

Use of Educational Technology

1. Background

This policy has been developed in light of the University's Corporate Plan objectives, informed by the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (CLQE, 2007), the outcomes of the national Benchmarking of e-Learning exercise (CLQE, 2007) and is in line with national priorities in higher education. The focus of this policy is on ensuring the effective and efficient use of learning technologies that can be applied across a broad spectrum of the University's provision (although it does not preclude the use of technologies with specialist application).

Students participating in Higher Education expect to learn using appropriate modern instructional materials and methods, including increased use of ICT in teaching and research. Therefore, in order to meet student expectations this policy advocates that the use of learning technologies should be an integral part of the learning experience for all students studying with the University. The use of learning technologies should be informed by pedagogy and research and offer engaging and interactive learning experiences.

Within Middlesex University e-learning is seen as an important method for learning and teaching, which if informed by subject discipline and pedagogic research and if used appropriately, can improve the quality of learning and teaching and enhance the institution's academic profile. The University recognises the significant efforts of individuals and teams over the last five years in the development of e-Learning. However, following the adoption of the new Corporate Plan and the ELTA strategy it is now timely to articulate the expectations for the role that the development and use of e-learning will take in achieving the University's future objectives. This policy and plan aim to promote and support diversity, creativity and innovation in using ICT to support student learning and is not limited to the use of OASISplus, the University's chosen virtual learning environment (VLE).

In particular this policy and its associated plan aim, through the use of learning technologies, to

- enhance learning and teaching; and
- contribute to student satisfaction with their learning experience.

2. Definitions

E-Learning

The definition of 'e-Learning' adopted in this policy is sufficiently broad to encompass the many uses of information and communication technologies (ICT) that are used within the University aimed at enhancing learning and teaching practices. Within this policy, e-learning is defined as:

the use of learning technologies to facilitate flexible approaches to learning, teaching and assessment in ways that enhance the student learning experience. It includes online communication within and between communities of learners and teachers, computer-assisted assessment as well as the use of online learning materials developed internally or from external sources.

The concept of e-learning increases in complexity as the proportion of online activity increases. The e-Learning Spectrum (appendix 1) provides examples of e-learning activities based on the degree of the blend between online and traditional face-to-face activity; it is acknowledged that the degree of the blend will differ across programmes and modules.

Distance Education

Distance education is defined as programmes, parts of programmes, or short courses explicitly designed to be provided for students who are geographically removed from the University (or partners validated to such provide such provision) and who will not access physical resources provided by the University (or partner). Thus, most of the University's distance education will be by e-learning; but the majority of e-learning in the University will not be part of distance education.

3. Policy Aims

Policy aim 1:

E-learning will be integrated appropriately into the learning experience of all students.

In doing this the University will:

- Align e-learning development and delivery with guidelines on pedagogy
- Take a programme-wide view of technology enhanced learning opportunities offered to students
- Facilitate learner engagement through the use of technology
- Use e-learning to provide greater flexibility of study, and to address issues related to student diversity and equality of opportunity
- Encourage staff to draw on experiences of using e-learning technologies to inform development and practice
- Use technology to support assessment and feedback

Policy aim 2:

Middlesex University will plan for the use of learning technologies in a strategic manner

In doing this the University will:

- Strategically consider and evaluate appropriate technologies, with a view to developing, investing in, and embedding such technologies across the University
- Consider the sustainability and resources of e-learning activities and online teaching when it is introduced or developed.
- Allocate time for staff involved in learning and teaching innovations to allow for updating and experimentation with emerging technologies and pedagogical models
- Ensure that the implications of delivering and supporting e-learning are taken into account when determining staff workloads
- Promote the sharing of resources across all levels of curriculum development and delivery
- Make effective use of existing resources wherever possible.

Policy aim 3:

The University will seek to provide adequate, appropriate, timely and consistent levels of motivation, support, training and development to engage all staff in enhancing learning and teaching through the use of technology.

In doing this the University will:

- Establish and apply an evidence-based support strategy to enable staff to effectively achieve the delivery methods for the enhancement of learning.
- Develop and provide a full range of supportive and timely staff development programmes.
- Create opportunities for all staff (academic, technical and support) to identify and share best practice, ideas and experiences of using learning technologies to facilitate learning

- Ensure that reward and recognition schemes will acknowledge engagement with and pedagogically sound use of technology
- Strategically acknowledge the HR and career development implications of learning technologists

Policy aim 4:

The University will seek to provide adequate, appropriate, timely and consistent levels of support to students engaged in e-learning.

In doing this the University will:

- Define levels of appropriate support and put in place corresponding support and maintenance strategies for all e-learners
- Effectively provide guidance, made available by a variety of means, to enable students to learn through the use of technology
- Provide clear guidance to students on learning and assessment processes mediated through learning technologies
- Keep support levels and quality under review with a view to continuous improvement

Policy aim 5:

The University will seek to ensure that the quality of the learning experiences offered via e-learning will be of a high standard.

