



Leading Technology-Enhanced Learning in Higher Education

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Research and Development Series

LEADING TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Full Report

Linda Evans

Professor of Leadership and Professional Learning, School of Education, University of Leeds

Neil Morris

Chair of Educational Technology, Innovation and Change and Director of Digital Learning, University of Leeds

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Linda Evans and Neil Morris

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Executive summary

Introduction

Technology-enhanced learning (TEL) delineates the defining feature of the changed and changing learning landscape in higher education (HE), within which sector its provision and use have escalated over the last decade. This document is a report of a research project that focused on examining how strategic change initiatives and the embedding of technological developments in institutions may enhance students' experience of higher education. One specific strategic change-focused initiative was central to our examination: the Changing the Learning Landscape (CLL) programme (described in outline below).

Background

Launched in September 2012 and involving the participation of 149 institutions over a two-year period, the CLL initiative was directed at supporting and facilitating higher education providers in England, in both the higher education and further education sectors, to develop their strategic change approaches and capacity in relation to TEL, including through inter-institutional networks and partnerships. It was managed by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (the Leadership Foundation) through a programme board comprising representatives from the Association for Learning Technology (ALT), the Higher Education Academy (HEA), Jisc, the National Union of Students (NUS), and an external evaluator in a participant-observer role.

In June 2014, the Leadership Foundation issued an invitation to tender for a research project to look at improving student learning outcomes through strategic change, focusing particularly on 'the learning which has come out of the Changing the Learning Landscape project'¹. The research project reported in this document was the result of our successful bid, and was carried out between September 2014 and April 2015.

Aims

The main aim of the research was to examine how strategic change initiatives and the embedding of technological developments in institutions providing higher education may enhance the student experience, and to discuss the implications of our findings for institutional policy and practice. More specifically, the key objectives were to identify factors that influence the success of strategic change in institutions, and, in particular, to examine the outcomes of the CLL initiative.

Method

A qualitative approach was applied to data collection and analysis, using face-to-face interviews as the main method, supplemented by analysis of the Leadership Foundation's documentation relating to the participation of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the CLL initiative. Consistent with the funders' expressed wishes, five case analyses were undertaken, whereby a single, discrete CLL project served as the unit of analysis and involved interviews with: students; the CLL project lead at the HEI where the project was based; and other key players (typically these interviewees included academics, members of senior management, academic developers and learning technologists from the HEI in question, and in some cases the external consultant appointed to support the project team). In total, 40 interviews were conducted. Each case project was selected after initial data collection and analysis indicated its potential to be interesting and illuminative in relation to TEL-focused strategic change. Thereafter a wider pool of project participants was interviewed.

In addition to the case analyses, some data were derived from 'stand-alone' interviews with students and academics or academic-related staff from a sample of the HEIs that participated in the CLL initiative.

Key findings

- There is considerable variability in institutions' commitment to and engagement with TEL. Some English HEIs still have a long way to go to catch up with the most TEL-engaged institutions.
- Whilst bottom-up initiatives offer much potential for increasing and/or enhancing TEL provision within an institution, amongst our sample these alone proved insufficient to advance the TEL agenda; full support from senior management was also essential. In institutions where such support was only nominal or half-hearted, success was partial and patchy. The greatest success was evident in institutions where senior managers demonstrated full commitment to and active support for TEL provision.

- Four key features or characteristics of such senior managers or leaders were found to underpin the effectiveness of their TEL-focused strategic leadership:
 - seniority and status
 - knowledge of 'new' learning technologies and digital resources and of the TEL field
 - knowledge and understanding of the institution and its people
 - vision for TEL in the university.
- Students were generally satisfied with the TEL provision at their institutions and, for the most part, tolerant of – if a little frustrated by – patchy or inconsistent provision. They indicated little appetite for participation in online chat rooms, but were very enthusiastic about lecture capture and were frustrated when it was not offered. They showed little inclination for involvement in TEL-focused strategic decision-making. Their satisfaction with TEL provision was determined by convenience value: the extent to which it made their lives easier.
- The CLL initiative was universally applauded by those of our research participants who were aware of it, particularly the CLL project institutional leads. The perceived key benefits of participation in the projects included:
 - it ensured that the institutional teams remained focused on the requisite tasks, disciplining themselves to avoid lapsing into procrastination
 - it sustained the motivation of, and revitalised, the institutional teams
 - it fostered a sense of achievement
 - it offered practical support and expertise that was often lacking or in short supply in-house
 - in the person of the consultant it brought objectivity and externality that broadened perspectives and challenged the status quo
 - it provided leverage – again, in the person of the consultant who was recognised as an expert in the field – for institutional teams to push through their change agendas in the face of resistance.

Implications of the findings

Changing the higher education learning landscape across the sector seems likely to be a protracted process, with some institutions preferring to take small, incremental steps than to introduce the wider-scale, more sweeping changes that mark out the sector leaders.

The success of the CLL initiative has demonstrated the benefits of external support and expert advice in advancing TEL-focused strategic change, particularly in institutions that lack the relevant expertise. Such institutions should not necessarily rely solely on in-house resources. Offering valuable consultancy at no, or very little, cost, the CLL initiative represented a particularly good 'deal' for those institutions that might hesitate, or struggle, to justify committing scarce resources to buying in external advice. If the learning landscape is to change significantly across the whole higher education sector, rather than just within the best-resourced institutions, there is a real need for more such initiatives to be rolled out.

Yet no matter how helpful and informative it is, consultancy or similar support can only provide direction and impetus; responsibility for pursuing that direction by implementing the recommended change lies with the institution. Here, effective leadership of TEL-related strategic change must be focused on a well-formulated strategy that reflects an informed, ambitious but realisable vision. To merit all three of these adjectives, the vision must be grounded in sound knowledge and understanding of learning technologies and of the TEL field, and of the context in which the strategy is to be applied: the institution, its culture and its people. Above all, senior management must actively – rather than nominally – support and promote such a vision. Without such support from the top, even the most creative and well-formulated bottom-up initiatives are likely to have limited success.

A short report which summarises some of the key project findings is available at www.lfhe.ac.uk/Evans5.4 and you can also find the online tool at www.lfhe.ac.uk/CLL-ISLO

Background

This document is a report of a research project that was focused on examining how strategic change initiatives and the embedding of technological developments in institutions may enhance students' experience of higher education. The report's main purpose is to present our research findings, which we supplement with our commentary and analysis, drawing upon a range of pertinent literature that is necessarily limited by space restrictions.

One specific strategic change-focused initiative was central to our examination: the Changing the Learning Landscape (CLL) project. A comprehensive description and account of the CLL initiative may be found in the final CLL evaluation report². Rather than repeat much of its content here, we confine ourselves below to presenting only information needed to clarify the contextual background of our study. First we outline the learning landscape that, consistent with its name, the CLL initiative seems to represent: a higher education landscape of digital technologies.

Technology-enhanced learning in higher education in England: the current landscape

Technology-enhanced learning (TEL) delineates the defining feature of the changed and changing learning landscape in higher education (HE), within which sector its provision and use have escalated over the last decade, in the wake of technological improvements in available hardware and software that have prompted what have been described as 'epoch-making changes'³ to organisational environments. Whilst this represents an evolving⁴ change movement, it is also an escalating one, marked by what has been referred to as 'the push to e-learning'⁵ (though we recognise that e-learning is not synonymous with TEL), with TEL having 'become an indispensable feature of higher education across the world'⁶ (see also^{7,8,9,10}). Most UK universities have implemented a virtual learning environment (VLE), achieving varying degrees of success in terms of staff and student usage^{11,12,13,14}. Most, too, have recognised as strategic imperatives the incorporation of learning technologies into their course delivery and administration, through their development of what are variously known (depending on the precise foci) as e-learning, digital learning, blended learning, or TEL strategies, along with accompanying policies; University College London, for example, argues that 'the large lecture is not the best way in which to teach the assessed portion of most programmes. It reduces the opportunity for the students to engage critically with the ideas presented and reduces peer-to-peer discussion. It is being superseded by more multi-directional modes'¹⁵. Blended learning for campus-based students is widespread, reflecting recognition of the benefits and value to students of augmenting face-to-face learning, and interaction with teachers and peers, with the use of digital technologies, services and tools.

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- 2 Cullen, P. (2014). *Changing the Learning Landscape: Connect to the Future – Final evaluation report*. London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.
 - 3 Pettigrew, A. & Whipp, R. (1993). Understanding the environment. In C. Mabey & B. Mayon-White (eds). *Managing Change* (2nd revised edition). (pp. 5–19).
 - 4 Moore, J.L., Dickson-Deane, C. & Galyen, K. (2011). e-Learning, online learning, and distance learning environments: Are they the same? *Internet and Higher Education* 14: 129–35.
 - 5 Trowler, P., Ashwin, P. & Saunders, M. (2014). The role of HEFCE in teaching and learning enhancement: a review of evaluative evidence. York: Higher Education Academy (p11).
 - 6 Cilesiz, S. (2014). Undergraduate students' experiences with recorded lectures: towards a theory of acculturation. *Higher Education* 69: 471–93 (pp471–2).
 - 7 Breen, R., Lindsay, R., Jenkins, A., & Smith, P. (2001). The role of information and communication technologies in a university learning environment. *Studies in Higher Education* 26(1): 95–114.
 - 8 Owen, P.S. & Demb, A. (2004). Change dynamics and leadership in technology implementation. *Journal of Higher Education* 75(6): 636–66.
 - 9 Privateer, P.M. (1999). Academic technology and the future of higher education. *Journal of Higher Education* 70(1): 60–79.
 - 10 Stensaker, B., Maassen, P., Borgan, M., Oftebro, M. & Karseth, B. (2007). Use, updating and integration of ICT in higher education: Linking purpose, people and pedagogy. *Higher Education* 54(3): 417–33.
 - 11 Broad, M., Matthews, M. & McDonald, A. (2004). Accounting education through an online-supported virtual learning environment. *Active Learning in Higher Education* 5(2): 135–51.
 - 12 Chowdhry, S., Sieler, K. & Alwis, L. (2014). A Study of the Impact of Technology-Enhanced Learning on Student Academic Performance. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice* 2(3).
 - 13 Mogus, A.M., Djurdjevic, I. & Suvak, N. (2012). The impact of student activity in a virtual learning environment on their final mark. *Active Learning in Higher Education* 13(3): 177–89.
 - 14 Walker, R., Voce, J., Nicholls, J., Swift, E., Ahmed, J., Horrigan, S. & Vincent, P. (2014). *2014 Survey of technology enhanced learning for higher education in the UK*. Oxford: Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association.
 - 15 University College London (2011). *UCL Council White Paper, 2011-21*. London: University College London (p31).

In recent years universities have implemented a variety of other TEL initiatives^{16,17}, including the use of: online distance learning; software and hardware solutions for recording and capturing teaching and learning (commonly referred to as 'lecture capture'^{18, 19}); and mobile devices (such as tablets) to support students' learning and their study-related lives. A variety of benefits of these approaches have been reported (in terms of student engagement, improvements in attainment, and increased efficiency for staff and students^{20,21}), although entirely virtual learning remains 'a minority choice'²² that tends to be confined to The Open University²³. Universities have also supported projects at departmental and faculty levels to pilot TEL initiatives, including mobile learning, e-portfolios, e-assessment and the use of digital technologies and services to support administration and the wider student experience; pioneering institutions have had to embrace the kinds of social media preferred by their students in order to maximise their (students') engagement²⁴.

Despite the increased availability and use of digital technologies in universities, staff resistance to them remains evident²⁵. Whilst a report commissioned by the Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA)²⁶ highlights lack of time as the main barrier to TEL development, six key challenges impeding the adoption of digital technologies in higher education globally were identified by the New Media Consortium in its 2014 report:²⁷ 'low digital fluency' amongst academics; the lack of rewards for good teaching, particularly in research-intensive universities; competition from new models of education; resistance at the institutional level to implementing new strategies; the expanding access to higher education that has resulted from the shift from an elite to a mass system; and the pressure to keep education relevant to students' needs, expectations and lifestyles. It is challenges and issues such as these that universities need to address if they are to effect a cultural shift in their approaches to, and uses of, digital technologies for learning and teaching.

Such challenges are as much a feature of the higher education learning landscape in England in the second decade of the 21st century as are the advances and achievements made in embedding digital technologies into teaching and learning. This is a landscape that has changed exponentially over the last two decades, and particularly in the last five years. It is a landscape that is recognised as being in the midst of change, as continuing to change, and as needing to remain dynamic in order to keep up with the digital revolution and those who, by embracing it, perpetuate it. This pervasive challenge of bringing and keeping higher education in sync with ongoing, unremitting, technological revolution – and evolution – was the impetus for the Changing the Learning Landscape initiative.

The Changing the Learning Landscape initiative

The CLL initiative was managed by the Leadership Foundation (LF) for Higher Education through a programme board comprising representatives from the Association for Learning Technology (ALT), the Higher Education Academy (HEA), Jisc, the National Union of Students (NUS), and an external evaluator in a participant-observer role. The programme board reported to a Steering Group representing Hefce, its TQSE (Teaching, quality and the student experience) Committee, the QAA and the Tribal Group. Launched in September 2012, it was directed at supporting and facilitating higher education providers in England, in both the higher education and further education sectors, to develop their strategic change approaches and capacity in relation to TEL, including through inter-institutional networks and partnerships.

