

# City and Islington College: using a project management method to define and deliver e-learning projects

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Supported by:



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## 1. The organisations

City and Islington College is London's most successful college, with over 21,000 full-time and part-time students of all ages. It offers nearly 4000 courses and about 450 qualifications in many settings: in college, at work and in the community. The Ofsted inspection in November 2004 described the college as 'outstanding' and placed us among the top ten colleges in the country, awarding 90 per cent of college provision with outstanding or good. Beacon status was awarded to the college in January 2006

By 2005 the college will have completed the biggest accommodation investment programme of £60 million in the history of further education. By then, the college will have five centres across the borough of Islington, each specialising in its own distinct subjects. Students and staff will have the very best environments for teaching and learning.

City and Islington College selected Camden LEA as a key partner in the delivery of our strategy. Working closely with our in-house ICT team and the capital projects team, Camden has brought significant technical, procurement and project management experience. By working together, the 'classroom of the future' is now a reality at our Finsbury Park and Angel sites.

## 2. Overview

The college has invested significantly in the network infrastructure, users now benefit from a reliable high speed, 100 MB, network between sites. The total PC population is now in excess of 2500 with excellent facilities such as colour printing, network filtering and specialist software for multi-media and languages.

This was the first year of using a project management method to manage change projects across the college centres and services involved in e-learning.

## 3. Details

### Approach

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83 small scale projects and 6 medium scale projects were initiated using a project management methodology. The status and progress of all projects was reviewed regularly. All projects were closed and evaluated by the end of the academic year. Development plans for 2005- 2006 were reviewed and drafted by the end of the academic year.

The project used the Ferl Practitioners' Programme Module Q for the planning and implementation

cycle and Microsoft Project 2003 Professional for project management templates and method.

## Scale

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The focus of the small scale projects from each of the 5 centres and four support areas (key skills, adult learning, the learning centre and careers guidance) was agreed after a consultation process. They are outside the overall annual development plan and run from 2004 to 2006. All are matched to the college strategic plan and to the listed centre or service priorities for e-learning development. The data collected and project evaluations were to be used to report to SMT on the distance travelled towards the goal of embedding e-learning in the college by September 2005.

## Impact

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- Increased online access to learning materials for specific courses via the VLE.
- Subject support by learning centre staff improved by accessing course materials online via the VLE.
- Increase in access to subject-specific online resources and journals via the learning centre online.
- Increase in teachers using multimedia and web based resources in the classroom in a sustained way, including evaluation of how this can improve learning.
- New policies and procedures in place to ensure services meet the needs of learners.
- Enabled cultural change in learning centre service to enable knowledge exchange between student, subject teacher and learning centre staff, and to focus students using the centre and resources effectively for independent study.
- Supplied data and feedback on how e-learning is becoming embedded.
- Identified areas for future improvement and for LSN Q project applications.

## Costs and benefits

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The e-learning manager and e-learning assistant spent time:

- Researching the project management method and adapting available document templates.
- Creating the project year overview and milestones.
- Training the e-learning champions.
- Preparing reports and consulting with directors and champions to agree outcomes and deadlines.
- Preparing and presenting end of year reports and disseminating the results.

## 4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

The use of a project management methodology is becoming embedded in normal practice and the college is now developing a programme management approach. The adoption of these approaches has improved the monitoring and control of projects, and allowed progress and success to be measured against the college plan and priorities as well as targets such as widening access. Further work is required to quantify, on a project by project basis, time and costs for internal staff and central resources such as the ICT team.

## Systems

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After spending lots of time on setting up in the first year, overdoing the paperwork, we came to a streamlined system for the following year. The streamlined system introduced varying levels of detail - depending on the scale of the projects which are classed into three broad categories: small, medium and large. This has enabled a quicker start to the year for projects and improved regular reporting to management.

## **Small-scale projects**

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If you have many small-scale projects running simultaneously in faculties and curriculum areas, make sure they are all numbered and listed and no new ones sneak onto the list during the year. Agree the basics, like timescale, outcomes, who will do the work, and who will be the sponsor - then get on with it! Use a project overview to monitor progress and report to existing college deadlines (e.g. the self-assessment review and development plan).

Analyse all the projects for areas that cross over college departments or services (e.g. learning centres and key skills) and make sure they share knowledge, resources and standards.

Use external funding (e.g. the LSN Q Projects) to enable academic and technical staff to work together on projects to explore new technology, resources and their effectiveness in teaching and learning practice.

Examples include:

- Childcare: Populate two identified VLE course areas with interactive learning materials from the NLN learning object collection. In term 2 the course leader and e-learning champion will demonstrate to the team at the end of term training day.
- Key Skills: Online assessment for students to be researched and added to the VLE area. In term 1 the staff and students trained to use this will include the key skills e-learning champion.

## **Medium-scale projects**

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Analyse the projects and the development plans of service areas that support e-learning and identify projects that cover more than one service. Get this list identified and agreed by senior management as a priority for the services involved and agree to work together and appoint a project manager to each. This approach also works for writing and agreeing new policies and procedures.

Examples include:

- Create and document a responsible 'unblocking service' for web sites in liaison with ICT services and the learning centre service to expand the range of resources available to support teaching and learning.
- Procure and install two new 'classrooms of the future' in liaison with ICT and e-learning services to enable web and multimedia resources to be used in the classroom.

## **Large-scale projects**

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Use Prince 2 methodology with an appointed project manager and senior management project board. These projects may include bidding for funding and applying a tendering process.

## **5. Contact details**

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