

# RSC Newsletter

Issue 18 – March 2008

Stimulating and supporting innovation in learning

## Think Clever - Work Smart Anytime, Any place, Anywhere



Many students find studying for a Higher Level qualification a daunting experience, often feeling that they lack expertise in areas such as research, note-taking, referencing and essay writing skills. Recognising the difficulties faced by many HE students, Belfast Metropolitan College initiated an innovative project in January 2007 called Think Clever - **Work Smart** HE Mentoring Project, aimed not just at those experiencing difficulties but at improving the learning experience of all HE students.

The project is delivered using both e-learning and face-to-face (f2f) activities.

The students have e-mentoring support in the form of learning mentors who communicate with the students using a blended learning approach including using e-mail, f2f seminars, VoIP (Skype) support sessions on a Sunday evening and SMS which is used in a variety of novel ways.

For instance SMS is used to remind students of a f2f session or a virtual meeting or to reschedule a session if students are overloaded with

assignment work. It is also used to send hints/tips to targeted curriculum groups.

The 450 HE students registered with the programme have access to the Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment - where the material on topics such as time management, note taking, research skills, and mind mapping is also available. The material also consists of podcasts and links to useful websites such as NLN materials on Critical Thinking.

To date 6 part-time learning mentors have been recruited.

As well as morning, afternoon and twilight sessions, there have been seminars on Saturday mornings to accommodate those HE students who are unable to attend during the 'traditional' study/working week.

Donna Hyland, the Learning Mentor Co-ordinator for the Work Smart HE Mentoring Project, believes that the e-mentoring project has "given students access to support at a time and in a manner that they require and which best suits their needs"

A true example of anytime, any place, anywhere personalised learning which innovatively exploits ILT within an appropriate learning support framework.

For further details contact Donna at [dhyland@belfastmet.ac.uk](mailto:dhyland@belfastmet.ac.uk).

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# 'Eventing' for College Staff

RSCni provides a wide range of events – such as workshop and seminars – over the course of a year, but only a small fraction of college staff – in FE and HEIs – are able to attend.

As a means of compensating for this, we set up a Moodle-based 'Events' website where we lodge the presentations and other materials that are used in the face-to-face sessions. This 'Events' website is open to all users and does not require a password.

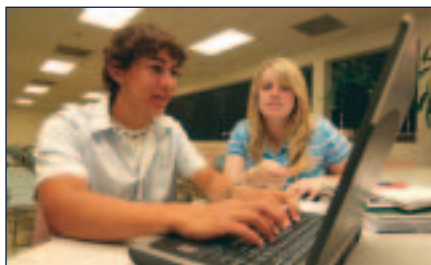
The content of the site is steadily expanding and recent coverage includes:

- Building Your ABC's eLearning Strategy;
- LR Forum 15 October 2007;
- Cross College Collaboration;
- DEL ILT Strategy Guidelines.

So – if you weren't able to get to recent events, go to <http://events.rsc-ni.ac.uk>.

For further information or enquiries concerning any of the information in this newsletter please contact: [b.stewart@rsc-ni.ac.uk](mailto:b.stewart@rsc-ni.ac.uk)

# Young People Do IT Better?



It's a given that the younger generation, who have been brought up in the Internet age, are best at using the World Wide Web. Apparently not, according to a recent report commissioned by the JISC and the British Library, which claims that whilst young people demonstrate an ease and familiarity with IT, they rely on basic search tools and do not have critical and analytical skills to assess the information that they find.

The report 'Information Behaviour of the Researcher of the Future' also shows that research-behaviour traits that are commonly associated with younger users, impatience in search and navigation, and zero tolerance for any delay finding

information, are now the norm for all ages, from younger learners through to experienced academics.

The findings also send a stark message, that young people are dangerously lacking information skills. Dame Lynne Brindley DBE, of the British Library, said: "libraries have to accept that the future is now. We have seized many of the opportunities new technology offers to inspire our users to learn, discover and innovate."

Dr Malcolm Read, of JISC, said: "These findings add to our growing understanding of subjects that should concern all who work in FE and HE, the changing needs of our students and researchers and how libraries can meet their needs. We hope it will serve to remind us that students continue to need the appropriate skills to navigate an increasingly diverse and complex information landscape."

A podcast of this report can be found at: [//tinyurl.com/ytmqvu](http://tinyurl.com/ytmqvu)

# Type and Talk

Did you know there are an estimated 450,000 deaf, hard of hearing, speech-impaired and deaf/blind people in the UK that cannot use a standard telephone? How can you help?

A student with speech difficulties will use a textphone (a telephone with a qwerty keyboard and small display screen) or a PC. The student will dial 18001 followed by the full telephone number of the person they wish to call. The call is answered by a hearing person a Typetalk Relay Assistant who will

join the line to relay the call onto the person the student was calling.

This FREE service is provided by British Telecom and Typetalk is managed by the RNID and both are supported by the UK telephone industry.

Why not put this information up on your college VLE and make your staff, especially those with responsibility for disabled students, aware of this service?