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- 16 TEL is defined by Walker et al. (2014) as 'any online facility or system that directly supports learning and teaching. This may include a formal VLE, an institutional intranet that has a learning and teaching component, a system that has been developed in house or a particular suite of specific individual tools'.
- 17 Walker, R., Voce, J., Nicholls, J., Swift, E., Ahmed, J., Horrigan, S. & Vincent, P. (2014). 2014 Survey of technology enhanced learning for higher education in the UK. Oxford: Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association.
- 18 Cilesiz, S. (2014). Undergraduate students' experiences with recorded lectures: towards a theory of acculturation. *Higher Education* 69: 471–93.
- 19 Panopto (2011). Panopto reaches 400 adoptions and 2.7 million students, taking pole position among lecture capture vendors. At <http://www.panopto.com/news/in-the-news/panopto-reaches-400-adoptions-and-27-million-students-taking-pole-position-among>. Retrieved 20th April 2015.
- 20 Chowdhry, S., Sieler, K. & Alwis, L. (2014). A Study of the Impact of Technology-Enhanced Learning on Student Academic Performance. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice* 2(3).
- 21 Mogus, A.M., Djurdjevic, I. & Suvak, N. (2012). The impact of student activity in a virtual learning environment on their final mark. *Active Learning in Higher Education* 13(3): 177–89.
- 22 Beetham, H. & Sharpe, R. (2013). An introduction to rethinking pedagogy. In H. Beetham & R. Sharpe (eds). *Rethinking pedagogy for a digital age: Designing for 21st century learning* (2nd edition). Abingdon: Routledge (pp1–11).
- 23 Dunn, I. (2014). Digital is the missing link in higher education. *The Telegraph* 25th November.
- 24 Philipson, A. (2014). Email is dead for today's students who prefer Twitter, universities say. *The Telegraph* 30th May.
- 25 Gurney-Read, J. (2014). Fear of technology may hold back change in education, says Lord Puttnam. *The Telegraph* 4th February.
- 26 Walker, R., Voce, J., Nicholls, J., Swift, E., Ahmed, J., Horrigan, S. & Vincent, P. (2014). 2014 Survey of technology enhanced learning for higher education in the UK. Oxford: Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association.
- 27 Parr, C. (2014). 6 challenges impeding technology adoption in higher education in 2014. *Times Higher Education* 21st February.

In the context of the CLL initiative, TEL is interpreted more widely than applying to what may be considered student learning; it encompasses the use of digital technologies in relation to *any aspect* of the students' study-related experiences and to the administration and management of teaching and learning provision, including activities and facilities such as online submission of coursework, online appointment booking, and the use of digital study resources.

The CLL initiative spanned two years, during which period, through two annual rounds of funding, four main forms of support were offered to institutions: strategic interventions in the form of 'strategic conversation'; a programme of practitioner workshops; project-based consultancy resource; and a strategic change programme.

In total, 149 institutions participated in the initiative, of which 79 engaged solely in the practitioner workshops. The remaining 70 institutions (also) took part in the strategic change programme and/or accessed the consultancy support, which entitled them, within each of the two funding rounds, to five working days' consultancy: specifically, advice and support for each institution from one (or in several cases, two) out of a pool of partner (LF, HEA, ALT, Jisc, NUS) TEL-focused expert consultants, whose role incorporated that of 'critical friend'²⁸. Supporting engagement that was directed towards facilitating and promoting institutions' 'taking stock', identifying priorities and formulating strategic change-focused goals, a key feature of year 2 of the initiative was an initial *strategic conversation*. In some cases, as our findings show, the post-strategic conversation consultancy included a degree of collaborative working (between consultant and institutional CLL lead or project team) that exceeded what could be labelled 'advice': 'coaching and mentoring relationships which strengthened the confidence and ability of the project leaders to effect change'²⁹.

The research project reported here was commissioned by the Leadership Foundation to 'examine how strategic change and embedding technological developments can contribute to improvements in student learning outcomes', with a main element of the project being 'an examination of the learning which has come out of the Changing the Learning Landscape (CLL) project'³⁰. In the next section we present details of the project's research design and method.

28 Cullen, P. (2014). *Changing the Learning Landscape: Connect to the Future – Final evaluation report*. London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

29 *ibid*

30 Taken from the Invitation to Tender prepared by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education for the Improving Student Learning Outcomes through Strategic Change research project.

Research design and method

Aim and objectives

It is important to emphasise that our project was never intended to be an evaluation of the CLL initiative – that had already been carried out by Patsy Cullen³¹ – but it did incorporate an evaluative dimension. Consistent with the brief (stipulated in the Invitation to Tender), the main, overarching aim was to examine how strategic change initiatives and the embedding of technological developments in institutions providing higher education may enhance the student experience. Within this aim, the project's key objectives were to identify factors that influence the success of strategic change in institutions, and, in particular, to examine the outcomes of the CLL initiative (outlined above). *We also emphasise that our remit did not include – and, indeed, the resources available did not stretch to – financial analyses, such as defining degree of success on the basis of the cost of the CLL initiative, measured against the tangible benefits it brought.*

Research questions

The project was directed towards addressing two research questions:

1. What are the extent and nature of enhancements to the student experience contributed by CLL projects and by technology-enhanced learning (TEL) more generally?
2. What influences the degree of perceived success of TEL-focused change initiatives in institutions providing higher education?

Sample and participant selection and composition

Consistent with the funders' expressed wishes, it was intended that the main organisational structure of the evidence presented would involve cases, whereby a single, discrete CLL project served as the unit of analysis: the case being studied or examined. Five such cases were examined. They represent a sample selected from the projects that had been located within the 70 institutions in England to have participated in the CLL initiative's strategic change programme over the two years in which it was offered. The analysis of each case involved gathering data in the form of the perceptions – conveyed through one-to-one, face-to-face interviews – of selected key actors: members of the CLL-participating institution who had participated in the CLL project, including the project lead. In some cases the CLL consultant who had been assigned to the institution was also interviewed. These data were supplemented by analysis of CLL documentation relating to the case projects.

In the interests of encouraging frank and candid interview conversations – and by extension of generating data that are as 'authentic' as possible and go beyond simply repeating institutional rhetoric – it was decided that the identity of all interviewees and the institutions that they represented would be concealed. Ethical approval for our study was sought (and granted, by the University of Leeds) on the basis that participant anonymity would be assured and that no gatekeepers would be used at institutional level to recruit participants. Great care was taken not to divulge to anyone outside the project team – including the funders – which individuals and which institutions had been included in the sample (and this care extends to the presentation of findings, with some key contextual details being withheld or disguised). No interviewee was told which other individuals (within or outside her/his institution) had participated, nor which other institutions were represented by the sample in its entirety. The possibility nevertheless remains that some interviewees may have divulged to others – as is their prerogative – that they had participated as interviewees.

Yet the process of identifying the CLL project cases that would be the main research focus had to incorporate consideration of the ethically determined constraints identified above. We could not simply approach a senior member of a CLL-participating institution to request that one of her/his institution's projects serve as a case for analysis; not only would this risk introducing institutional gatekeeping into the process of interviewee sample selection, but it would also make public (albeit perhaps only within the institution) the institution's participation. The implications of such information's being publicly available would be that data and findings presented in this research report – and in any other written or oral dissemination – may offer too many clues to identifying (at least to their institutional colleagues, and potentially to a wider readership or audience) individual interviewees, the perceptions they hold, and the comments they made in interview. The process of sample selection described below incorporated consideration of these necessary constraints.

31 Cullen, P. (2014). *Changing the Learning Landscape: Connect to the Future – Final evaluation report*. London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

Since the modest resources available for this research project limited the data collection – specifically, the number of interviews – achievable, each project case analysis involved no more than six staff interviews. We also interviewed a small number of students (fewer than five) from each case project institution with the exception of one. We recognise that, as a result of such limitations, the case analyses presented below must be regarded as partial and indicative rather than comprehensive in scope; they represent miniature snapshots rather than expansive, colourful, detailed depictions of the nature and extent of efforts within the higher education sector to enhance student learning through strategic change that is focused on promoting and supporting the use of digital resources.

Selection of CLL project cases

Cases were selected with a view to their representing, collectively, a range of variables. We wanted to include both pre- and post-1992 HEIs within the sample, as well as representation of a variety of institutional student population demographics. (We would have liked to have included representation of the FE sector within the sample, but no suitable case presented itself.) We also ideally wanted to represent a range of TEL engagement levels, of strategic focus and leadership relating to TEL, and perceived success in relation to participation in the CLL initiative, as determined by the institutional project participants and/or appointed consultants. In relation to the projects themselves, we wanted to include representation of a range of different strategic change foci and of perceived levels of success of implementation.

Whilst we achieved a sample that broadly reflects such variation, in the event the selection of case projects was of necessity partly determined by a significant practical consideration: the willingness and availability to participate as interviewees of enough people who had been involved in an institutional CLL project to provide sufficient representation of it to warrant its identification as a potential case for analysis. Achieving such ‘critical mass’ (albeit small in size) of institutional representative interviewees proved very difficult in some cases (over 40% of our personalised requests for participation went unanswered), and was exacerbated by our commitment to avoid the use of gatekeepers and to protect the anonymity of all participants. Snowball sampling as it is normally practised – whereby one participant openly nominates one or more other potential participants, who each, in turn, then nominate one or more others – was therefore not an option that we could consider, but we did adopt a variation of it, described below, that allowed us to remain faithful to our decision not to divulge the identity of either our institutional cases or our interviewees.

The starting point in the process of sample selection was a list, provided by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, of the HEIs that had participated in the CLL initiative and of the institutional CLL contacts. These contacts varied in relation to role incumbency, status and seniority within their institutions; some were pro-vice-chancellors (or the equivalent), and some were heads of academic development or learning technology, or similar services. As an initial trawl, 18 of these named contacts, selected on the basis of their collectively representing a varied range of institutions located in different parts of England, were each emailed a personalised request to participate in a research interview. The request outlined briefly the focus and nature of our research, highlighting its link to the CLL project, and identified our funders as the organisation that had managed the CLL project. Eight failed to respond to our request; the remaining 10 all indicated their willingness to participate, and interviews were set up with them and carried out over the course of three or four weeks.

By this stage of the data collection process, we had not determined which would be the five case projects; we wanted first to decide, on the basis of the insights afforded to us through the interview conversations with these 10 participants, which CLL projects would potentially make interesting cases. Yet this alone did not influence our sample selection; we also needed to be confident of being able to identify and recruit the participation of, in relation to each potential case project, enough interviewees (within the constraints of our limited resources) to permit an informative analysis. This was tricky to negotiate; we neither wanted to indicate to interviewees whether or not their projects might be cases for analysis, nor to ask them to specify which of their colleagues might make good interviewees, but we did want to know which of their colleagues had been involved in the CLL project, as well as the names of other colleagues who are manifestly either engaged in, or sceptical about, TEL initiatives (particularly those related to the institutional CLL projects), so that we could approach some of them. Moreover, we wanted to be entirely open and honest with all participants about this dilemma, and the ethical considerations underpinning it.

Accordingly, we included the following information in the letters sent to each participant in advance of her/his interview (see Appendix 1 for a copy of this letter in full):

Since we have committed ourselves to protecting the identity of all participants, and to avoiding using gatekeepers, we propose not to reveal to any interviewees whether or not their institution is being treated as a case study – if participants know that their institutions are to be treated as case studies, on reading the research report they may be able to work out the identities of some of their institutional colleagues who have acted as participants, so we want to do everything possible to avoid this.

...Your identity will not be revealed to anyone else at any point in the future, and we will take great care to remove or disguise any references to you or your work or circumstances that will allow you to be identified. To preserve this anonymity, you may wish to avoid telling anyone that you've participated as an interviewee in our research, otherwise they may, if they later see the research report when it is placed in the public domain, be able to work out which anonymised comments were made by you.

The gist of this information was repeated to every participant, orally, before her/his interview began. In addition, interviewees were asked to name in their interview conversations any colleagues referred to (rather than refer vaguely to 'a colleague') so that, if we wished to, we could approach such individuals directly. Since this request was made to every interviewee, our interview data included the names of many more colleagues than we intended to pursue, which helps to obscure the identities not only of our interviewees, but also of our institutional cases.

Selection of interviewees: institutional employees

By the process outlined above, each interview with an initial institutional contact revealed the names of several employees of that same institution who had, in some capacity, been involved in the CLL institutional project (in most cases between four and eight individuals were named). Only at institutions whose projects we had decided to shortlist as potential cases did we follow up these leads. We refer to them as *second-wave contacts*, to denote our second trawl of potential interviewees. The roles or jobs that they held varied across the five cases, but included:

- academics and teaching fellows (some of whom were identified as institutional or departmental e-learning or TEL 'champions')
- learning technologists
- academic developers
- middle managers, senior managers and middle- or senior-ranking administrators.

It is worth noting that a small number of second-wave contacts were identified as sceptics or as having challenged aspects of the CLL project as it was planned in their institutions. In the interests of gathering and elucidating a range of perspectives, we were very keen to include these individuals in our interview sample. Regrettably, most failed to respond to our personalised request for an interview – despite our making no allusion to their alleged negativity or scepticism – and the very few who did respond politely declined to participate. Their omission from our sample has unfortunate methodological implications: it leaves us with a sample that is, to varying degrees, ostensibly supportive of the TEL agenda in higher education, which must inevitably distort the data that we collected, skewing our findings towards a generally pro-TEL perspective.

Second-wave interviewees, in their turn, sometimes identified additional institutional colleagues who had had some CLL project involvement, or, more generally, were engaged in TEL. We sought interviews with some of these – our third-wave contacts – selected on the basis of their representing one or more biographical or situational variables that would otherwise have remained un- or under-represented within their institutional sample group.

It is important to clarify that our sample also includes several 'isolated' or 'stand-alone' interviewees, who are not associated with any of the five case analyses.

Selection of interviewees: students

Concerned that the student voice should be heard, the funders had been very keen for us to include in the case analyses the perspectives of student leaders, ideally those who had been involved in the CLL project(s) in their institutions. This proved extremely difficult to achieve, for three main reasons:

- Several of the institutions represented in our sample had not – according to our interviewees – directly involved students in their CLL projects.
- With respect to those institutions that had reportedly involved students, many of their student leaders had apparently left the institution on completion of their courses, and/or their names were not known. One interviewee, for example, reported that whilst a group of students had been invited, via the student union, to attend a CLL project-related meeting to air their views, none had been invited by name, and the group was probably untraceable.
- Even in the very few cases where students' names were known and they remained registered at institutions, their contact details were very difficult to obtain because, unlike those of academics and other employees, these are seldom freely available through institutional websites, and data protection legislation prohibits institutions from divulging such information.

