

# RSC Newsletter

Issue 23 – November 2009

Stimulating and supporting innovation in learning

## “e’ducation in the classroom’

SWC , Dungannon Campus hosted its first ILT Conference entitled “e’ducation in the classroom’ in November 2009. The conference was designed to be an interactive information day, informing staff from across the four campuses and local schools of developing technologies in using ILT in the classroom. Keynote speakers at the event included; Joe Martin, Chairman of Governing Body SWC; Michael McAlister, Head of Technology SWC; Frank McGonagle, mygroupni.com., and Fearghal McKinney, Fermanagh TV, as well as, Adrian Logan who provided excellent compering with his usual charm.

RSCni also contributed to the conference. The seminar e-Resources for Teaching and Learning was presented by Mike Moran, RSCni. It covered ILT methodologies employed in teaching, such as delivering material, fostering discussion, questioning and formative assessment. Social networking and social bookmarking have been



found to stimulate interaction between students and promote learner engagement. Catherine Gormley, RSCni gave a seminar on the use of these Web 2.0 tools to achieve this. Two SWC Lecturers, Suzanne Workman and Kirk Gilmore, demonstrated examples of where they have used the modern forums most commonly frequented by young people as teaching and learning tools. College staff also showed how they are embedding ILT, with workshops on making the VLE an interactive platform for learning,

Feedback from those attending and presenting at the conference was extremely positive, and has confirmed how much staff really want to utilise the ILT infrastructure that has been put in place across the South West College to benefit their learners.

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## The Learning Forge Project

The main aim of the DEL funded Learning Forge project is to develop and share Learning Objects via a collaborative approach encompassing all of the six local further education colleges. The benefits of this sharing in the development and use of the learning objects include:

- A common purpose and outcome
- Sharing of expertise and good practice

- Support for less experienced ILT practitioners
- Learning and developing knowledge and skills collaboratively
- Quality improvement benefits in staff development, teaching and learning
- Maximised sector creativity
- Wider range of resources

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## Programme for Effective Learning

Over 200 teaching staff in the Southern Regional College have recently completed the Programme for Effective Learning (PEL) which is designed to improve the pedagogic skills of lecturers in the use of ILT. The programme, developed by RSCni, is based on the Hybrid Learning Model used by CETL (Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning) at the University of Ulster. PEL attempts to help lecturers reflect upon their teaching and to identify areas within their courses where ILT can be incorporated in order to provide a more meaningful/stimulating learning experience for their students. PEL focuses on the interactions between participants in the learning process and on the human element of teaching and learning.

The programme consisted of two workshops. The first gave staff an opportunity to reflect on their teaching and allowed them to assess how effective their ILT skills are in the classroom. This was complimented with sample lesson plans showing ILT being used along with sample ILT learning materials to support the lesson plan. The second workshop required staff to develop a lesson with an ILT component and to demonstrate this to their colleagues. Staff were then given the opportunity to give feedback on their experiences of the workshops – these comments will help shape future ILT staff development within the college.

A spokesman for SRC said that the information provided by staff in their comments and reflections is a great asset to have when considering future staff development and will help ensure that ILT staff development is relevant and appropriate to the needs of staff.

## Anytime Anyplace Anywhere Learning for Literacy and Numeracy Teachers

In 2008 -2009, the School of Education at Queen's University Belfast, was involved in a project investigating the use of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) to support reflective and collaborative practice on their Adult Literacy and Numeracy teacher education programme.

The part-time adult students enjoyed group work but meeting up outside class time and often travelling long distances posed a challenge as did keeping the reflective journal.

The course team decided to use TEL tools to address these issues. Tools chosen had to be appropriate, easily accessible, practical and simple to use by all students. These tools also would be required to support future professional practice. Most of the students (aged 35+) were not typical "Generation 2.0" learners.

A number of applications were identified that satisfied all these requirements: Google Docs, Skype for collaborative work and Windows Moviemaker to support reflective practice.

GoogleDocs was used to carry out activities in web-based collaborative learning. Students were encouraged to use this application to support group work.

Later they used headsets, webcams and Skype to share and discuss course assignments.

