative working on-line and contributing to on-line communities which are key skills in an e-learning context)
- access to help desk, administrative support and advisory services
- opportunities to provide and receive formal feedback on their experience on the course
- procedures to handle and resolve any difficulties or disputes which may arise
- legal advice (such as copyright and intellectual property rights).

## 6.1 Technical

Staff working in an e-learning environment requires significant technical support in the acquisition, operation and maintenance of ICT networks. Specialist technical staff should support academic and administrative staff in all technical aspects in order that they can maximise use of their expertise in an e-learning context.



### 6.1.1 Technical support (ICT)

All staff should have access to technical support in the use of the e-learning environment and the hardware and software used in teaching. For those working remote from the institution's physical base this technical support will be provided on-line and whilst the institution may not have responsibility for the physical equipment used by those employed in support roles it should endeavour to provide a comprehensive advisory service on all technical aspects that might impinge on the effectiveness of the institution's teaching.

Within the institution technical support should be available to all staff and operate to clear performance levels that acknowledge the impact that technical problems might have on student learning.

#### Indicators

Academic staff and departments have access to technical support services in selection, acquisition and maintenance of their ICT equipment and networks.  
Technical services operate to clear and agreed standards for provision of staff support.  
Media development and Administrative staff have access to technical support services in selection, acquisition and maintenance of their ICT equipment and networks.  
The infrastructure supports teachers at all times with online access to materials, administrative data and communication facilities.

#### At excellence level:

There is an institutional plan for the provision and future direction of the technical support function.  
Technical departments inform academic, media development and administrative staff of the potential of emerging technologies and systems.  
Technical departments collaborate with academic, media development and administrative staff in the development of strategies and plans for future use of ICT.  
A suite of on-line technical support services is available to staff working remote from the institution's physical base.

### 6.1.2 Training support

Academic and administrative staff has access to a comprehensive suite of training opportunities that equip them with the capabilities to operate the software and hardware necessary for them to contribute effectively in an e-learning environment.

Training may be provided by induction programmes on appointment, training programmes associated with the introduction of new systems, updating programmes, on-line training materials and helpdesk services.

The needs of staff working remote from the institution's headquarters or campus should also be provided for via on-line network and telephone support services.

#### **Indicators**

Responsibility for the provision of training is clearly defined and adequate resources are allocated.

Newly appointed staff is provided with induction in the use of software and systems.

The introduction of new systems or equipment is supported by adequate training for all users.

#### **At excellence level:**

There is an institutional plan for the provision of training in the technical aspects of e-learning.

The intranet provides access to self help training materials augmented by help line services.

## 6.2 Pedagogic

The provision of support for staff in the pedagogy of e-learning is essential if e-learning is to be implemented as an integral component of institutional activity. The majority of academic staff will not have experienced e-learning during their own education and may not have received training in the pedagogic possibilities of e-learning. The development of early generations of e-learning programmes has been driven by enthusiasts but future institutional development should be based on involvement by the majority of academic staff. Institutions must foster an environment that encourages and supports the development of pedagogic skills and expertise amongst its staff. Recognition of these in its structures of reward and esteem is an important factor.

### 6.2.1 Pedagogic support

Staff needs to be supported in the development of the pedagogical, technical skills and methods that accompany and are necessary for e-learning.

Dispersed expertise within an institution may be focused by the formation of a real or

"virtual" department within the institution charged with the responsibility for pedagogic development and their expertise made available to others involved in e-learning delivery via, for example, internal consultancy, secondment to development teams, training courses, seminars (real and virtual) and good practice guides.

### **Indicators**

The institution offers to its staff an information service on uses of e-learning via library and intranet.

Training courses are available for staff engaged in e-learning activities.

Staff is encouraged to provide mutual support in cross-professional groups in the development of e-learning materials.

Staff is supported in the pedagogic uses of digital technologies (including web oriented tools) in teaching.

Staff employed as tutors and in other student support roles are appropriately briefed and supported in the pedagogic techniques incorporated in courses.

### **At excellence level:**

The institution has recognised structures for the dissemination of best practice in relevant pedagogic techniques.

There is an institutional plan for the development of pedagogic support services.

The institution has a "showcase" site on its intranet demonstrating best practice in on-line pedagogy.

## **6.2.2 Pedagogic development**

Pedagogic development should be seen as a key activity for academic and student support staff within the institution and staff should enjoy an environment in which their efforts in this area are respected and acknowledged.

