**Loughborough University E-learning Strategy**

1. **VISION AND RATIONALE**

**1.1 Definition**

E-learning is defined here as the pedagogically-driven application of a range of digital technologies to the teaching and learning process. These technologies comprise corporate delivery systems including the Virtual Learning Environment, lecture capture, web conferencing and online assessment systems as well as, increasingly, external Web 2.0 services (eg YouTube) and Cloud services (eg GoogleApps). In addition, there is a wide range of specialist academic software used on campus, from statistical analysis to computer aided design, which it is useful to consider within the scope of this strategy. The definition also encompasses the need to cater for the widening range of devices that students (and staff) now use to engage with, prepare and update learning content, such as smartphones and tablets.

Whilst E-learning can be wholly online, in the Loughborough context it will typically refer to the online component of a blended approach.

**1.2 Background**

The University’s current (and first) E-learning Strategy was launched in academic year 2007-08. Drawn up by members of Programme Quality Team, and approved by PQT in July 2007, the Strategy was subsequently endorsed by Learning and Teaching Committee in February 2008 and by Senate the following month.

Whilst it was understood from the outset that e-learning should be integral to the University’s overarching Learning and Teaching Strategy, it was recognised that a more detailed document specifically addressing the development of e-learning would be helpful. The document that was produced sought to capture our overall aims in relation to e-learning, describe its benefits and set out some initial priorities in the form of an implementation plan. Approval of the strategy coincided with the migration of the University’s Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) from the previous, internally-developed Learn system to the new version of Learn based on Moodle. The strategy focused on compliance across the Faculties with a set of module ‘minimum presence’ requirements.

In the time that has elapsed since then the use of learning technologies in teaching practice and the support of student learning at Loughborough has continued to grow, though it is clear that there is considerable potential for further development. The capabilities of Learn are not yet routinely and consistently being exploited, and opportunities exist for colleagues to engage more fully with a number of other technological applications that can support the teaching and learning process.

**1.3 Scope**

It is important to recognise that there is a distinction to be drawn between e-learning support and e-administration. E-administration can be defined as any system that provides facilities to improve the efficiency of administrative processes which do not impact directly upon the student learning experience. Whilst there will inevitably be some overlap between the two areas, this interface needs to be managed, not least through effective co-ordination of the E-learning Advisory Group and Student Information Steering Group.

It is recognised that the learning technologies deployed within the teaching and learning context can also have significant spin-off benefits for other aspects of the University’s operations. Whilst consideration of these wider applications does not fall within the remit of this document, it is important we do not lose sight of these value-added opportunities. This agenda will need further exploration in the appropriate forums.

**1.4 Principles**
(i) Our core approach will be based on blended learning – delivering high quality teaching and learning approaches including those based on e-learning.

(ii) The development of e-learning will be driven primarily by pedagogical factors, not by technical developments.

(iii) The deployment of e-learning, as with other learning and teaching methods, will necessarily and appropriately vary across subject/discipline boundaries.

(iv) The extension of new e-learning approaches from pilot project status to wider roll-out will be evidence-based.

(v) E-learning should be integral to our approach to learning and teaching, from curriculum design through delivery to assessment, feedback and evaluation.

(vi) Distance learning provision should primarily utilise online delivery, unless there is a clear rationale for not doing so.

(vii) Students should have equality of access to e-learning materials, and no student must be disadvantaged by the use of e-learning.

(viii) The Virtual Learning Environment, Learn, will continue to form the hub of e-learning at Loughborough, with a defined ‘minimum presence’ for every module, applied rigorously within Schools and across the University.

(ix) Awareness of the capabilities of learning technologies, and proficiency in the use of core elements of Learn, should be considered an essential part of Continuing Professional Development for all staff with substantial teaching duties.

(x) The University will seek to take full advantage of external Web 2.0 services as appropriate, giving due consideration to the risks attached to such services.

1. **DRIVERS**

**2.1 Quality of the Student Learning Experience**

The University remains fully committed to sustaining and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience, and recognises the important contribution that e-learning has to play in realising this ambition. Today’s students embrace information and communication technologies in their daily lives in a multitude of ways. This has had, and will continue to have, a significant impact on student expectations of higher education and their learning needs.

**2.2 Effectiveness and Efficiency**

Simultaneously, the cuts to HE spending have brought to the fore the need to reassure ourselves that constituent elements of the teaching process (design, delivery, support, assessment, evaluation) are undertaken effectively and efficiently. The use of learning technologies can contribute to efficiencies in teaching-related activity, thereby enabling staff to use their time to best effect without compromise to the high quality student learning experience we offer.

**2.3 Competitiveness**The Higher Education marketplace is certain to become increasingly competitive with the impending changes to funding. Moreover, it is becoming easier for prospective students (and other stakeholders) to compare and contrast between similar programmes at different institutions. In this context, it is crucial that Loughborough continually benchmarks its use, and investment in supporting, learning technologies against the best in the sector.

1. **STRATEGIC AIMS**
[1] To enrich the student learning experience by promoting increased use of a range of appropriate learning technologies within teaching-related activity
(*Driver: Quality*)

[2] To enable staff to make informed choices about which e-learning applications to deploy, grounded in a credible evidence base of what works in what contexts (*Driver: Effectiveness*)

[3] To promote the increased use of specific learning technologies in ways that enable the University, Schools and Departments to make best use of staff time
(*Driver: Efficiency*)

[4] To safeguard the attractiveness and relevance of the provision we offer current and prospective students by striving to be at the forefront of e-learning developments, benchmarking what we do against best practice in other research-intensive HEIs
(*Driver: Competitiveness*)

[5] To respond in a timely and flexible manner to technological changes that influence the ways in which students engage with both formal and informal learning
*(Driver: Currency)*
2. **OBJECTIVES**

AIM [1]: Enriching the student learning experience

* Identify, evaluate and communicate effective practice through a range of activities including; action research; student-led feedback; publication and awards.
* Articulate minimum expectations for new programmes to ensure that due consideration is given at the planning stage to the consistent and appropriate use of corporate e-learning applications at programme level, not just within individual modules.