Students also discussed how they might use their mobile phone or a digital camera to capture key moments and events during their classroom practice. They were shown how to present these images using Windows Moviemaker and how to create 'videos'. Soon a number of students were using images or videos to support evidence of their reflective learning journal and portfolio of teaching practice.

Feedback from students indicated that these TEL Tools were appropriate, practical and accessible and supported their professional development.

More details can be found at [www.qub.ac.uk/eskills](http://www.qub.ac.uk/eskills) or by contacting Jim Mullan at [jim.mullan@qub.ac.uk](mailto:jim.mullan@qub.ac.uk)

## JISC TechDis Online Accessibility Self Evaluation Service (OASES)



There are many different approaches to accessibility and from the JISC TechDis perspective the fundamental guarantor of good practice is the extent to which accessibility is embedded in the **culture** of an organisation rather than the enthusiasm of an individual or a team. This leads to a 'maturity model' of accessibility practice where one of the main determinants of maturity is the extent to which staff in **all** roles contribute to inclusive practice.

To assess and benchmark your approach to accessibility, JISC TechDis have created a number of online surveys aimed at; Library Specialists, Marketing Specialists, IT/Network Specialists, Disability Officers and additional Learning Support Specialists, Staff Developers and Learning Technologists and Senior Managers.

For more information go to [www.techdis.ac.uk](http://www.techdis.ac.uk) and enter a search for "oases".

# 2010: The Journey Continues: Getting to Embedded

RSCni Annual e-Learning Conference "2010: The Journey Continues" will take place on the 23rd of March 2010, in Stranmillis University College Belfast.

The RSCni has been around now for 10 years and, to mark this major anniversary, we have asked all the learning providers that we support to present at our annual conference. This will be the first time that all eight will present for us at one event; a truly remarkable feat.

The focus of the day is on where we are now and where we are going with e-Learning. With regard to where we are now, each learning provider will present a workshop in which they will demonstrate an innovative e-learning initiative that they have developed in-house and rolled out into their college.

To assist colleges with where they are going with e-learning, it is hoped that with the combination of keynotes and the strategic workshops in the afternoon, colleges may be inspired as to what direction this should take.

With the sharing of best practice and innovative ideas RSCni hope that all delegates will enjoy the conference and come away from it having made new working relationships from across the sector, as well as, being inspired as to what e-learning can contribute to teaching and learning.

RSCni look forward to meeting you on the 23rd March.

Conference programme and booking form are available at [www.rsc-ni.ac.uk/Events](http://www.rsc-ni.ac.uk/Events)

## The Learning Forge Project

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- Skills gaps plugged
- Saves time in the preparation of resources through collaborative working
- Cost-effective; benefits and resources shared with all colleges.

### Blended learning

In the initial pilot phase learning objects will be developed primarily for the following courses/units:

- Essential Skills at Levels 1 and 2
- Leadership and Management at Level 3 and above.

This does not preclude colleges from continuing to develop their own blended learning solutions in other curriculum areas.

### Common specs

For the creation of the learning objects the project will use Xerte which is an open source content creation tool developed by the Information Services team at the University of Nottingham. It allows non-technical staff to create rich,

interactive, engaging resources with high levels of accessibility including:

- all content is keyboard accessible using the tab, space, arrow and enter keys.
- the user can choose from a number of different colour schemes, text sizes and font types.
- A range of media types, interactivities and self-assessments cater for different learning preferences.
- Text-to-speech has been implanted for all textual content in the learning object.

The Regional Support Centre of Northern Ireland will facilitate training on this tool for all staff involved in this project and will also provide a repository where all colleges can access the learning objects.

### Project Managers

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## Next Generation Learning Awards: Technology Excellence in FE & Skills

Congratulations to two Colleges from Northern Ireland who have been short listed for the Next Generation Learning Awards 2010. Staff from both colleges impressed the awards panel by showcasing a wide range of areas of College life where technology is used to provide a better service to students and staff.