In doing this the University will:

- Establish ownership and responsibility by appropriate staff for the quality of the content, communications and interactions of technology supported provision
- Evaluate the impact of technology supported learning offered in programmes through quality enhancement initiatives and respond to findings
- Provide convenient appropriate access to fully equipped learning and teaching spaces suitable for enhancing learning and teaching through the use of technology.

4. Management of e-Learning Policy

This policy will be overseen by Teaching and Learning Committee which will have responsibility for addressing strategic e-learning issues. This committee will seek to

- Establish an effective institutional process for monitoring the implementation and achievement of the e-learning policy (e.g. through internal benchmarking or similar exercises)
- Systematically review key data and performance indicators to measure the effectiveness and implementation of the e-Learning Policy
- Regularly consider the results of the evaluation of e-learning and its contribution to the enhancement of student learning. The outcomes will be communicated widely within the institution and appropriate recommendations will be made.

Developments will also be informed by appropriate individuals, networks and operational groups across the University.

This policy APS15 - Open Learning and Distance Education Policy was approved by Academic Board in 2001. Its replacement APS15 – Enhancement of Learning through the use of Technology was approved by Academic Board on 18th June 2008. A change of title to Use of Educational Technology, with an associated Action Plan, was approved by Academic Board on 19 November 2008. The policy is due for further review by June 2013.

Appendix 1: e-Learning Spectrum

This e-Learning Spectrum outlines six diverse scenarios across a spectrum of e-learning practice, with which most of Middlesex University staff and student already engage. It is important to note that progression through the table is not linear, and staff are not expected to progress from scenario 1 to scenario 6, however, each scenario is numbered for referencing purposes only. Scenario 6 is the only scenario under which students decide the degree of e-learning with which they would like to engage whilst studying; all other scenarios leaves the degree of the blend up to the individual academic facilitating the module/programme.

| ICT usage | e-enhanced | | e-focused | e-intensive | |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Degree of blend decided by individual tutor | | | | | Degree of blend decided by individual student |
| | Student activity: up to 10% online | Student activity: up to 50% online | Student activity: up to 75% online | Student activity: 100% online | Student activity: % variable |
| Use of internet for searching information, use of databases, Word, Excel, SPSS, use of computers as production tools, etc | Same amount of face-to-face (f2f) teaching Improved access to materials which are physically available (handouts, slides, etc), however access to these resources electronically is not necessary in order to achieve the learning outcomes. Announcements are provided online. | Reduction in f2f contact time Some f2f contact time is replaced with online ACTIVITIES (discussions, quizzes, etc) Online collaboration and peer support is important Refocusing what is done in face to face session – in class sessions are subject based but do not focus on providing information; they address misconceptions, attempt to resolve issues, provide timely feedback and build a greater cohort identity | The physical focus is a “learning resource centre” which offers on demand and personalised assistance (up to 75% online) There are no traditional, timetabled, f2f class meetings (lectures, etc) Small group tutorials and peer support are key Students work within a defined framework set out at the beginning of each unit of study (can be smaller than a module) | All student-tutor interactions are online and there is no need for physical meetings (100% online) Online collaboration and peer support is essential Online self assessments help students pace themselves and allow for monitoring of progress Feedback is provided to students based on their online activities and behaviour in relation to the class average and tutor expectations. Materials are generated dynamically – students seek materials, electronic or otherwise, evaluate their relevance and contribute them to their peers online. | This “buffet model” approach allows students to choose between multiple ways of achieving particular learning outcomes. They can choose between using e-learning, attending a lecture or attending a tutorial, etc. Learners enter into a “learning contract” which captures their choices of learning. There are proposed “fixed menus” for students to choose, but these can be altered by each student. |
| e-Learning/DE expert required on validation panel | | | | | |
| The presence of the online tutor is essential and key to the student learning experience. | | | | | |
| Advantages – (list is not exhaustive) | | | | | |
| Provides IT skills relevant to subject area which are expected by employers from graduates | Improved accesses to resources and limited flexibility in attendance | Flexibility of space Opportunity to provide more engaging f2f offerings | Highly personalised mode of learning No lectures to prepare | Students can choose the pace at which they wish to study (within reason) Flexibility of space | Highly personalised mode of learning |
| Challenges – (list is not exhaustive) | | | | | |
| Appropriate and up-to-date software needs to be present on student machines. | This is supplemental to existing traditional provision and implemented by tutors on top of their existing commitments. | Requires rethinking of how teaching and learning takes place | Requires radical rethinking of how physical space and resources are used Institutional commitment to large amount of electronic resources | Requires excellent communication, team building and e-moderating skills on behalf of the online tutor. | Requires a large variety of offerings Requires radical rethinking of how physical space and resources are used |