Staff activity planning processes should acknowledge the time required to develop and practice new pedagogic skills.

## Indicators

Tutorial and other support staff is encouraged to take part in pedagogic developments.

Professional development seminars and symposia on pedagogic issues are organised (and well attended).

Internal and external publication on pedagogic issues related to e-learning is encouraged.

Internal secondments and cross-departmental working are used as mechanisms for sharing expertise in pedagogic techniques.

The experience of tutorial and other support staff is valued by the institution.

Student feedback is used extensively in review of pedagogic developments.

## At excellence level:

Pedagogic development is widely respected throughout the institution and recognised through reward and career development structures.

The Institution has a group of staff who are committed to the research and development of e-learning pedagogy. These staff may operate as a self contained unit or, perhaps more appropriately, as a distributed unit contributing to the activities of a "host department".

The institution encourages and supports participation in inter-institutional collaboration and exchange programmes related to pedagogic development.

## 6.3 Resources

Those involved in the development and delivery of e-learning courses and programmes should have access to the resources to enable them to undertake their activities effectively. The aspects identified in this section include information resources, administration and support in their career development.

### 6.3.1 Information and Media support

Staff should have the access to support in the acquisition of information and media materials necessary for them to fulfil their role in the development and delivery of e-learning programmes.

Information on the performance of current and previous e-learning programmes is an important aspect of achieving improvement in programme design and delivery; hence staff should have access to institutional data and other information relevant to their sphere of activity.

The indexing and archiving of e-learning materials demands different approaches to those required for traditional materials, and institutions risk losing hard-won experience if they are unable to easily identify and access exemplars of materials or software components.

On-line resources should also be available to tutors for incorporation into their responses to students, or for posting on student community sites they may manage or moderate.

### Indicators

The technical infrastructure supports teachers by providing online access to materials, administrative data and communication facilities.

The library function within the institution is adapted to the provision and maintenance of on-line resources for staff and students.

Support is available for course design staff in the research and evaluation of online resources for student use.

The institution complies with appropriate emerging metadata standards for indexing e-learning materials.

Tutors make active use of on-line resources in their feedback to students and other aspects of their on-line teaching.

### At excellence level:

The institution has staff committed to the maintenance of historical records of course and student performance and their analysis to assist in programme development and delivery.

The institution has processes for indexing and archiving its e-learning materials for evaluation and potential re use.

Development teams are routinely able to access previously developed materials and consider their potential for re-use.

There is evidence of re-use and re-purposing of e-learning materials in preference to *ab initio* development.

### 6.3.2 Administrative Support

Effective administrative support should be provided to all staff involved in the development and delivery of e-learning courses and programmes.

Primary design of the administrative services should aim to facilitate on-line interaction with students. There is a parallel requirement that interactions requiring staff input are processed with speed and efficiency appropriate to a customer service organisation operating primarily via on-line interaction, *e.g.* full student information available to all staff handling phone or postal enquiries.

The introduction of e-learning may create new requirements for administrative tasks over and above those encountered in previous modes of delivery (*e.g.* the administration and management of teaching activities devolved to tutors/mentors). The impact on staff should be assessed and appropriate arrangements made for additional staff or adjustment of workloads.

Study centres should also provide their tutors and teachers with support for effective teaching (*e.g.*... supply electronic teaching facilities independently of the central office). This includes administrative support, both at study centre as well as (on-line) via the central office.

### **Indicators**

The institution has assessed the administrative impact of e- learning and e- learning systems on the workloads of all staff groups.

The institution has adjusted staffing levels and workloads to account for the requirements imposed by e- learning.

Administrative support at study centres facilitates effectively the teaching function, meetings with students and other stakeholders.

### **At excellence level:**

All staff using the administrative system report that it operates well.

### **6.3.3 Career development**

The involvement of staff in e-learning development needs to be properly recognised by their institution for promotion and career development opportunities.

### **Indicators**

Staff acknowledges that their inputs to e-learning programmes are recognised in career progression structures.

### **At excellence level:**

The institution has reviewed its careers progression structures to take account of new roles and functions associated with e-learning.

Criteria for progression and promotion from existing roles are reviewed to ensure that e-learning contributions are appropriately reflected.

There is evidence that the criteria are actively implemented by decision makers in the career progression process.