After numerous fruitless attempts to identify and 'pursue' students who may have been involved, even if only peripherally, in their institutions' CLL projects, we were reluctantly forced to accept that the exercise was degenerating into a wild goose chase. In the very few cases where such students were traceable, our interaction with them proved disappointing insofar as they almost invariably claimed to have no knowledge of the CLL initiative as a whole, nor of their (former) institutions' specific CLL project involvement. References to specific institutional CLL projects by name – and even descriptions of the nature, focus and output of the projects in question – seemed to jog no memories. In one case, despite having been named by the institution's CLL project lead as having participated in the strategic conversation with the CLL consultant, a sabbatical officer of the student union who had readily agreed to be interviewed claimed in his interview to have no recollection of such involvement, and contextual clues (including the name of the consultant and the date of the strategic conversation) failed to jog his memory, prompting him to comment, 'No, I wasn't involved, but I shall certainly find out why, as education officer, I wasn't [involved]!'. In another case, a potentially valuable source of student perspective – a student who had been seconded for a term to participate in promoting e-learning within her institution, and who had been heavily involved in the institution's CLL project – declined (in an email message) our request for an interview:

"Thank you for considering me to be a part of your research. I was a placement student during that year, I have some understanding and my own opinions, especially regarding the [X] project. I'm not sure I could give you the best interview. Have you contacted [Y]? He is the head of [Z] and ran the [CLL] project. His knowledge would be far more useful than mine! I'm also currently in my final year, I have very little time to spare."

Unsuccessful in recruiting CLL project-specific student interviewees, we then decided to cast our net wider, by pursuing, at the institutions represented in our five project case analyses, student perspectives on TEL generally, including their experiences and evaluations of provision in their institutions. Yet even this proved frustratingly difficult; out of over a dozen requests to student union sabbatical officers – whose email addresses were listed on their local student union websites – only one yielded a positive response.

We finally settled on securing, in an impromptu fashion, a small sample of students by seeking them out on their university campuses, opportunistically approaching individuals or small groups encountered in coffee shops, book shops, student union buildings and common rooms, outlining the focus of the project, and requesting brief, on-the-spot, interviews (which nevertheless involved our following ethical procedures by advising the interviewee of her/his rights and how her/his data would be used, and requiring a signature on a consent form). Care was taken to select a sample that, in its entirety, included 'young' and mature students, men and women, home, EU and international students, and students registered on a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

The data yielded by these interviews are not *directly* related to the case projects, since none of the student interviewees was familiar with the CLL initiative, nor – as we had anticipated – did the name 'CLL' mean anything to them. Indeed, seldom were the students familiar with the specific projects that the CLL initiative had supported and facilitated in their institutions. Yet the data they provided was valuable in addressing both of our research questions (presented above) by uncovering student perspectives in relation to TEL provision in their own institutions and in higher education in England more generally.

Additional interviewees

To supplement the data provided by institutional employees and students, with a view to incorporating into the database the informed perspective(s) of another constituency with insight into the CLL initiative, we interviewed two of the consultants who had been employed to work with specific institutions on their CLL-supported projects (most CLL consultants had worked with multiple institutions on multiple projects).

Data collection

Data were collected by interviews, whose focus and direction were largely determined by the interviewer's questions, but that were otherwise only very loosely structured. It became apparent very early in the data collection process that a single interview schedule could not be used for the following reasons:

- The sample of institutional employees represented a range of diverse roles (both institutional roles and roles in relation to the implementation of institutional technology-enhanced learning strategy/ies).
- The institutions that the two main interviewee constituencies (employees and students) represented differed in relation to the nature of their engagement with both their institutions' CLL projects and TEL more generally.

Accordingly, a very loose, partial schedule – in the form of a list of key issues and topics that were likely to be applicable to many, but not necessarily all, interviewees within each constituency – served as an *aide-memoire* for prompting discussion of issues encompassed within the research questions. This incorporated the flexibility to follow up unanticipated relevant topics; indeed, rather than follow the 'schedule', more often than not the interviewer was required to 'think on her feet'. There was a need to assimilate the contextual information conveyed by the interviewee – and which related to the background, nature and focus of the CLL project as it had evolved within the institution's participation in and implementation of it – and, as the interview conversation was proceeding, to apply this newly acquired knowledge very speedily to the formulation of a succession of relevant questions and discussion topics directed at addressing the research questions. Recognising the challenging nature of this responsive, *extempore* interviewing, we decided that, rather than employ a research assistant, the study's principal investigator (Evans), a highly experienced interviewer, would carry out all the interviews. Interviews were audio recorded (with interviewees' permission) and recordings transcribed to facilitate analysis. All were conducted face to face, to encourage a good interviewer-interviewee rapport.

Data analysis

Data were analysed manually through an incrementally reductive process from which key themes (relevant to the research objectives and questions) emerged that illuminated people's experiences, together with their attitudinal responses to these experiences, the bases of these responses, and the implications of these for leading and managing institutional TEL-focused (strategic) change.

In relation to the case projects, analyses were directed at incorporating all research participants' perspectives into the construction of 'stories' framed by contextual backdrops that outlined institutional history and culture, and highlighted priorities, goals, micro-politically influenced dynamics, decision-making processes and outcomes, with the aim of identifying and explaining the nature and extent of TEL-related policy and practice, and progress in effecting strategic change. (In the interests of obscuring the identity of participating individuals and their institutions, some of this contextual background has been withheld in the presentation of cases, below.) Unless otherwise indicated, all such stories reflect what our analyses suggest to be, within each case analysis, consensually converging participant accounts.

Our research findings are presented in the sections below. We begin with presentation of the five case analyses, in the form of narratives that outline, in each analysis, key elements of the story of the CLL project, such as: the impetus for it within the institution; who the key 'players' were; and, in some cases, the sequence of events or exchanges that determined the project's nature and the 'shape' that it evolved. We also focus on challenges and problems encountered, and achievements and gains, implicitly highlighting facilitators of and barriers to project success, including how success was defined and determined, and by whom. Some of the case analyses involve rather complicated, longwinded narratives that we felt were needed to convey a sense of what happened, when, involving whom, and with what consequences. A key challenge has therefore been keeping the narratives to a reasonable length. To address this issue, apart from occasional commentary, we avoid discussion of underlying

and generic issues that influence the success of TEL-focused strategic change initiatives more generally. Nor do we make anything other than occasional fleeting, superficial, cross-case study comparisons, matched by superficial analyses. More substantial cross-case study comparisons and more in-depth analyses appear in the final main section of this report (beginning on page 64), which draws out of our findings the implications for the higher education sector in relation to leading strategic TEL-focused change.

Our decision to present the student perspective in a section of its own was also influenced by consideration of the need to keep section lengths – and particularly the lengths of case narratives – reasonable. Occasionally we incorporate into case analyses snippets of data from our interviews with students, and we also occasionally draw upon this dataset in our final main analytical section on implications for leading TEL-focused strategic change in HEIs. The bulk of our findings relating to students' experiences and perceptions, however, are presented in the section 'The student voice'.

The case analyses

Through adopting the anonymity approach, we have uncovered valuable insights into institutional micro-politics (as reported by our interviewees) and, of particular relevance to this project, the factors that influence – positively and negatively – strategic change initiatives and, more specifically, the take-up of TEL in institutions. Such factors include the roles played by leaders at all levels. There is, however, a trade-off in anonymising our findings to the extent that not only individual interviewees but also their institutions remain unidentifiable: we lose some of the kind of contextual data that can help to weave an engaging and informative narrative. In some cases we have disguised such information, distorting it in ways that we judge do not affect reliability and validity, but that nevertheless help to throw readers off the scent of what could be a trail of detection. In other cases we have had to omit key facts, leaving out pieces of the jigsaw that, whilst painting a detailed and colourful picture, would offer too many clues to who said what, to whom, where, and with what consequences. In some cases, for example, we have decided not to attribute precise administrative roles or job titles to the interviewees quoted; in other cases we have avoided specifying what disciplines or subjects certain interviewees represent; in yet other cases we have presented only minimal details of the CLL project in question.

Readers may therefore be frustrated by the information gaps in some of our case study stories – particularly our limited descriptions of the CLL projects – but we believe the narratives presented below are nevertheless more informative about institutional decision-making, policy and leadership than if we had presented uncontentious, ‘tame’ accounts that risk being big on rhetoric, but obscure much of the reality of life in 21st century higher education – for students and staff – that underpins strategic change initiatives and influences their success.

Case 1: Voices crying in the wilderness? The frustrations of leading bottom-up change³²

Background: project focus and impetus

In early 2013, a small group met in a room on the city campus of their large, pre-1992 university, which we shall call City Centre University³³, to discuss the feasibility of and practicalities involved in developing online learning in the institution. They included a faculty pro-dean for student learning, five other academics (two of them designated departmental e-learning champions), and one of the institution’s four learning technologists. Two of the group members had each been forwarded an email message publicising the CLL initiative, and the colleagues decided to apply for support from it in developing a generic model – in the form of a template – for online learning, which they hoped and anticipated colleagues across the university would then use to develop online learning modules. Their application was successful, and a CLL consultant, Graham, met with the group over the course of several weeks to tease out precisely what their goals were and to work with and support the group in achieving them.

The consultancy: group dynamics and approaches to working

Graham challenged the group’s thinking about flexible learning – particularly their conceptions of what it entailed and how it might work in practice – encouraging them to think ‘outside the box’ and to consider whether their notions of flexible learning were in fact as ambitious as they could be. Learning technologist Barbara described this approach and focus:

“Through the consultancy we were actually pushed to think about flexibility much more widely; much more, sort of: well, why would you do it like that? Sort of: why wouldn’t you let people do their modules in any order – do the content of the module in any order, start and finish at any time? It was the kind of approach, almost, of being a devil’s advocate for a highly extreme flexibility³⁴.”

For one member of the group - lecturer, Felicity - the protracted nature of the consultancy time and its focus on what she felt were peripheral, irrelevant issues was frustrating. She would have preferred to focus exclusively on the content of the online module template being developed and on the practicalities of getting it operational within what was recognised as a very short timescale imposed by the CLL funders. She explained the nature of her frustration:

32 We fully accept Paul Trowler’s (1998 p106) point that ‘The division between top-down and bottom-up approaches is, of course, a rather simplistic way of thinking about policy change and its implementation’, but space restrictions preclude our elaborating upon and interrogating the meanings of these two broadly indicative labels.

33 Pseudonyms are used in all references to individuals and institutions involved in our research.

34 All quotes and all references to indirect spoken comments are derived from transcribed research interview conversations.

"To speak really frankly, we spent far too much time in that crucial beginning time, which left not much time to actually work on the content and the stuff that – especially me, anyway – I wasn't really into. ... I was frustrated, and I remember one particular day, actually – and it was for three or four hours – talking about using images to make it [the module content] look more exciting ... And that went on and on, and I thought: 'Oh, for heaven's sake! ... we really don't need to be talking about this!'"

Yet, apart from Felicity's complaints, the broad consensus was that the consultant's approach – his encouragement of reflectivity and consideration of wider issues that ought to underpin decisions relating to the design of the online provision – was beneficial to group members' professional development. Most seemed to appreciate the intellectuality that it fostered; one labelled it 'blue skies thinking' – 'I think it was very interesting to think in a, sort of, a blue sky mode ... that anything was possible' – and another observed, 'Having that project in particular made me aware of other ways of flexible learning – particularly, I think, notions of flexible learning that I'd never really thought about, and which have definitely impacted on what I've been doing since'.

Treading new paths: value-adding consultancy

From a broader perspective, the group's co-ordinated move towards online learning represented something of a 'first' for their university, whose official line had been that its teaching provision is predominantly face-to-face, in order to develop and sustain good staff–student relations and to better support students. Yet, despite a proclaimed student focus, student consultation and shared decision-making seem to feature rarely within the university, and generally only through annual feedback surveys and representation on review panels. Evidently no student representation was involved in developing the online module template; nor, indeed, in testing out how well the idea of online learning was likely to be received by students. Faculty pro-dean, Freda, explained: 'We didn't have any student involvement in the design at all. I think we were all feeling our way in ways that we had quite enough going on in some ways at that level of the project'. The university's pro-vice-chancellor offered a different perspective: 'We tried desperately to bring a student into the Changing [the] Learning Landscape project', adding, 'students we find very hard to engage with in some ways ... We try in different ways to bring them in, and we can't because they are really busy people'.

Interpreting his role as one of facilitator, the CLL consultant, Graham (who was one of our interviewees), whilst being keen to present ideas that stretched group members' imagination and widened their focus, fully appreciated their need – and respected their concern – to work within their institution's cultural norms in determining what was achievable. The project nevertheless involved an element of going against the grain: deviating from established, tried and trusted, institutional practice that revolved around face-to-face course delivery; it was, as Graham observed, 'completely revolutionary for the institution – and completely revolutionary for the sector ... in the design [of the template/module]'. Learning technologist Barbara explained: 'It wasn't just converting a module ... it was completely, kind of, a brand new entity'. Yet this was not a subversive group operating under the radar; as one of them explained, their coming together had been casually facilitated by one of the university's pro-vice-chancellors (PVCs):

"I wrote to our PVC for learning and teaching and said I was interested [in applying for CLL support to develop online learning], and he said, 'Oh, I know a couple of other people who are interested in it as well'; and, kind of, put us together in a room, and we came up with a project."

The resultant project was in most respects adjudged to be a resounding success; 'I just loved it!', remarked Graham, who summarised its outcome:

"In terms of the success, from the [CLL] proposal – what the bid was all about – what it was we were trying to achieve ... that was ... a big tick, really. And they [the group] were astonished – genuinely astonished. I had completely knocked them for six about what could be thought about ... what else could be done. And that was very fulfilling ... very enjoyable."