For more information visit <http://www.typetalk.org/index.asp>

# What's Happening

Date	Title	Location
13 Feb 2008	Learning Resources Forum	Ulster University, Jordanstown
March 2008	Pilot webinar or webcast on: • Federated Access Mgt, or	
9 April 2008	RSCni Annual Conference	Dunadry Inn, Templepatrick
25 April 2008	Getting to Embedded: Round 2	TBA
30 April 2008	Train for Success Using ILT	SWC, Omagh Campus
28 May 2008	Joint e-Learning/LR Forum	NWRC

## World Wide Webinars – RSCni Comes to You

The terms "web conferencing" and "computer conferencing" were once used to describe group discussions conducted via a message board. But these were not live and therefore discussion was pretty un-reactive and slow. Things have changed considerably in recent years – largely due to the wider availability of broadband.

In today's web conferences, participants sit at their own computer, and are connected to others, by either a downloaded application on each participants' computer or via a web-based application where they simply enter a URL to enter the live meeting or conference.

These so-called webinars can be very collaborative, using

presentations and audio connections to allow full participation between the audience and the presenter.

RSCni has recently acquired licences to use Instant Presenter – a tool that allows this mode of working – and plans to employ it for a series of webinars to brief college staff on e-learning issues. Instant Presenter (or similar) software can also provide a cost effective solution for colleges to operate across campuses in, for example, course team planning sessions; management meetings; and online tutorials with students:

So – watch this space for our upcoming webinars and, if you would like more information, contact us at [info@rsc-ni.ac.uk](mailto:info@rsc-ni.ac.uk).

## DEL ILT Training Needs Analysis – Thanks for Your Responses



RSCni recently carried out an ILT training needs analysis for e-learning skills in all of the 6 area-based colleges. We'd like to thank all of those staff who took the time to complete the survey. The survey was targeted at the following staff:

- Teaching staff;
- Learning Resource staff;
- Network support and development staff;
- Staff with an ILT development and support role;
- Staff who support learners through guidance and learning support; and
- Senior managers.

The biggest survey of its kind, it elicited over 1100 responses. RSCni expects to report the findings to the Department by late spring 2008. After that, subsets of the data will also be made available to every college to assist them with their internal planning.

The outcomes will be used to inform the Department's future plans for ILT staff development and enable colleges to reach the 'Embedded' stage described in IO:RS.

# Getting Connected to Resources – All Change

Access to online resources – whether free or paid-for – will change radically from 01 August this year. Up to now colleges have been using Eduserv Athens under a JISC-subsidised regime that made it free at the point of use.

The new arrangements will use the UK Access Management Federation as the main platform for integrating between the college's users and the suppliers of online services. The Federation is free to join but it places obligations on colleges to use a robust system for presenting user information to the licensing suppliers.

This Identity Provider (IdP) information standard can be met by colleges by a number of routes:

- Shibboleth open source software;
- Other open source software;
- Bespoke solutions provided through other software suppliers (including Eduserv's OpenAthens).

JISC has recently announced that it was unable to agree with Eduserv on a suitable price for colleges for the provision of the required gateway services. Therefore, Eduserv is no longer JISC's preferred partner and becomes only one among many solutions that colleges can seek for ensuring that they meet the UK Federation standards.

RSCni has been keeping in close contact with these developments and has arranged for JISC and Netskills support for colleges in creating their IdP and building the technical infrastructure required. The main vehicle for information and discussion continues to be the LR Forums. If you would like to know more about these issues and the support arrangements that are being planned, please contact [m.moran@rsc-ni.ac.uk](mailto:m.moran@rsc-ni.ac.uk).

## Balance IT

ICT funding from the Department for Employment and Learning has resulted in evolution of college networks, in terms of size, complexity and services delivered. Colleges are tempted to respond to resulting higher security threats by implementing more restrictive security procedures.

The Balanced Security Review Programme for the FE sector is an opportunity to conduct an informal review of your current information security situation. Reviews will be undertaken by an external ICT security consultant in conjunction with the RSCni. The process is neither a formal audit nor security penetration test but the chance to undertake a review of how you have met your obligation to provide a safe and secure working environment to both the students and staff.

Our three-phase approach involves:

- an online questionnaire to users, ICT staff, and security managers
- face-to-face interviews with stakeholders
- a report of findings.

The first phase will be online self-assessment for ICT staff and users, covering the core security areas that every business needs to address, and system usability. Tailored on-site interviews in phase two will be used to support the online questionnaire's main trends. The final phase will produce a unique map of the college's security response and highlight areas for more detailed examination.

This service, offered free of charge to FE colleges initially, will subsequently be made available to our non-FE clients.

To organise a review contact [n.mcdaid@rsc-ni.ac.uk](mailto:n.mcdaid@rsc-ni.ac.uk)

## Voice over IP workshop secured for NI

Argilon Training has agreed to deliver their hands-on vendor generic Voice over IP (VoIP) Simulation Workshop here in Northern Ireland, exclusively for the RSCni. The need for the workshop has arisen from the actual growth in use and interest in this technology among learning organisations.

This workshop is aimed at college ICT and telecom staff wishing to understand the technology behind VoIP and will explain, through practical demonstration, how voice fits into an IP network and the challenges involved, including how

to ensure and implement quality of service.

There will also be an opportunity for delegates to discuss issues specific to your academic organisation and offer expert advice on current projects.

The RSCni expect to make significant savings for colleges on this course and places will be allocated on a first come first served basis.

To record your interest in this and for further information contact [n.mdaid@rsc-ni.ac.uk](mailto:n.mdaid@rsc-ni.ac.uk).