Elearning and Academic Workloads: What is the role of Professional Development

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ANEC - November 2011

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NEW ZEALAND

leading and illuminating
our communities through tertiary education

Undertaken in a New Zealand ITP

Illuminate issues associated with academic staff workloads across applied health degrees utilising eLearning

eLearning – the use of various technological tools that are either Web-based, Web-distributed or Web capable for the purposes of education.

METHODOLOGY

The research used critical theory to

- explore and uncover the privileged position/s

- give voice to the participants,

- promote emancipation through understanding and action

(Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Freire, 1970)

Drew on complexity theory to illuminate institutional influences

(Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the experience of academic staff of implementing eLearning within applied health degrees?

- What skills and knowledge does an academic staff member transfer into the role of facilitator of eLearning and what could be developed further?

- What impact does designing, developing, facilitating and evaluating eLearning appear to have on the workload of an academic and how can it be measured?

- What is the perception of key stakeholders within the organization of the skills and knowledge required by academic staff to effectively integrate eLearning into their practice?

- How does the institutional environment influence the development of eLearning within the tertiary institution?

- Results from previous questionnaire

- Workload diaries

- Moodle statistics

- Discussion groups – academic staff, programmes leaders & Online learning

- Individual interviews with senior managers

Assumption: that academic staff workloads are comparable in relation to eLearning and face-to-face (f2f) delivery of any applied health degree, with one key difference – the loading of programme teaching/learning material into a Learning Management System (LMS).

Workload literature is contradictory – no research located specific to applied health degrees

Academic workloads are influenced by many variables, such as

- the type of course
- the preparedness of the academic,
- academics understanding of teaching and learning philosophies
- the institutional eLearning philosophy
- institutional support processes and
- professional development available.

(Haber & Mills, 2008; Nichols, 2008)

- "For staff, the key limitations of using technologies in higher education were: increases to their workloads; usability/technical issues; the loss of f2f interaction; … and the priority given at the institutional level to technology over pedagogy" (Waycott et al., 2010, p. 1208).

THEMES

	Academic Staff	Programme Leaders	Online learning	Individual interviews	Total
Professional development	21	23	20	13	**77**
Workload	29	22	25	4	**81**
Student support and engagement	9	3	0	2	**14**
Institutional support	4	9	52	8	**73**
Cost	10	5	6	1	**22**
Quality	11	6	10	6	**33**
Leadership	0	2	5	7	**14**

- the content, timing and effectiveness of training

- the institutional focus on technology rather than pedagogy training

- lack of training and support for new academic staff

- Time – to learn and to do
  - *… it is a huge challenge all this in terms of technology … competency in your own field, the teaching field and the technical IT field is huge as well* (Academic Staff).

- Student engagement
  - *… the extra times goes into the feedback side, the people side of it* (Individual Interview).

- Role Clarity
  - *… it's the line between what is education and what is a technician/administrator role* (Programme Leaders).

ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

- Leadership
  - Overall strategic vision for eLearning not overt
- Technology
  - disconnect between academics and the service groups supporting them.
- Non integrated electronic systems
  - Re work and increase in workloads
- Quality and Managing Risk
  - More integrated approach required

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The institution adopts a pedagogy driven model of eLearning.

- Professional development in educational pedagogy and practice implemented for new and existing staff.

- Develop frameworks /processes to support workloads.

- The institution continues to progress strategic projects relating to infrastructure, quality and performance management.

- By understanding the pedagogy and practice of education, both within f2f and eLearning environments, academics become empowered to have greater control over their workloads.

- Workload stress is reduced and academics become more engaged and productive members of the educational team.

(Anderson, 2009; Brady, 2010; Morgan & McKenzie, 2003).

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