Notwithstanding the negative evaluations expressed by lecturer Felicity (above), the colleagues broadly corroborated Graham's evaluation. They generally reported working well with him, and acknowledged the clear benefits brought not only by his expertise and experience, but also by the discipline and focus necessitated by working to what was by all accounts a tight schedule, with tasks that had to be completed before each consultancy meeting:

"[The consultant's contribution was in] the kind of pedagogical, theoretical questions of ... drawing on his experience, really, of what would work really well, what might not. But, interestingly, what he also did was, he ... pushed us to answer a lot of questions that we wouldn't necessarily have asked ourselves. So I think that was really valuable. Another thing that I think was valuable about simply the involvement of the consultant in the process was that it meant that we had to have meetings, we had to prepare in between the meetings for the next one. And they had to happen quite quickly because the timescale for the consultancy was quite short."

Barbara, learning technologist

"What we did with our consultant was just, actually, spend a lot of time originally thinking through what blended learning means, and what models one can use, and what factors one needs to take into account. And that's what he really, really helped with – just ... knowing the problems and the pitfalls, knowing the things we needed to ... take into account. ... What [he] helped us with was invaluable, and it just wouldn't have happened – there's no way ... I mean, both in the sense of his expertise, but also just providing that framework and a space to talk through these things. Without that being put in, we'd have never have got together; ... we'd have never sustained it. It got us focused, and it became very enjoyable."

Freda, faculty pro-dean for student education

The project outcome was that an online learning module template was indeed designed and developed, and, to demonstrate its capacity and potential, was then used by the group as the basis for an online module in psychology that was put on the books, went live, and successfully recruited students. Freda explained: 'We decided we also wanted to have an example that we could then show colleagues, so we'd say, "Here's the template, and look, here's how we used it, and here's our model".'

The group were understandably proud of their pioneering achievement, not least because they had driven it, delivered it, and, as a result, felt ownership of it:

"I'm proud of ... this online learning module ... because I think it was very successful and we did it in ... we really didn't have the time or resources, so that was just a crazy – and quite exciting – mad dash. But somehow – we were looking at each other at the launch, and ... we were saying, 'It's working and it's wonderful!' So that was good. So we're quite proud of that."

Felicity, lecturer

Despite the early interventions of senior colleagues in alerting them to the CLL initiative and bringing them together as a group with a shared interest, this was unequivocally considered a bottom-up project:

*"My dean emailed the details [of the CLL initiative] and said, 'Is this something that could interest you?', and the PVC then directed me towards a couple of other people who he'd also heard were interested. But from that moment on, it became **our** project totally. "*

Freda, faculty pro-dean for student education

"It was very few people [who were involved], and we just start talking and ... from there we decided to submit a proposal And it was a very intense and interesting experience, and we were all very committed to this, with a bottom-up approach rather than a top-down."

Anne, lecturer

Voices crying in the wilderness? The downside of bottom-up initiatives

Yet the bottom-up nature of the initiative was to prove problematic, for, to their disappointment, the project reportedly failed to scale the heights that some group members had hoped it might reach, insofar as it evidently remained relatively unnoticed beyond the CLL project group and their close colleagues:

"Interestingly, [the online learning project] initially didn't get that much interest So I think, initially, I would say that [it] was something that we did because we were interested. It had quite a big impact on the Faculty of [X], where I'm based, because we did a pilot module in the faculty, which went down very well with students and colleagues, but it didn't have a big impact across the university. ... And I was invited to several [institution-wide meetings to discuss digital learning] – as were the two e-learning

champions. And each one of us, every time we came, we'd mention the project; I mean, I'm sure we bored everybody senseless! But we kept mentioning it, and we kept mentioning it, because it just seemed such an obvious example of something that we'd done which seemed to feed into the discussions. And ... for some reason it took quite a long time for notice to be taken of it."

Freda, faculty pro-dean for student education

As the most senior participant in the project, Freda was nevertheless relatively sanguine about its limited impact and exposure:

*"I think some of the other colleagues who were involved felt very strongly about the fact that it hadn't been picked up. I think ... it was one piece of work among many, in some senses, that I was doing. And I think, probably – the other colleagues didn't come from my faculty – so I saw its **immediate** impact on our students ... So I felt from **my** [faculty] colleagues I got quite a lot of feedback about the value of the work we'd done. ... I wasn't as disappointed [as other group members] because I could see the impact in my area, whereas I think they probably couldn't, and therefore ... will therefore be less enthusiastic."*

Freda, faculty pro-dean for student education

As Anne's comments (below) illustrate, other group members did indeed convey less enthusiasm and positivity than had Freda about the project's exposure and impact. What they perceived as the shortcomings in relation to its follow-up seemed to have diluted the satisfaction derived from the project, and tempered the measure of success that they associated with it:

Anne (lecturer): "We had hoped that once this [online module template] was developed there would be more interest from other parts of the university ... we hoped that ... management would just take on board that model and perhaps do that for other departments."

Interviewer: "Now, you say management haven't taken it on board; have you tried – I mean, is this a disappointment to you?"

Anne: "It is a disappointment, yes."

Interviewer: "Have you made the effort to get them involved?"

Anne: "Yes. ... We've talked about having a presentation somewhere, about this, so people could really understand it ... and, it's just, like, 'Oh yeah, let's do that!' But it, kind of, never happens, and it ends up being forgotten."

The consultant, too, perceived a sense of deflation within the group, as they began to realise that the impact of their achievement across the university was negligible:

*"And the module was finished, and they went live with it as a pilot, and they were able to introduce it across other parts of the university. I think they were disappointed that it wasn't more ... applauded ... more ... taken up. ... I was surprised – and disappointed – that it didn't have more of an immediate impact. The amount of work they put into it – and it was well known that it was happening – and it was a **lovely** module, and it could've had ripples throughout the institution."*

Graham, CLL consultant

The reason why: reflection and introspection

Prompted in her research interview to reflect on the reasons why she felt the project had attracted very limited attention across the university, and asked whether she felt the group had done all that they could to promote the online module template, faculty pro-dean, Freda, replied: 'No, I think we *could've* done more. I think we *could've* done more.' Her 'mistake', she suggested, had been to roll out the template within her own faculty, where she felt confident of its being taken up, pursuing its speedy implementation on a relatively modest scale, within a familiar environment. She had – to use her own words – taken 'the path of least resistance' in order to achieve a quick return on the group's achievement, rather than face the daunting prospect of seeking institutional recognition, endorsement and adoption, with all the associated problems that stem from micro-political complexities, competing priorities and administrative hurdles:

"I did what so many of us do: we revert to the world we know. The path of least resistance, in making this module function, is to take it back into my faculty, where I know how to make it work and I know who to talk to, and I know who to ask and to make it function. I think ... a braver version of that would've been, at that point, trying to take it to the university, or pushing it. On the other hand, that would've risked ... the fact that it might never have got any further."

Freda, faculty pro-dean for student education

Asked whether the group had taken their achievement back to the pro-vice-chancellor who had initially brought them together, and had given the nod to their CLL application, Freda responded:

*"I'm not sure that we really did, at that stage. ... I think, had we seen it more as **university** work ... rather than taking it into the faculty – and done that via [the PVC] – yes, I think it might have had more of an immediate impact."*

The final judgement?

So this is a tale of what was, by all accounts, a successful project, involving an effective collaboration between a group of highly motivated, committed colleagues and an expert external consultant. It was well executed, and, in productive terms, achieved its goals. It represented what was perceived as ground-breaking course design and delivery, yet – through what may have been a combination of a naively unambitious impact and dissemination plan; senior management's taking its eye off one of the balls it had watched being thrown up in the air, and failing to follow through where it had landed; and an institutional culture and infrastructure that were not geared up to recognising, celebrating, and capitalising on effective, grassroots initiatives – the limited reach that the project achieved diluted its potential for kick-starting significant, institution-wide pedagogical innovation.

Epilogue

Had the story ended here, it could simply have been an unfortunate one of wasted opportunities, thwarted ambition and unfulfilled potential. But it has a very interesting sequel, for six months after the completion of this 2013 CLL project, City Centre University embarked upon a second one, which was eventually to breathe new life into the online learning module template developed in project 1, affording it new importance. This second project is the subject of case study 2, presented below.

Case 2: Dancing to different tunes? Disjointed efforts at developing a flexible learning strategy

Background: project focus and impetus

In contrast to City Centre University's first, bottom-up one, its second CLL project was a top-down one, driven by senior management and instigated by the pro-vice-chancellor for learning and teaching. Learning technologist Barbara highlighted the proprietorial distinction between projects 1 and 2: '[the first project] was *our* baby, and then with this [second] project it felt more that it came about ... as a result of management saying, "Do another project!"'

The impetus for the second project appears to have come from a recently launched institutional agenda – or, in the words of the pro-vice chancellor for learning and teaching, 'a strategic imperative' (which was distinguished from an institutional strategy), reflecting the vice chancellor's awareness of the need to embrace technology-enhanced learning (TEL). Lecturer and departmental e-learning champion Doug observed: 'the vice chancellor sees TEL as ... one of the key strategic areas that the university needs to get in, to, sort of, bring it into the future'. Specifically, the pro-vice-chancellor who instigated it observed that project 2 was focused on 'looking at the ways in which we can develop flexible blended learning and how we can take that forward':

"Over the last few years we've increasingly focused our thinking around flexible learning and teaching and what that means for our students; how we truly can be flexible in a whole range of learning, teaching and assessment processes and strategies to enhance the ways in which they can engage."

Pro-vice-chancellor for learning and teaching

In contrast to the rather narrow focus of project 1, the second project sought more general strategic advice and guidance on how the university might extend its flexible blended learning provision, and on the advantages and disadvantages of a range of technologies and learning models that senior management could consider and evaluate against the institution's needs and priorities. Faculty pro-dean Freda described it as 'a much more university-led piece of work on changing the kind of learning landscape around digital learning within City Centre University'.

Graham, the CLL consultant who had supported its first project, was reassigned to City Centre University to support project 2.

The consultancy: group dynamics and approaches to working

By all accounts, the consultancy did not proceed smoothly, particularly the working relationship between Graham and the institutional CLL project team, which comprised mainly senior academics and administrators, led by the deputy vice-chancellor (DVC). The DVC failed to respond to our request for an interview, so we are unable to incorporate his perspective into this case analysis, but the consensual perspective to emerge from other City Centre University interviewees is that the essential problem was one of cross purposes: mismatched perceptions and ideas about the nature of the CLL initiative, what it had the potential to achieve at institutional level, and aspirations about what it would achieve. Graham offered his recollection of his initial meeting with the City Centre University project 2 team:

"We spent most of that meeting talking about flexible learning. And I told them they had all the elements in place for flexible learning ... and the deputy vice-chancellor's face was a picture – he was looking at me almost like I was a miracle worker! And he said, 'OK, we'll do flexible learning! I'm just going to introduce you to a load of people, and then you can write your report.' And I said, 'That's not what the CLL projects are about; it's not about me writing a report. It's me working with a team, like I did on the previous occasion, so that you have something concrete.' ... I was really quite shocked that this was what they wanted, and it took me quite a while to get my head around the fact that the DVC was operating from quite a conservative, traditional interpretation of what the word 'consultant' actually means."

Graham, CLL consultant

Graham identified two difficulties: first, it appeared that the pro-vice-chancellor for learning and teaching, who had submitted the proposal for CLL support, was being outranked by the deputy vice-chancellor's taking charge of the project and following a different agenda from the one originally proposed; in Graham's words: 'I had a feeling that the whole project had got hi-jacked, from the PVC's perspective. ... I was getting one message from the DVC and another message from the PVC. ... In the end the PVC gave way'. Other interviewees made similar observations:

"I think, basically, people at the very top – and, in fact, above the PVC – had an agenda there, and they basically took over."

Anne, lecturer and departmental e-learning champion

Barbara (learning technologist): "I think the PVC had actually more of an idea of trying to capitalise on what we had learned from the first project and try and do something, try and broaden the scope, and ... generally to investigate how scalable it was, really ... but I think that there was someone else that also became involved that, sort of, wanted to ... push it in a different direction."

Interviewer: "Are you prepared to say who?"

Barbara: "[pause] ... The DVC. "

The PVC's comments implicitly corroborate these perceptions:

Interviewer: "Did you feel, for the second project here at City Centre University, that all of you senior management people were on the same page?"

PVC: "No. No, it was another big problem."

Interviewer: "So there were some micro-political power games, or whatever, or...?"

PVC: "No, not power games, really, but the DVC ... was leading it because it was agreed that it was an important piece of university work, but actually he didn't know very much about this – he's not somebody who is embedded in pedagogy – so he came with a different focus. Now his focus ... is all around lecture capture, and it's just, kind of, different. He thought we would get a report from the CLL which would tell us what to do, so it took a while to get him to understand what this was all about."

Interviewer: "Is that what **you** wanted – a report – or just what **he** wanted?"

PVC: "What **he** wanted, yes, yeah."

The second problem that Graham spoke of was the time lag between the project start (marked by his participating in the initial meeting, referred to above, chaired by the deputy vice-chancellor) and the preceding CLL strategic conversation that had occurred six months earlier in which Graham had had no involvement; it had been led by a different consultant. Both he and the PVC agreed that, between those two events, the university had reconsidered its original proposal and changed direction:

“They had put the proposal in in the summer, and everything at their end had moved so quickly that, by the time January came ... they’d almost changed their minds; they no longer wanted what they’d said they wanted in their proposal. ... They almost jettisoned the technology-enhanced learning side of things; they picked up on the flexible learning. ... I don’t think they knew exactly what they did want.”

Graham, CLL consultant

“From the time of the original application to the time we started working with [the consultant] the strategic imperative had developed further. The university’s thinking and needs had moved on somewhat since the original application and strategic conversation.”