### North West Regional College

In particular NWRC demonstrated its use of technology to:

- improve learning, with examples of media rich learning materials that stimulate and excite learners
- improve management decision making, with emphasis on a range of tools that were developed in-house and used by senior and middle managers
- improve support services for learners, featuring tools for providing lecturers with better quality information on learners with disabilities and learning difficulties and other tools that directly provide learners with information they require.

### South Eastern Regional College

SERC showcased:

- MILT – Development of ILT management tools. Development of VLE, e-ISLA and e-student induction.
- Second Life Project - Staff, employers and students from all areas of the college have been engaged in using the SERC Virtual Campus. Students have showcased their work in our virtual art gallery and the college has created online digital portfolios that employers view before selecting students for work placement.

RSCni wish both Colleges every success.

## Applications on Your Phone – Education in Your Hand

On 17 December last, RSCni mounted a workshop on the theme of Education in Your Hand – showing how mobile devices can be used actively in learning situations. The devices and software now available represent a step change in capability – from geek-centred gimmick to mainstream platforms. 57 million iPhones and iTouches had been sold up to that point – and they were only third placed in the smart phone league.

During the workshop, Jonathan Heggarty of Belfast Metropolitan College presented an overview of the growing trends in the use of web applications on mobile phones and gave examples of apps that can be actively used by learners and teachers. Many of the most useful apps are free. With approaching a quarter of a million applications now available across a range of platforms such as Android and Symbian, the potential for college users is significant.

Further presentations from the RSCni team showed worked examples of how the apps can be used in practical learning situations. Software that allows colleges to create and disseminate their own news items and learning materials via clients' phones was also highlighted.

The presentations used in the workshop have been uploaded to the RSCni TELe blog and you can view and copy them at – <http://rscni.wordpress.com>.

## Dropbox – The end of USB pen drives?

Recently while investigating web-based technologies I stumbled upon “Dropbox”; a desktop/cloud application that allows you to store, synchronise, access anywhere and share files with ease and all for free!

### Store and synchronise effortlessly

Essentially, when installed on your computer, the system creates a folder that you can use to store your files and folders seamlessly and securely to the Internet. This means that you can access your files via almost any web browser or computer, but its benefits don't stop there! Install dropbox on all other computers that you access regularly and dropbox synchronises your files automatically so that you never need to copy (and forget) that important presentation to your USB pen again!

### Collaborate

Another great feature of the system is the ability to collaborate/share folders and files with colleagues and external agencies. With a single right click you can invite people into

your spaces securely to collaborate on projects. It's the product Microsoft Groove wanted to be!

### iPhone it!

Yes, Dropbox even has its own very useful iPhone app that stores all files locally and synchronises periodically to ensure you have the most up-to-date versions.

### Too good to be true...

Well, yes, it does sound too good and yes, it does have its limitations. Dropbox will give you 2GB of fully functional storage free for life and if you want more then you will have to pay a subscription. I've found that 2GB is more than enough if you use it for working on, projects, reports and then moving them to proper storage mediums, when you no longer need regular access to them.

**End of the USB pen... probably not... but at least I've stopped losing them for a while!**

For more information: <http://www.dropbox.com>

## RSC Information Security toolkit (beta)

The RSCni has been heavily involved in the development of a self assessment toolkit for Information Security professionals in colleges. This toolkit (currently in beta format) will allow users to have an overview of their security readiness, based on a series of IT and security-based questions. The end result is a report and high level risk analysis that colleges can use to inform security planning and funding.

All our supported providers' Heads of IT have been sent the beta version for evaluation. If you have not received this and would like to be involved in the beta trials email [n.mcdaid@rsc-ni.ac.uk](mailto:n.mcdaid@rsc-ni.ac.uk) for a copy.

## ITSligo – Crossing Borders with Webinars

Staff at the Institute of Technology Sligo have recently launched a programme of online webinars on the use of e-learning. So far the webinars – coordinated by Brian Mulligan – have attracted healthy audiences of between 30 – 50 participants on topics such as – Screen Capture; Online Discussions; and Using Google Wave with Students. Presenters and participants have come from all over Ireland and the UK and from USA, Spain, Brazil.

You can check the remaining topics in the series and sign up to take part at – <http://sligolearning.blogspot.com>.