AIM [2]: Supporting staff to make evidence based choices

* Provide staff with evidence on effective embedding of recommended e-learning practice as appropriate.
* Foster a community of practitioners across the institution
* Deliver effective support for staff and opportunities for professional development in relation to e-learning.

AIM [3]: Promote increased use of efficient e-learning

* Implement School- based plans for the embedding of efficient e-learning approaches

AIM [4]: Strive to be at the forefront of e-learning provision

* Benchmark current activities
* Identify and document effective practice
* Identify and address gaps in provision
* Encourage innovative incubator projects within Schools

AIM [5]: Be responsive to changes in technology that influence learning

* Create a Loughborough E-Learning roadmap to help communicate what e-learning approaches are being piloted and which are moving to core provision and university wide adoption.
* Provide a clear mechanism and sound business case for core adoption of peripheral technologies.
1. **ROLES**

**5.1 Schools**

The responsibility for adopting the new strategy and associated implementation plan lies primarily with the Schools which will need to develop their own local strategy and policies within the parameters of what is set out here. Within each School, the role of the ADT is critical in this respect, in terms of monitoring the extent to which the strategy in general (and the new minimum module online presence in particular) are complied with, initiating follow-up action as appropriate.

**5.2 IT Services**

IT Services, and in particular the E-learning Systems Team, are responsible for hosting, maintaining and further developing the main corporate systems and services relating to e-learning: LUSI / Learn; Questionmark Perception; ReVIEW; OMR. The E-Learning Systems team will also work closely with the Centre for Engineering and Design Education to broaden adoption and implementation of innovations developed by the Centre for wider audience. Once institutionally adopted these tools will be hosted and maintained by IT Services, (for example these currently are Co-Tutor, Attendant and WebPA) and will continue to work with the Centre on further developing these technologies.

* 1. **Teaching Centre**

The E-learning Team, within the Teaching Centre, is a key player in driving the development and implementation of e-learning within the University. The team is responsible for promoting the effective and efficient use of corporate e-learning applications; providing frontline support to academics (and others who teach/support student learning), in use of the core University e-learning systems, tools and services; undertaking development work to ascertain the benefits and applications of emerging technologies; providing a range of professional development activities to support e-learning including bespoke provision for Schools/Departments, support for programme teams undertaking curriculum development and review activities, and centrally scheduled sessions addressing both technical and pedagogical aspects of e-learning; responding to cases raised through the Learn helpdesk; and dissemination of effective practice through a variety of channels (eg E-learning Blog, Learn Staffroom, and printed newsletters).

* 1. **Centre for Engineering and Design Education**

The revised Centre for Engineering and Design Education, incorporating both the EngCETL and the Engineering Subject Centre, plays a major role in supporting, enabling and promoting innovation in engineering and design education within its 5 client Schools, particularly with respect to the efficient and effective use of learning technologies. It will continue to undertake projects and activities as EngCETL did previously, but with established protocols covering the progression of any pilot e-learning projects to institution-wide adoption, at which point the responsibility for hosting and maintenance of any tools and systems developed will be transferred to IT Services, as has now happened with WebPA / Co-Tutor / Attendant.

* 1. **Library**

The Library has a key role to play in driving forward the e-learning strategy, not least because it supports and provides guidance to both staff and students in using e-resources. Specifically it is focused on enhancing the digital literacies of students and staff, as well as the academic literacy of students. It is also responsible for the Reading List system (use of which is mandated under the revised minimum presence); provision of the E-reserve Collection that allows access to copyright cleared articles and chapters of books for use on Learn and the Institutional Repository. Copyright guidance, to staff and students, also falls within the remit of the Library.

1. **CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS**

The following ‘critical success factors’ are essential for this strategy to be successful:

* Adoption of and institution-wide compliance with the enhanced ‘minimum module online presence’
* Engagement of academic staff supported by clear messages from senior management, within the University and Schools, that the efficient and effective use of learning technologies is an important University priority.
* Continued investment in technical systems, including maintenance, further development and frontline support
1. **CONSTRAINTS**

For this approach to be successful, the technical hosting, maintenance and ongoing of e-learning systems needs to be adequately resourced. A number of these systems (most notably Learn) are now ‘mission critical’. In particular, it is essential to minimise the risk attached to over-reliance on a very small number of key individuals. Alongside this, the licensing on *production* e-learning systems needs to be mainstreamed, with pilot projects involving significant software costs (eg ReVIEW) having a clear funding “exit strategy” defined at the project approval stage, to be enacted if the pilot is successful.

1. **MONITORING AND REPORTING**

**8.1 E-learning Advisory Group (ELAG)**

Responsibility for the Strategy and Implementation Plan lies with the E-learning Advisory Group, which reports through the Academic Procedures Subcommittee to Learning and Teaching Committee and ultimately to Senate.

ELAG will review both the Strategy and the Implementation Plan on an ongoing basis, monitoring progress against the actions in the Implementation Plan and taking remedial measures where necessary.

ELAG will also make recommendations to other University Groups as appropriate, notably to IT Committee, the Student Information Steering Group, and Operations Committee.

 **8.2 Student Information Steering Group (SISG)**

As noted in 1.3, there is an overlap between e-administration and e-learning. One example of this overlap is online coursework submission, which could be categorised as either (or both). A number of actions on the Implementation Plan will need to be monitored by SISG rather than (or as well as) ELAG.