Pro-vice-chancellor for teaching and learning

Not only these two problems, but also – more fundamentally – the incongruence between Graham’s ideas and perspectives and those of the university’s senior project team to whom he was answerable appear to have jeopardised the project; indeed, struggling to envisage a mutually satisfactory outcome, Graham referred to it as his ‘crisis’. His version of events is that, in what he described as ‘a make-or-break meeting’ with the pro-vice-chancellor for learning and teaching (whom he regarded as his institutional project line manager and a potential mediator), he proposed that the City Centre University project 1 team (featured in case study 1, above) be reconvened:

“I said, ‘Here’s an idea: suppose I get my original team back again and we convene them ... on a weekly or fortnightly basis, and we think through what all the dimensions of flexible learning are that are pertinent to the university. We can add another two or three people, and every weekly meeting we will invite another person from the university, who will have another perspective to bring ... and I’ll write the report at the end once we’ve had that brainstorming. ... I can’t see myself writing a conventional report, but I think I can do this.’”

Graham, CLL consultant

As Graham recalled it, this proposal, intended as a compromise between his own preferences and the deputy vice-chancellor’s expressed wishes, was recognised as having saved the day: ‘the PVC grinned and said, “Y’know, I didn’t think this project was going to take off, but you’ve solved it for us!”’.

Yet the shaky group dynamics and mismatched foci were not entirely attributed to the misunderstanding of a deputy vice-chancellor who seemed out of sync with others and their agendas, for whilst Graham seemed to think that he (Graham) and the PVC had established an effective working relationship and were pursuing shared goals in the face of competing expectations of the consultancy, the PVC’s account is somewhat at odds with this perception:

PVC for teaching and learning: “We felt that the consultant didn’t really have the skills that were needed to take the more strategic approach of helping us to spread this out across the university in a more strategic way than just designing one programme. [He was] very good on the pedagogy, but limited help on the strategic work of that project. We had somebody from the Leadership Foundation leading the ... strategic conversations, I think they were called, to take us into that work, who was excellent, but it was, kind of, like starting again ... it just felt quite a bit of a mismatch when we actually got the HEA consultant, and there was a lot of revisiting, going over old ground, trying to think of a different way. At least he was very open and honest about where he saw his strengths, where he saw his limitations, but it took us a long time to get going with it. So we were very late starting that work because it took a lot of the time just working out how we might work and what we might do.”

Interviewer: “How did it work out in the end? Did you end up getting it to move more towards the direction you wanted, or did it go towards his direction?”

PVC: “Honest answer: I think more towards his direction, yeah.”

All's well that ends well? Breaking the deadlock and recognising achievement

The outcome of this uneasy truce was that, in line with Graham's proposal, regular meetings were convened of what came to be known, unofficially, as the Blended Learning Working Group: the CLL project 1 team, augmented by a succession of interested colleagues from across the university, co-opted as critical friends and opinion-contributors who, to encourage participation, were each invited to just one meeting. According to Graham, many of these supplementary members chose to participate repeatedly: 'the group grew and grew because everybody loved taking part in them [the meetings]'. Yet many of the core group interviewees expressed frustration at having to start every meeting briefing newcomers: 'the whole purpose of the meeting had to be re-explained from scratch every single time, and that took up an enormous quantity of the available time. That was highly frustrating, I felt' (Barbara, learning technologist).

Intended to satisfy the DVC's wish that Graham, in order to inform the strategic change recommendations that he would include in his report, should consult with representatives of different constituencies of City Centre University staff, the Blended Learning Working Group was focused on addressing how the institution might best take forward the vice chancellor's TEL strategic imperative. Within this agenda, prominence was given to the online learning module template that had resulted from project 1 as, along with the psychology module that had been developed to illustrate its capacity, it was presented as an example of what could be achieved.

It was at this point, through the showcasing of their achievements, that the project 1 group began to receive recognition, and their work began to attract attention on a wider scale than had hitherto occurred. The template and module were proposed by consultant Graham, not only as an example of the kind of development that could be achieved university-wide, but also as a starting point: a model that could be elaborated and extended. But as learning technologist Barbara explains, his vision was perceived as potentially problematic:

*"We talked a lot more about this [module template] and discussed a lot about what would be the benefits of going to an ultra-flexible – where absolutely **everything** is flexible – type of model. And a lot of people had valid concerns that that actually wouldn't work very well ... I think the value in having that blue-sky thinking is actually, in a way, about realising that you **don't** want to do that in the end."*

Barbara, learning technologist

There were concerns, too, that Graham was promoting a vision that many did not buy into:

Barbara (learning technologist): "I felt like we were, sort of, being driven down that route..."

Interviewer: "...By the consultant?"

*Barbara: "By the consultant. ... Most of the participants, I think, felt that we had discussed this quite a bit and felt like we had established that ... it wasn't going to work to become ultra-flexible in every possible way, and we were trying to pull it back in the direction of: let's talk about things that we could actually do – things that we could propose to people that they might actually say, **That's** a good idea!'. And I felt like we didn't actually have enough time working on that, unfortunately. But I **don't** think that that was a flaw in terms of the Leadership Foundation's vision for what they're trying to offer people, or the consultant's approach really. I think that was our problem, internally."*

*"In fact it was quite a turning point because all of us got almost, kind of, against what Graham wanted at that point, and we said that we didn't want the model ... the maximum we wanted was a menu. ... We didn't want a model that would be imposed. We wanted to be able to say [to colleagues], 'You can make it more flexible **this** way; you can adopt **this** part; you can do **this**; or you can do the whole set if you want'."*

Anne, lecturer and e-learning champion

Acknowledging that there had been a problematic period, when consensus had been elusive – ‘We did flounder in the middle’ – Graham credited the most senior group member, pro-dean, Freda, with having led them all to a compromise: to present a range of models of flexible learning, outlining what each might look like, the ‘menu’ to which Anne refers above:

“And so I wrote up a formal report that named these models ... articulated what they were like ... and I gave a draft to the PVC, who fed back, and we then made final corrections before running it off as a formal report. And that was the end of that.”

Graham, CLL consultant

Epilogue

Perhaps because, of all the members of the working group, she was the most senior, it was Freda, again, who was to play a pivotal role in keeping alive the vision and the capacity and potential that the project 1 online learning module template represented. After Graham had presented his report, as an effort to address the university’s TEL strategic imperative, Freda was tasked by the PVC for learning and teaching to roll out the template institution-wide. It is, from all accounts, early days, but it seems that the achievements of a determined, committed and enthusiastic group of pioneering colleagues are likely to have a much bigger impact within their institution than any of them had initially hoped for. The last word in this ‘tale of two projects’ must come from Freda herself, who succinctly sums up the whole story and its outcome to date:

“We did a pilot module ... which went down very well with students and colleagues, but didn’t have a big impact across the university. That [impact] only came at the point at which there was, I think, more strategic direction – particularly, apparently, from governors coming in [and saying]: ‘City [Centre University] needs to rethink its model’, and ‘Our students could benefit from not always having to attend ... and other forms of delivery, teaching delivery’, and, ‘What about blended learning?’ and ‘What about online courses?’. And that was the moment where, suddenly, the fact that we’d done this piece of work was seen, and became more seen! And I’ve now been charged with rolling this out across the university, so that there’s a version of the module in all the departments! So in some senses, [it] took on a life of its own and became bigger than we originally thought it was going to, and has had quite a lot of, I think, impact across the university in various ways.”

Freda, faculty pro-dean for student education

Case 3: Getting engaged: developing a sustainable TEL strategy

Background: project focus and impetus

At first glance, case 3 appears an unremarkable story – an uncomplicated, straightforward account of a group of colleagues who applied for help under the aegis of the CLL initiative and received much of what they had wished for. In comparison with the two City Centre University case studies presented above, it makes for a somewhat lack-lustre, uneventful, tale. But we chose it as a case for analysis because, whilst in several respects it runs parallel with case 2, it also deviates from it in illustrating what is achievable under the ‘right’ circumstances and conditions – and what could have been achieved by City Centre’s CLL projects if those circumstances and conditions had been present, and had prevailed.

This story takes place in what we shall call Improved University: a small, post-1992 institution located in the south of England and that, having grown from being a college of education, has expanded steadily over the last two decades. It is a teaching-focused, rather than a research-focused, institution, but boasts some pockets of research activity and entered a small proportion of its academics in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014.

The impetus for participation in the CLL initiative may be traced back to the deputy vice-chancellor (who, having now left Improved University, did not participate in our research). Aware that the university was in danger of lagging behind other institutions in relation to TEL, she apparently asked the director of the Centre for Academic Practice (CAP), Danny, to place TEL at the top of his agenda:

“There was no strategy, but TEL was recognised as important. The then deputy vice-chancellor called me in and said, ‘If you do anything with this job in the next three years, will you please do something with e-learning?’ She knew that we needed to up our game in terms of ... well, blended learning ... technology-enhanced learning – call it what you will. She could see that, in the sector, we were falling behind, and I think she’d have settled for any evidence that the university was engaging with e-learning. There wasn’t anything that’d been pulled together.”

Danny, director of CAP

When, a few days later, an email publicising the CLL initiative arrived in Danny's inbox, he seized upon it, referred it to his line manager, Jim – the institution's education quality director, who was a member of the senior management team – who submitted an application for consultancy help in determining how best to move forward the TEL agenda that both they and the deputy vice-chancellor recognised must be addressed:

"MOOCs were being talked about, and this was now becoming ... y'know, you hear about it on Radio 4, you read about it on the front page of the newspaper; it was something that, while we clearly didn't have the capacity to develop our e-learning like the Ivy League universities and the Russell Group universities, we just knew that this was something too big to ignore – even for a university like ours."

Danny, director of CAP

With their application accepted, these colleagues set about assembling a steering group for the CLL project, comprising the deputy vice-chancellor, plus Danny, Jim, Rosie – an academic developer with expertise in e-learning – and Josh, the student union's sabbatical officer for education. They met as a group to plan the strategic conversation day with the consultant, identifying which constituencies should be represented at it.

Enter the consultant: developing a plan for strategic change

The CLL project at Improved University began on the day the HEA-appointed consultant arrived on campus to engage in the strategic conversation with the steering group and then with a succession of groups: the departmental e-learning champions, the university executive, the heads of department, and the faculty pro-deans for student education. The first to be met was the student group, because the issues that they raised were expected to set the agenda for discussion with the other constituencies. By all accounts, the day was a great success, with the conversations with the students proving the most enlightening of all the discussions:

"We did find that day really useful; it was interesting, because, in reflecting on it – we agreed on this – the most useful parts were the meetings with students, 'cos it outlined their expectations, and made explicit things – a couple of things that we picked up through other sources."

Jim, education quality director

"The students ... if you like, they held up a mirror to us and said, 'This is what it's like to be a student'. ... They spoke very clearly and went straight to the issues, and gave a very colourful and clear illustration of what it was like to be a student on these courses. You try and talk to the students and you try and find what are their ... what are the issues. And that went really, really well, and when we had the report from [the consultant], she said it was clearly evident that Improved University had very good working relationships with the student group; they gave us a lot of information – we probably found that the most useful."

Danny, director of CAP

The other constituency groups, too, offered useful perspectives:

"The meeting with the e-learning champions ... I remember one of them saying, quite passionately, 'We keep talking about this and nothing seems to move forward!' ... So, it brought to the surface lots of things."

Jim, education quality director

"The stories and the narrative from the e-learning champions' group was: we're just not getting anywhere; we've been ploughing our own furrows alone for years and years, and there's been seemingly no engagement by the university."

Danny, director of CAP

In the case of the university executive group, their attitude towards the prospect of embarking upon a TEL-focused strategic change initiative alerted the CLL steering group to the institutional challenges it might have to face; as Danny related, this was ‘the hardest nut to crack’:

*“If the student group was the best in terms of the free-flowing nature of the conversation, and the clear identification of issues, then there was a defensiveness and a resistance from the [executive] – and, from my point of view, I was chairing all of these conversations – it was the most difficult to ... to move it on. Y’know: ‘Who says that we should be doing this?’ and: ‘What’s to say that a technology-enhanced learning approach is better than a person who can hold the attention of 200 students in a lecture theatre?’ ... And maybe ‘resistant’ isn’t the right word, but certainly a scepticism, and a need to be persuaded – why **should** we engage in this? – y’know ... and, so, I suppose what you’d deduce from that is that there’s a disconnect between ... their reality, and what was happening in the sector, both nationally and internationally.”*

Danny, director of CAP

“The discussion with the students was brilliant, but, with the executive ... not many came, and their response wasn’t terribly positive. ... Certainly, one of the deans of faculty felt that it wasn’t really necessary to have these...charismatic, engaging lecturers that could hold an audience [engage in TEL] – and that was what he felt was good learning and teaching, not online [teaching].”

Rosie, head of institutional learning technology support service

(We sought interviews with members of the university’s executive group, without making any reference to their reported negativity. One declined our invitation; none of the others responded.)

