The CMALT experience: an individual perspective

In 2005 I was involved in the ALT pilot for CMALT (Certified Member of the Association of Learning Technologists), which was based on the idea of recognising that a learning technologist would benefit from having a defined, professional framework for their specific repertoire of skills and experience. I work 4 days a week in a further education college and I am an ILT development coordinator. I was glad to participate in the trial because there was little formal recognition of my role in the college and I was also interested to see whether the CMALT qualification could bridge the further education/higher education divide.

The idea of professional reflection is not new to any of us and I think we could agree that it is an important part of the ongoing process of professional development. However, making the time to reflect often needs a structure like CMALT as an incentive. There was a bonus in participating in this pilot because not only was I able to reflect personally, I was also able to discuss each of the CMALT application areas with other participants in the project who were from both FE and HE. Learning technologists often operate, at least in smaller institutions, in isolation so this turned out to be important. Without the benefit of this discussion I might not have been able to write and reflect to the degree necessary to achieve the CMALT status.

So, what did I gain from completing the application process? Aside from being of professional interest, I had the pleasant experience of reviewing what I had achieved in the previous five years as an ILT development coordinator and feeling a sense of achievement. I identified several training needs, realised I didn't want to change jobs, felt in a better position to discuss my role within the college with my line manager, and identify changes needed within my institution. It also gave me the confidence to participate in another JISC project, a scoping study for the learner experience of e-learning, which was outside of my work in college.

There did not appear to be any significant difference between the core skills and capabilities of learning technologists in further education to those in higher education, supported by the cross-sector nature of the CMALT scheme. My continuing involvement in the JISC Support and Synthesis project for Phase 1 and 2 of the Learner Experiences programme, and current role as Project Manager, is a direct result of participating in the original CMALT pilot and demonstrates the ability to bridge the FE/HE divide.

As an organisation, ALT is now of good national standing, particularly through its annual September conference and journal. The CMALT scheme is likely to be recognised more widely as time goes on, and offers a specialist recognition that few other organisations can offer. The process is professionally valid, interesting and personally worthwhile. Applications are peer reviewed by two people, one nominated by the applicant, and one (a CMALT holder) appointed by ALT. The standards for success are clearly laid out.

In summary, I recommend it as a useful tool for reflection, an interesting process in terms of gathering electronic as well as paper evidence in support of your application and a source of satisfaction on its completion.

Key points to a successful completion of the CMALT process:
1. Complete the application in outline and start gathering a repository of your evidence.
2. Make sure you reflect and evaluate, and not simply list, your achievements, in response to the requirement to 'demonstrate knowledge and application of effective practice in four core areas.'
3. If possible, find a colleague and discuss what you plan to write. I don't think CMALT was intended to be an "examination", it is highly peer based.
4. When you achieve CMALT status, let your organisation know. This will help CMALT become better known and its value recognized in job specifications and interviews.

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