

Forum Insights for Managers in Higher Education

REPORT

Online Learning Task Force,

Collaborate to Compete: Seizing the Opportunity of Online Learning for UK Higher Education: Report to HEFCE by the Online Learning Task Force (January 2011), http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce1/pubs/hefce/2011/1101/11_01.pdf

Key insights for managers

Providing online learning

- 'Online programmes need to be of comparable quality and standard to other programmes' (p.5).
- 'Technology needs to enhance student choice and meet or exceed learners' expectations' (p.5).
- 'Institutions need to know what they hope to achieve from online learning ventures' and to 'understand the market and what students want' (p.10).

Building capacity for online learning

- 'Institutions need to take a strategic approach to realign structures and processes in order to embed online learning. [...] Institutions and organisations need to invest in learning, and leadership and vision at the highest level [...] to bring a step-change. [...] Institutions need to ensure staff understand the range of challenges and opportunities provided by online learning, and ensure what they do is cost-effective and high-quality' (p.6).
- Building on existing strengths, institutions' approach to the delivery of online learning 'must reflect their own organisational arrangements, culture and values' (p.10).
- 'Investment is needed to facilitate the development and building of consortia to achieve scale and brand in online learning' (p.5). Inter-institutional collaboration in online learning can achieve economies of scale, minimise risks entailed in developing new forms of provision, facilitate the exploitation of joint brands, and harness the collective strengths of institutions and providers'.
- 'Institutions can build on existing open educational resources' to maximise efficiency (p.7).
- 'Training and development should be realigned to enable the academic community to play a leading role in online learning. [...] There needs to be a stronger understanding of the potential of web-enabled learning and the use of social media, greater prioritisation of teaching partnerships between technologists, learning support specialists and academics, and an end to the "not invented here" syndrome' (p.7).

Supporting student-engagement with online learning

- 'Students need greater support to ensure their study and academic literacy skills are fit for the digital age' (p.5).
- Institutions should facilitate collaborative online learning to overcome students' concerns about the lack of contact with tutors and other students, and to facilitate international interaction.
- 'Institutions need to be able to offer courses and programmes that are adaptable to individual student circumstances' (p.10).

Opportunities

- Online learning provides an opportunity for institutions 'to develop responsive, engaging and interactive provision which, if offered at scale, can deliver quality and cost-effectiveness and meet student demands for flexible learning' (p.3).
- Markets for online learning and flexible programme provision are growing rapidly: 'going to university' will take on many, varied meanings and manifestations over the next ten years' (p.4).
- 'Technology can free up time (central timetabling and room allocation for example), as well as helping to enhance reputation and access to resources' (p.17).
- Online learning may help to prepare students for higher education, thereby improving retention.

Challenges

- The development of online learning is challenging because technological change is more rapid than the development of pedagogy for its exploitation.
- Staff contractual arrangements can inhibit engagement with online learning if, for example, hourly quotas are assigned to teaching time.
- Better information for students about online learning is required.
- Better market intelligence about international demand for online learning is required.