It was after the strategic conversation day that somewhat divergent perspectives surfaced within the CLL steering group. The consultant’s report – produced very soon after, and based on the information gleaned during, the strategic conversation day – had emphasised the value of implementing ‘quick wins’: small initiatives and changes that could be introduced speedily and relatively easily in order to convey that the change agenda was being addressed without delay; as Danny explained: ‘If it is going to be seen and adopted by the university community as a priority, they needed to see the effect of this happening quickly’. (He gave, as an example of a ‘quick win’, the introduction of an online tutorial booking facility for students – adding, with evident frustration: ‘It *still* hasn’t happened in every case!’). The report had also recommended that the university focus on curriculum design, specifically, not simply *discussing* TEL, but taking the next step of replacing some of the face-to-face course delivery with blended learning models. Whilst Danny was perfectly satisfied with the report, he detected some disappointment with it on the part of his line manager:

*“And so, [the consultant] sent her report in, which was considered by the steering group. Jim was a bit disappointed in it, and I think he was disappointed in it because his expectations were probably a little unrealistic inasmuch as...I think he thought we’d have someone coming in, listening to these groups that we’d put together, and she [the consultant] would say, ‘Right, this is my diagnosis, and this is my remedy, and sprinkle a bit of salt and everything’ll be alright’. ... Jim thought the consultant would come in and say, ‘Right...get hold of you lot, and we’re gonna sort senior management out and we’re gonna do **this**...and we’re going to improve the consistency of the student experience by doing **this**’. And clearly there’s no person walking this earth can do that, because some of these institutional issues – the cultural things – they run so deep ... even working *within* it, it’s a problem.”*

Danny, director of CAP

Jim’s own account included no reference to such disappointment, but did imply regret – without apportioning blame – that a more tangible, activity-focused agenda had not resulted from the strategic conversation:

*“I think, now, in retrospect, the idea was that out of that strategic conversation an institution would devise a project. And I know, in previous years – and in that year – some institutions had projects around, particularly developing students’ digital literacy; that seemed to be one which jumped out at me. I don’t think we did that, for whatever reason; we didn’t really have a, kind of, project...we just, kind of, had **identified** some things.”*

Jim, education quality director

Yet Jim was not one to let the grass grow beneath his feet. In the wake of the strategic conversation and subsequent report, he initiated a working group that would drive forward the strategic change agenda:

*"I'm somebody who likes to move things on. I'm very much a doer – a driver: 'We **can** do this! We must, kind of, move it on'. So I got frustrated that I didn't see things move on from this, and some of these quick wins didn't seem to be happening. So I said, 'Look, let's, kind of, get together a small group of people'. And I said, 'Look, I'd like us to meet regularly – probably every six weeks or so – to really, kind of, monitor... to agree what we're going to do ... and to progress changes'."*

Jim, education quality director

Driving forward: the push for strategic change

Jim realised that if the push for TEL-focused strategic change at Improved University did not come from him, it would probably come from no one. By this time the deputy vice-chancellor had left the university and had not yet been replaced, and, though he was recognised as being student-focused and supportive of an institutional TEL agenda, the vice-chancellor himself, Jim acknowledged, had other priorities: 'How can I put it? Er ... the vice-chancellor's quite strong in this institution, in terms of prioritising and identifying things. ... I don't think he has seen this as particularly a priority'. Jim was aware that, as a member of the university's senior management team, he (Jim) had (albeit to a limited extent) the 'clout' that very committed, but less influential, colleagues at middle management level lacked to rally the troops and lead them on a TEL strategic campaign.

Whilst it soon became apparent that a TEL strategy was needed, it was less clear who would write it:

"I didn't know who was going to write the strategy, because at that point I didn't feel capable of doing so. And I remember, I said to Danny and Rosie – because I didn't think even between the three of us, we were capable of doing so – I said, 'Should we actually get in a consultant to do it?' I knew some other institutions that'd done that, and we talked about that. And then, I don't know why, but after another meeting or two – I thought: no, I think I could have a stab at writing something which is short. ... So, I decided that maybe what we just needed was something which, kind of, painted a vision, set some priorities... and so, it's maybe two pages long – it's a draft. I sent it to that small group; one of them came back with some really helpful comments – all of which I've taken on board. ... So, that's the point at which we are now."

Jim, education quality director

Meanwhile, Danny continued to lead on engaging with the CLL consultant and, following up on her report, organised two curriculum design days that she facilitated and that were evaluated very positively. A fourth consultancy day was directed at trying to win over the sceptics. For this, a second consultant was recruited and given a slot at an executive group away day. Jim explained the background to this initiative:

"I presented to the university executive – a big group that includes all the five deans of faculty – kind of, what we were doing, and why it was important. And, it went down okay, but one of the deans said he would find it really useful if we could have a seminar for deans on technology-enhanced learning: what it was, why it was important – you know, to inform them. And so I took that on board, and a different consultant came and did a seminar. That wasn't entirely successful, unfortunately. ... I think maybe we didn't brief her well enough. ... Nobody actually said, but it didn't achieve what I wanted it to achieve in terms of engaging the deans, and inspiring them to take the next steps."

Jim, education quality director

Magnanimously, Jim took responsibility for what he perceived as this disappointing outcome:

*"I take responsibility. I had been to an HEA event where the speaker had been inspirational; I thought she was absolutely **brilliant!** And that's what I wanted – somebody who could really, kind of, inspire... set the, kind of, scene: what's happening. And I suppose that's why I, kind of, took that on board; I thought we could achieve that. We didn't have the right person, with the right **depth** of knowledge, or the right kind of inspirational... style. I also tried to get the vice chancellor involved, and didn't manage that!"*

Jim, education quality director

Yet, once again, it seemed that Jim and Danny had not seen eye-to-eye in their respective evaluations of the fourth CLL consultancy day:

*"I think it's true to say that what Jim wanted from the second consultant – or anybody – was someone who would come in with such a compelling story and evidence base that people would just think: how can we **not** engage with this? ... I thought the second consultant was excellent! Jim was very clear: he wanted the consultant to come in as an external person and say, 'I know exactly what sort of institution Improved University is, and you need to do: a, b, c and d...'. And the consultant deliberately – she said, 'I can't do it; it doesn't work like that. I can give you case studies, evidence, ideas...but it's up to you then to take it forward'."*

Danny, director of CAP

The path to strategic change: value-added consultancy?

Asked to consider how useful their participation in the CLL initiative has been, and how helpful the consultants were, the Improved University CLL team all identified positive elements or outcomes of their participation, the greatest of which was the exposure it gave to the TEL agenda within the institution:

"I think it's been a really positive experience for the university, taking part in the CLL, and certainly, from my perspective, I feel like TEL's much higher up the agenda than before we did it."

Rosie, head of institutional learning technology support service

"I think, had I not known about [the CLL initiative], the deputy chancellor would still have said, 'Could you get something going on e-learning?' And I think, probably, without it, we would've relied on those e-learning champions, so to speak. We would probably have identified some staff development sessions and relied on departmental directors of learning and teaching to try and drum up some support in terms of attendance at these sessions. So, I don't think we would've succeeded in...in getting an institutional drive, and linking it to other areas, like the learning and teaching strategy, like the personnel staff development programme, like the staff appraisal scheme. And even, also, I think it's becoming part of the recruitment strategy of the university's specifically requiring – probably under the 'desirable' heading – of what we're looking for in a teacher. ... Now we have faculties who are planning away days for their staff, and making technology-enhanced learning their focus."

Danny, director of CAP

"The positive aspect of it was, it got it on the agenda, made us give it some priority. We've used the term, which I like: changing the learning landscape, and the reference to the initiative as a rationale for driving some things. But I think we've got to the point now, whereby that's legacy...history, now; it's up to us now to identify how we're going to take various things forward."

Jim, education quality director

If Jim's evaluation seems to convey measured enthusiasm about the university's participation in the CLL initiative, it is because he felt they did not make the best use of the consultancy:

"I don't think we made as much of it as we could've made – and there were all kinds of complex reasons for that. So, its success was, I think, as much down to us as down to the nature of the project – though I would say...I suppose I did feel that it could've been a bit more...clearly structured about what was expected, and by when, and how the kind of – and maybe a year was too short, in terms of, kind of, doing it. It did feel like...we had the strategic conversation, drew some of this out, and it was then left to you to take the next step. Somehow I don't think it was made very clear what the expectations were about the next steps, and we would've found it very helpful to be more clear about what the next steps were, and to have milestones."

Jim, education quality director

For Rosie and Danny, however, the consultancy proved invaluable – 'very helpful!' (Rosie). In common with CLL projects at other institutions, at Improved University the consultants injected into the strategic change initiative an externality that, for the most part, gave them credibility and encouraged senior managers to take notice of them. Despite resistance from the executive group, this feature of the consultancy worked to the advantage of the TEL pioneers at Improved University:

"I think there would be people who were involved in the strategic conversation who couldn't tell you the consultants' names. But I spent a lot of time talking with them, and I thought they were both great, and I would happily recommend them to other people. But I do think the fact that – for all its faults – the HEA still has that...it's still very significant to a lot of people in the university; even a person who's arguably not in a leadership role would know about the HEA. So, if you have an issue that's being presented by the HEA, I think it's still...it still helps to get people's engagement."

Danny, director of CAP

"I think it's that objectivity, of having someone from outside of the university who is an expert in the field, that has that recognition – knowing what they're talking about, basically – and coming in and actually saying, 'Yes, what you're trying to do from within is a good thing to be doing, and...we support this'."

Rosie, head of institutional learning technology support service

Life after CLL: achievements and legacy

Unlike case study 1 – and perhaps to Jim's regret – this story is not one that traces the development of one specific identifiable project that could then be showcased and, in due course, applauded as a pedagogical innovation and success story. Rather, it is a tale of how a determined senior manager, supported by two equally determined support service heads (Danny and Rosie), drew upon external advice and support to devise and implement a succession of relatively small TEL-related initiatives that would be augmented over the coming months and years, taking TEL engagement at Improved University ever closer to the realisation of Jim's vision:

"What I would like to see in five years' time is an institution whereby students who are on campus – and that would be the majority of our students – use technology more...effectively, or, through learning and teaching, technology is used more effectively to keep students on task, engage them in effective, active learning, that staff and students have high levels of what I would call 'digital literacy' skills and standing – able to critique and adapt – and that we would also have some programmes... which are again high quality, online blended, kind of, delivery. I know some of my colleagues are involved in those areas; that, for them, is a key issue: how do we ensure the quality of what is done?"

Jim, education quality director

Since participating in the CLL initiative, the Improved University CLL team have continued steadily along the path that the consultant led them to. The original CLL steering group has been augmented into a TEL working group, which includes the university's departmental learning and teaching champions:

"So we put together a TEL group; got together the people who would form the basis of... almost, this 'self-help' group, and said, 'Right; we're going to use your expertise to help make the necessary changes at Improved University'. So, really, that group set about, sort of, establishing the strategic direction. And it's been good inasmuch as we've...we're updating our learning and teaching strategy for the next four years."

Danny, director of CAP

For the head of the learning technology support service, Rosie, the post-CLL TEL working group has proved invaluable:

*"That's a **really** useful group. It's just great to get that input from the faculties. I think, with learning technology, you need that feedback from the academics to say, 'This is really useful', or 'This isn't useful', or 'This is what we would like, in an ideal world'. And you can then respond to that and provide the solutions according to the needs, rather than just providing solutions for the sake of it. And I find it really useful having that group to get that feedback – although, having said that, some of the things that they come back to me with are quite challenging! [laughs]."*

Rosie, head of institutional learning technology support service

A tangible output from the group has been – as an effort to promote consistency across faculties and courses – the introduction of a set of baseline standards for use in the virtual learning environment (VLE):

*“Some people used [the VLE]; some people **didn’t** use it...or some people used it as a repository; some people used other tools. And, within that, something that was about, kind of, using it in a way that made sense to students – and in a consistent way. So, we have recently approved what we’ve called baseline standards for use with the VLE, quite short and simple; they are minimum standards, but they are intended to say, ‘Look, every module, as a minimum, should do...this list of things’.”*

Jim, education quality director

Epilogue

For Improved University, the value of the CLL initiative was that it sharpened its focus on TEL, pointed it in the direction that was (at that stage in its development) the best one for the university to take, supported the enthusiasm with sound advice on how to tackle specific issues, and, above all, galvanised people into action that seems to have been sustained, post-CLL. This case is distinct from those of City Centre University (case studies 1 and 2) in being led by a very proactive member of the university’s senior management team, who recognised the need for – and the value in – recruiting staff (academics and academic-related) with the requisite expertise and tapping into their skills, enthusiasm and commitment to take their university into the 21st century in relation to engagement with new learning technologies. More significantly, student engagement was – and remains – a key feature of this university’s strategic change initiative, ensuring that the direction taken was one that led towards real enhancement of the student experience, as defined by students themselves.

As we introduced this case study analysis by observing, it is in many respects an uneventful story; no tumultuous reports of troublesome micro-politics garnish it; just the odd peppering of references to frustration with misaligned agendas and divergent perspectives. No headline-grabbing innovative project emerged from it. But effective strategic change is often like that: slow, steady and decidedly ‘unsexy’. Yet – and this is key – it is invariably sustainable and, on that basis, successful. When it is fuelled by enthusiasm, commitment, and supported by a key player in the institution – who, like Jim, is determined to make a mark – slow and steady often works. At Improved University, as Danny remarked: ‘I think there’s a whole range of challenges and issues facing us ... but, as far as TEL is concerned, I think we’re **getting there**’.

Case 4: A winning team? Championing TEL-focused cultural change

Background: project focus and impetus

Premiership University is a very successful pre-1992 institution. It is, by the standards of the sector, well-resourced, and considers itself (and is considered externally) a field-leader in many respects; it attracts high-calibre, international academics and research fellows, has several world-leading departments, and enjoys a vibrant, income-generating, research culture that was recognised in REF 2014. Its TEL facilities are commensurate with such a profile; it was a relatively early adopter of learning technologies, and has a large workforce attached to an extensive range of professional support services directed at taking the TEL, and the wider teaching and learning agenda, forward.

The institution’s CLL project application had been led by Alison, the director of one such service: the learning technology unit (LTU). The resultant project, whilst overseen by Alison, was led on a day-to-day level by one of her direct reports, Donald, the leader of a specialist team within the LTU.

The university’s e-learning strategy, which Alison had played a major role in writing, actively supported and assisted by the pro-vice chancellor for education, had been fairly recently accepted at committee level and was fully endorsed by senior management. The CLL project’s focus was consultancy support for more effectively embedding of TEL across the university, particularly at departmental level, where Alison and Donald felt there was still work to be done on developing a grassroots culture of receptivity to, and an inclination to engage in, TEL. The strategic imperative for TEL had not yet, they felt, consistently impacted upon the academic workforce. It was therefore decided to apply for support for a CLL project that would provide consultancy advice on and support in building up an effective cadre of departmental TEL champions, who would promote e-learning and support local capacity-building by acting as advisers to departmental colleagues:

"We wanted to build up this kind of capacity within the institution where it has a sufficient number of people, a strategic number of people – a tipping point number of people, if you like – who are interested enough and, kind of, au fait enough in e-learning to make that change happen locally, so they would then act with us, essentially, to try and make the strategy happen."

Donald, leader, LTU team

Since the creation of a network of TEL champions had been included in the e-learning strategy, this CLL project was explicitly linked to the institution's strategic change agenda. Alison explained the impetus for it:

"I was doing a master's [degree] ... and I took a module on e-learning policy and strategy at the same time as I had to write the e-learning strategy. And so, through the master's, I was forced to do quite a lot of reading about strategic approaches at other institutions, and I came upon a series of papers about, sort of, grassroots change and champions, and how to make it work. And I just thought: This is probably what we need – because this is a very diverse institution. And so I was taken with this, and decided that that was something that we probably should think about as, sort of, being one of the key things. And I remember, when I was mapping out what we wanted to achieve in the strategy, it seemed to me that the champions seemed to be one of the enablers for so much of what we wanted to do; so, yeah, it went into the strategy, and it seems to have worked."

Alison, director, LTU

Specifically, these two colleagues wanted CLL consultancy advice on deciding: how such champions could be recruited; how best to launch the champions network; what kinds of activities and projects it would be reasonable to expect champions to be engaged in; and how the LTU could best support them.

Team TEL champions: the project

Lacking the problems and drama that have featured in some of the case analyses presented above, there is little of substance to report on Premiership University's project, Team TEL Champions. From all accounts it proceeded well and without any hitches; the CLL consultant described it as a 'good and well-conceived project', adding that 'the Premiership University team were excellent'. It was apparently smooth, slick and straightforward in its execution, resulting in the recruitment of an extensive TEL champions network of, initially, over 100 individuals (a figure that has increased by 50% since the launch of the network). With the recruitment process having been started before her arrival, the consultant's input included advice for the LTU on, inter alia: the content of a questionnaire directed at capturing the interests of TEL champions; recruitment strategies, especially on the need to attract a good mix of champions including those with administrative and teaching experience; the sorts of 'carrots' that could sustain the network; keeping in close touch with champions; the sorts of activities that champions could engage in; and how best to interact and engage with departments in order better to support the champions.

Asked in their interviews to evaluate the project, and the CLL consultancy specifically, Alison and Duncan both agreed that its main value had been in encouraging them to prioritise and remain focused on champions-related work in order to be adequately prepared for consultancy meetings. They also found the consultant's external validation of their work and achievements gratifying and motivating:

Interviewer: *"Did the consultant and the consultancy days give you any insights that you couldn't have got yourself?"*

Donald (leader, LTU team): *"I think we found a focus, actually. ... By having somebody external...you've got a critical friend, which is always useful; although they may say, 'Yes, yes, you're doing fine', still that's a benchmark of some description, and even though they haven't said anything new, that's quite important because, with due respect, they're experienced, and if they say, 'You're doing fine', then you're doing fine. So ... the external portion of it gives you a kind of a driver; it's a focus to do something ... that then makes everything, kind of, happen. So, yeah, I think they've been quite useful actually."*

"I'm not sure that the consultancy has given us any particular insights, but, it's more...they make you do the event and plan it, and, y'know, sometimes we might be inclined to say, 'Oh, I haven't got time to do it at the moment', but, by having that commitment, you do it."

Alison, director, LTU

In the wake, then, of an apparently successful, but uneventful, project execution, our attention in this case analysis shifts from the CLL project itself to its outcomes and impact; our interest was in following up the progress of Premiership University's wider TEL-focused strategic change initiative, post-CLL project. Reflecting the nature of Team TEL Champions, our focus is wide, for, as an integral part of the institution's e-learning strategy, the establishment of a TEL champions network was never intended to be an end in itself; it was directed at creating and sustaining a collegial agency that would promote, enhance and strengthen TEL provision and widen TEL engagement – 'to spearhead change at departmental and faculty level', as Donald explained it – and encouraging the development of an institutional culture of digital teaching and learning.

It was evidence of such a culture that we sought, and present below.

Championing a TEL-focused culture: the change agents' perspective

Alison's and Donald's evaluations of the TEL champions network and, more broadly, progress in delivering the e-learning strategy, were largely positive – asked to give an arbitrary mark out of 10 for the progress achieved, Alison suggested seven, on the basis that: 'we've got pockets of zero progress, or minimal progress, and we've got pockets of excellent progress', and Donald felt that eight was a fair assessment: 'because I think the things that we've done well are really crucial and needed to be done, whereas the other ones, I think we have made a kind of a decision that these things are slightly less important'. For him, a key indicator of progress was the increasing willingness of academics to engage in the TEL discourse:

*"I think I'm just so impressed by the level of discourse that's going round in the departments. We may not have made the actual **physical** change in the students' actual learning experience, but the way that people are actually talking about it and looking at it. ... Y'know, I sit around in meetings and sometimes just listen and see what the kind of atmosphere there is, and unless I'm getting a very skewed message here, I think there's a general feeling of positivity. And I think that's why it's worth [a] high [number]...because I think that's important; it's not simply just that students do a little bit more online, and have a bit more online assessment ... it's how people **discuss**, and it's how people are planning the future, and I think we've made quite a lot difference. I do think so; well, I like to think so."*

Donald, leader, LTU team

To him, this represented cultural evolution; he discerned more of a pro-TEL perspective than had prevailed a few years ago, when, as he recalled, the research culture had dominated the institutional agenda, and detracted from teaching-related strategising. That mono-focus, he felt, was gradually beginning to dissipate:

*"I've been doing this thing for a long time in e-learning, and you always felt that you were trying to...it was like pushing water uphill. ... You'd sit around in committees, and heads would be shaking, 'Oh, it's a lovely idea, but we never have time'. That is still there, but it's becoming a little bit more faded out, and I think people are realising: we **have** to do something, but we don't have much time to do it. ... And that's where **we're** working; we're working in that space at the moment. And, in fact, that space has now opened up, albeit sometimes just a crack, and sometimes wider. That's quite important, I think, for us. But we're still a research institution."*

Donald, leader, LTU team

Premiership University had rolled out lecture capture a few years earlier, and Alison and Donald were pleased with the take-up:

*"I think [lecture capture] is appealing to academics, because they don't have to do anything particular; they do what they like doing: they **lecture**, and the students are very, very grateful for it, and really want more of it. I just think it's a very, very important technology, actually, for us. I think that it's, kind of, underpinned a lot of the change in attitudes, again, that we get from departments, in a way which is beyond what you would actually imagine."*

Alison, director, LTU

"We've put a lot of money into lecture capture ... the university in general has supported that. Now the reason it's supported, that is because there's been the student demand for that, which started off as a project in the department of [XX], and the students loved it so much –and of course, the academics will feed off that as well – that the money's become available to do that. And then you get this, kind of ... ratchet effect with lecture recording. Once the students see it, they want it more and more and more, and

... you can't go back. So they become used to going online after the lecture. And then that increases the traffic into the VLE, so the VLE becomes a more important hub for learning. Y'know, **before**, it was a place you would go in and download a few PDFs and come back out again. Now it's a place you can go in and spend a fair bit of time because you weren't in the lecture. And once the students are in there there's other things that they can do, so that's quite important. From the staff point of view, it's like a gateway drug ... y'know, the staff suddenly see themselves online – it's media: 'Hey, I can do this!' d'you know what I mean? they hadn't really thought about that... . And then some of them have started to think: Well, maybe I could flip lectures."

Donald, leader, LTU team

In relation to the TEL champions network, in nearly every department, Alison and Donald both reported that they had succeeded in realising their vision of what Alison called 'our dual-pronged champions approach', which involved having two TEL champions: an academic and an administrator. At the time of our interviewing her almost two years after the launch of the TEL champions network initiative, Alison implied that, having initially encountered a small pocket of resistance in a few departments to the idea of nominating champions ('I had a couple of exchanges with heads of department, [who were] saying, "You must be kidding!", y'know, "We're way too busy; we can't possibly do this"'), she now believed that every department in the institution had at least one champion: 'We're pretty much covered now, though. I was just speaking to my colleague; her last holdout was in the [XX] department, and I think we're covered everywhere now'.

Before launching the TEL champions initiative, Donald had worked extensively with what later became one of the constituencies from which TEL champions were recruited: course support administrators. He had realised that, not least in being at the frontline of day-to-day interaction with students in their departments, they were key cogs in the machinery that keeps Premiership University's teaching and learning provision functioning effectively:

*"We realised these people are quite important in the development of programmes and supporting programmes, particularly in the online parts of it. ... The programme administrator is often quite an important person because he or she – it's often a **she** – has quite a close link with the students and that, kind of, very close student contact. ... They have a very close feel for what the students have, because they get the kind of the problematic end of the students' experiences: about how they're dealing with stuff online, about assessment processes, feedback and all that sort of stuff."*

Donald, leader, LTU team

Moreover, Alison regarded the departmental course administrators as people with a degree of influence: 'They're quite well respected within departments; the academics, sort of, listen to them. They have some clout, even though they're in academic-related roles'.

By initiating a dedicated website and organising an in-house e-conference for them, Donald had helped develop these administrators into a community of practice with its own identity:

*"So it's become something which acts at the local level and acts at institutional level – so there's an exchange of practice – but just as much it acts at a personal level, so people feel personally they get something out of it. But then they will progress that professionally, or just out of interest. So that's been our model. So, when we launched the champions – when it went into the teaching and learning strategy – it was specifically said it wasn't just for academics; it was for at least two... [when we launched it in the departments] we asked them to nominate **two** people: somebody in support, and one academic."*

Donald, leader, LTU team

An important factor in the decision to recruit two for each department, Donald explained, was to avoid presenting the TEL champion as an isolated individual who is rather unusual and unique in her/his interest in, enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, new technologies and the TEL field: 'We wanted to avoid the idea that he or she does his stuff and the rest of us do our own stuff So we're trying to de-isolate the champions by having at least two people'. He was at pains to explain that the role of the departmental champions varies across departments, because 'Premiership University is very diverse in relation to how the departments operate; it is not a uniform place'. In all departments, the TEL champions are the LTU's first point of contact, and they are expected to proactively raise with the unit any departmental issues that need, or that academics want, addressing. In some departments and faculties, one or more TEL champions sit on learning and teaching-related committees. Both interviewees

recognised the need for flexibility in engaging with departments: 'You have to work within the local cultures, so we do what we can'. Above all, Donald remarked, 'what we want is this to be embedded and sustainable, and growing'. By 'this' he meant the TEL-focused institutional culture that he believed was being promoted, and enhanced, by the departmental champions.

But we were keen to explore to what extent both the picture presented by Alison and Donald of the university's progress in operationalising its e-learning strategy, and Donald's perception of a slowly evolving TEL-focused culture, were shared – particularly by the TEL champions themselves, and by others who, in various ways and through their various roles, are often at the frontline of TEL delivery in Premiership University. In their interviews Donald and Alison had 'talked up' the work and achievements of their unit, and their enthusiasm and motivation were contagious, but we felt it was important to give voice to others who might have an experientially informed perspective on the TEL strategic change initiative at Premiership University.

The ripple effects of team TEL champions: wider perspectives on Premiership University's TEL-focused culture
 Premiership University was one of the few institutions in our study whose student union sabbatical officer responded positively to our request for an interview. As the officer with the portfolio for education, he frequently engaged with certain academics, including the pro-vice chancellor for education, and academic-related professional services staff, including Alison and other members of the LTU. Asked for his perspective on TEL provision within the university generally, he highlighted variability as a key issue:

Interviewer: *"What about TEL provision at Premiership University? Is the university really at the top of the tree?"*

Student union sabbatical officer: *"Not quite. The reason I say that is because it's really varied. Premiership University really has the whole spectrum of advanced through to primitive forms of technology. I know that because I've been working with a few people. Some departments are really good at it – they do the flipped lecture, they have the entirely online module, and they would use the allocated lecture time as their tutorials, so students can focus on particularly difficult issues. But in other departments it's as if it's still the 20th century, with just pure, traditional lectures, and even submission is paper-based and not online...and no anonymous marking or anything like that. So, it's quite varied; we get, like, the whole spectrum. ... There's lots of good stuff, and there's lots of not quite good stuff."*

In something of a slight contrast to the rather rosy picture sketched out by Donald and Alison of academics' engagement in lecture capture, the student union officer was rather disappointed by what he considered inadequate take-up:

"Most departments currently don't make use of lecture cast. The facilities are there, but some lecturers feel, like: 'Oh, if I put this up, students will stop coming to the lecture.' I've read quite convincing evidence that that's not the case."

Student union sabbatical officer

More generally, a lecturer whom we singled out for interview because Alison had identified her as one of the most TEL-focused academics in her department – a department that had apparently achieved a certain amount of notoriety with the LTU on account of its resistance to TEL, and some of its members' expressed preferences for retaining blackboards – was similarly cautious in her evaluation of TEL activity at Premiership University:

Interviewer: *"So, in terms of TEL, what kind of activity is there here, at this university? Is it all-singing, all-dancing, and things like that?"*

Lecturer: *"No."*

Interviewer: *"No, right, OK. Let's have your perspective."*

Lecturer: *"So, there's clearly a big push, but it's not trickling down all the way. Because the thing that really is true of Premiership University, we have a reputation for being iconoclastic, for being bolshy ... and academics don't like to be pushed around. And certainly in the department we're doing little bits and bobs around the edges of technology-enhanced learning, but it's definitely being resisted in some places. And nobody's doing anything huge. I mean, I – if I'm doing the most, I'm not doing lots."*

She outlined the nature and extent of what she considered standard TEL activity in her department – use of the VLE as a repository for information for students and, in a few cases, for teaching materials:

“So every course has a VLE, and if we don’t set up our own then the department administrators set them up, so they’re automatically there. And we have a minimum; they will have: who we are, where you can find us, when our office hour is, our email address, and a link to the syllabus. And I suspect many people just leave it like that.”

Lecturer

She then described the nature of her own activity, which clearly exceeded the minimum, baseline, online information provision:

“I do use the VLE reasonably heavily, but in a very, kind of, traditional, this-is-where-I’ve-put-my-webpage-now, kind of way. So, after each lecture – or, rather, after each week of lectures, or possibly each topic – I will put up the lecture notes, so the students can go and get them. And then, the other thing that I’ve done – and I started it last year – is that I produced some videos of the lectures, which are also available within the VLE. I booked a lecture room and I spent an afternoon last year doing the complicated bits of one week’s theory, and captured those, and then edited them into little segments of individual topics. And then I made them available in reading week, with that topic to come the week after reading week. And then, in the contact hours of that week, I did something much more interactive, with more examples.”

Lecturer

In relation to the university’s TEL champions, which had been portrayed by Alison and Donald as jewels in the learning technology support service’s crown, the students union’s sabbatical officer claimed to know little, if anything, about them, commenting, ‘I’m not sure what they’re actually championing’. The lecturer quoted above was familiar with the TEL champion role, but was cynical about the impact that the champion was likely to have in her department, populated, as she portrayed it, with TEL sceptics and rebels:

“I mean, our TEL champion – well, it’s just changed over because the guy who was the TEL champion has become involved with a big funded thing, and so he’s basically had all of his time taken up, so he’s just handed it over; we’ve got a brand-new one who I met today. And he said, ‘I emailed everybody, going: “I’m the new TEL champion – is anybody interested in anything?”’ And you’re the only person that replied’. But the old one pioneered a trial of videoing the lectures – of videoing the whole lecture course – and clearly put a lot of effort into it, and it was quite interesting. But the upshot, the final conclusion, was that he didn’t think that it was going to work. But, yeah, he’s done an interesting thing, and it’s, kind of... it’s good to have done it, but I suspect he only did it because he was the TEL champion. It’s not got any particular traction with the rest of the department, and, to be honest, if he’d turned into a proper TEL champion who was actually pushing the stuff, it would have harmed his reputation in the department!”

Lecturer

Whilst we were unable to interview either the outgoing or incoming TEL champion in this department, we did include amongst our interviewees two TEL champions from other departments.

Championing a TEL-focused culture: the champions’ perspective

To gain a perspective on one of the main direct outcomes of the Team TEL Champions project – the recruitment of a network of people who would champion and support TEL in their departments – we were particularly interested to learn how the champions approached their roles; what they considered their key responsibilities to be, and how effective they felt their engagement or interventions with colleagues were. We also wanted to know something of the scale and nature of their own TEL practice.

TEL champion Brian, located in one of the science departments, described himself: ‘I suppose I was, kind of, one of the early adopters of e-learning tools, and e-learning philosophy, as well – if there is such a thing’. Asked to elaborate on the meaning of ‘e-learning philosophy’, he explained:

“Well, it seems to go with – and this is, kind of, seen as a correlation I think, rather than a great big causal model – that there seems to be a vision of an independent learner that is someone enabled by the right sort of tools, rather than who sits there and

watches me recite my lecture notes and go away again. It seems to be a lot of discourse – or use of the terms – around active learning, which interests me, sort of, philosophically I suppose.”

Brian, TEL champion in a science department

He described his approach to the TEL champion role as involving two main, inter-related elements: keeping abreast of the TEL field, and acting as a filter of information to his colleagues:

“I, kind of, look out for things...make enough intellectual space for browsing. So it’s, kind of, something that I keep doing; so I won’t just delete the email, I’ll have a good look at it and assess its content for wider relevance – if it’s something from a tech provider or a conference, I don’t commit to go to those conferences on e-learning, but will have probably scanned the agenda. And I can admit I have it in my mind to mention certain things, to make myself available...make people in the department aware that, if there’s some mysterious thing on the VLE that they can’t sort out, y’know, just give me a look at it and I’ll sort them out. And it seems to work.”

Brian, TEL champion in a science department

Asked if he considered his role as including trying to convert sceptics, he responded: ‘Not to convert, but just to, hopefully, make them aware that there’s good news to be had. I think...*ambassador* might be a better word for it’. His departmental colleagues’ attitudes towards TEL, he estimated as being ‘just like a good sample of the population: there are some people who find it a bit bizarre, and some people who do their own little things with their VLE courses’.

Brian outlined the nature of his own typical TEL practice: ‘I do a little bit of lecture recording, but it’s mainly for back-up purposes rather than to flip it forward. But we do a little bit of...I think it’s called *micro-scale flipping*; I don’t know if anybody’s really jumped on the flipping bronco so far. I think there’s a bit of fear about that’. He claimed to use the VLE ‘to the full’: which, he indicated, includes using it as a vehicle to disseminate material, to administer pop quizzes, to gather assessments, to serve as a repository for the digital artefacts that cannot be shown in the lecture theatre: ‘I do like to use a good variety of tools on the VLE – but I don’t think I’ve failed if I haven’t used all 27 of them!’. He was very complimentary about the Learning Technology Unit: ‘I think, individually, they’re all grand. And I think, obviously, they know their stuff’. He continued:

“They take time to go to conferences and report back, and they’ve got a blog which has got, probably, fortnightly postings on it, so you can see things like the use of video. ... So they, kind of, run around, and they do all the shop-window gazing for us, if you like, on our behalf. ... I think they’re going about it in the right sort of way.”

Brian, TEL champion in a science department

Located in an arts and humanities department, another interviewee, Robert, explained that he had become a TEL champion ‘almost by default’ since his is a very small department and he was really the only person who could feasibly have taken on the role, despite also being head of department. He was very supportive of the TEL champions initiative, whilst bemoaning that, with so many other demands on his time, he finds it difficult to be as engaged in the network as he would like:

“I think it is a useful idea. I feel a little bit guilty – and maybe even a bit sad – that I’m not as involved as I was, but you will understand that, as a head of department now, I have umpteen obligations...I’m also the admissions tutor and I run all the UCAS open days and everything, and I teach two modules, so [the network] has had to drop down my agenda. And it’s a shame; I would like to spend a few afternoons learning PeerWise But I just...I personally don’t have the time, so, I think it’s a good idea, but you need to find people in each department who are really, really into it.”

Robert, TEL champion in an arts and humanities department

But despite his concern that he may be neglecting somewhat his TEL champion role, Robert’s personal commitment to and engagement with TEL – as he describes them – seem to far exceed what may be considered Premiership University’s norm, certainly as the female lecturer, quoted above, described the norm within her department. Since it does seem to be exceptional, we convey something of the nature of his pioneering, seemingly ground-breaking, TEL-related activity through extended interview quotes below, which, incidentally, also include snippets of outline contextual details of the recent development of the TEL agenda at Premiership University. Contrary to Brian’s observation, here was someone who had most definitely ‘jumped on the flipping bronco’.

If Robert's rather modest account is to be taken as accurate, his TEL trajectory seems to have crept up on him almost unawares:

*"I was asked to speak at an HEA conference here at Premiership University. I can't remember the chain of events, but I ended up giving a short flipped lecture, **about** flipped lectures, to the delegates: about an eleven-minute lecture where I presented myself on a screen. Talking here, it's common now, but even then it seemed really – no one had really heard of it at Premiership. It's amazing that only three years ago... things have moved so fast with all the kind of PowerPoint alongside it. I was annotating the PowerPoint, I was saying, basically, 'I will send this to my students before I see them, and then in the session we'll have a big Q and A session and we'll talk about the content, and we'll use it'. And that little video was extremely popular, extremely well received. On the back of that I was invited to give a keynote at the [X] conference the next year. Again, it was way too early for me; I got through it by the skin of my teeth. I got some great feedback, so that was all fine, but that, sort of, catapulted me, funnily enough, in this kind of e-learning thingy."*

Robert, TEL champion in an arts and humanities department

Having begun to make something of a name for himself, his local reputation as a TEL pioneer then evidently went from strength to strength, as he explained:

*"The makers of our lecture cast system – y'know, our lecture recording system which we don't put on our VLE! – they were at that conference. They asked me to come along to, sort of, not **promote** it, but **talk** about how I use the system, to other delegates from Premiership University. And then I, sort of, did several things around the university on this. And the main thing I did was talk about flipping lectures – that really was my interest, and that was partly, sort of, born of necessity because I thought: well, I've got this big new cohort coming in, 80 students; I just think the old lecture series model looks really tired and strained a lot of the time. Now, how am I going to do this? And, above all – and I don't know if I expressed it like this at the time, but this is how it's turned out – I really wanted to build a community of learners, all sharing in this very exciting new, complex, difficult, project. And the best way, I thought, would be to have us all together – it was then 80 students, now its 120 – in the room, talking about stuff; y'know; really lively plenaries. And so I, sort of, introduced this flipping lectures as a way to do that: to build a learning community where we're talking about all sorts of big ideas."*

Robert, TEL champion in an arts and humanities department

With such a developing profile, Robert was an obvious candidate for the TEL champions network:

"So I was really good at flipping the lectures that I was thought of as someone using technology in an interesting way, and that's really what I'd done. I mean, I wanted to do more, to be honest; I really want to use PeerWise – there were other things at the time I've probably even forgotten now – yes, things like Google Docs, interactive BlackBoard – that I didn't get around to, because my brief is vast, and this was just a small part. But I have quite a lot of experience of flipping lectures and I've talked to many people about its pros and cons, and so that was my way into being the e-learning person for my department."

Robert, TEL champion in an arts and humanities department

Finally, rather than fill many pages in this case analysis with Robert's many accounts of his pioneering practice, we confine ourselves to reporting it as indicative of the atypically innovative outreaches of the TEL-focused culture that the Learning Technology Unit had hoped might be developed and enhanced by the Team TEL Champions project. We end this mini-profile of Robert with an illustration of a specific new lecture delivery approach that he introduced:

"A particular innovation of mine, which we then integrated in our virtual learning environment, was the 'hot questions' as they're called, which is simply a very simple platform in which students enter a question about the video. But, as a double purpose, it serves a need: I can see who's watched it, and in this era of enforced engagement that's very important. And then they simply 'like' a question which they like, and you get a peer ranking system. So we've just had a lecture on evolution – and somebody might ask a question: If natural selection chooses what's the most hip for propagation, how come skinny women are seen as attractive today? Y'know, everyone likes that – so that gets 20 'likes'. And the professor will come along to the flipped lecture and use the top five or six 'liked' questions, and they project them on the screen and the student tends to read them out for the audience. So, again, with the audience we build that community of learners."

Robert, TEL champion in an arts and humanities department

If Brian and Robert are representative of Premiership University's departmental TEL champions, then a valuable legacy of the Team TEL Champions project would certainly appear to be the sustained promotion of TEL across the university. In Brian's case, this seems to be through a rather conventional champion-like support and advisory role; in Robert's case, the championing is more indirect; through his acting as a high-profile exemplar of ground-breakingly innovative practice that has the potential to inspire and motivate colleagues to follow his lead, or to approach him for advice. We feel it is important to point out, however, that – unusually, for such an apparently high-profile, pioneering champion in a world-leading, research-intensive university – Robert was a teaching fellow and, as such, was not contracted to carry out research. His evident sharp focus on teaching was therefore not diffused by competing demands imposed by the Research Excellence Framework. He may indeed have impressed and inspired his colleagues, but with world-leading research profiles to build up and sustain, they may justifiably be less willing than he to engage in developing time-consuming innovative teaching methods. Robert may well be an exemplary TEL practitioner, but, at Premiership University, he is likely to represent the exception, rather than the norm.

Amongst our case study institutions, Premiership University was distinct in another respect: the championing of TEL was not confined to peer support or academic leadership from or amongst 'rank-and-file' or junior colleagues; it was also practised by the institution's senior management team, creating another layer of champions to support the strategic change initiative.

Senior champions: top-level support for the TEL strategy

In contrast to the reported experiences of several TEL-focused change agents presented in the other case analyses, many of the TEL-related achievements identified by Alison and Donald were attributed to strong support from senior management. Alison in particular – who, as the more senior of the two, had had much more interaction with senior management than had Donald – was quite effusive in her praise of the pro-vice-chancellor for education, Howard, to whom she reported: 'He just has come in like a breath of fresh air – really, really championing in the education!'

Howard was apparently a hands-on leader; not content simply to put his name to initiatives, he offered real, practical support – indeed, he had helped Alison finalise the e-learning strategy, most of which had been drafted before his fairly recent appointment, almost two years earlier³⁵. Alison spoke of him:

"It's fantastic to have Howard, who knows what he wants. He will give us a lead and make sure that it happens, make sure that there are, y'know, concrete actions. He's been very, very good, a good, sort of, advocate for us."

Alison, director, LTU

She related how he had engineered for her a platform for addressing the senior management team about e-learning:

"So I finally had the audience that I needed, and I was able to present the strategy to them, and then to say to them, 'One of the key enablers of the strategy is the champions, and we need your support as deans to make sure that these champions are able to do their job. We need the departments to work with us on that'. And I'd run through the presentation with Howard before, told him what I was going to cover, and, y'know, he made that happen. It wouldn't have happened without his input."

Alison, director, LTU

Both Alison and Donald illustrated the nature of Howard's hands-on leadership approach:

"He does take an interest in the, kind of, more nitty-gritty level as well, because we've had a couple of things where we need a little bit of a steer and support and he's been very, very supportive, to the point of actually reaching out to us and supporting us with a bit of funding. And I think that's really good, for somebody at that kind of level to, sort of, be interested. We did something with a small group of staff, and he came, and did a, kind of, an award for them – about a year or so back. And I really appreciated that; it gives a, kind of, nice sign that the top-level management is interested in the people."

Alison, director, LTU

"Howard will come to events. Y'know, I have regular lunchtime seminars and stuff and he will come and talk about things, and stand up and talk and introduce himself, about all sorts of stuff. So that's really appreciated, I think."

Donald, leader, LTU team

³⁵ Howard willingly agreed to be interviewed for our study, but we were regrettably unable to find a mutually convenient date before our fieldwork was completed.

A second senior champion – also fairly recently appointed – was then identified as having been very supportive of the LTU's work:

"Ted, the director of Information Services, just came in and looked at what we were doing and looked at what the mission of the institution was and said, 'Well, okay, let's look at how we can best deliver support for you.' So he's been, again, a kind of champion for us. In his case, he was determined that we got this e-learning strategy in, and that it was strongly visionary; it wasn't just doing more of the same. And so, after we drafted the first effort, we thought it was pretty respectable and passed it to him, and he said, 'Well, it's not a vision. It's fine, but it's not visionary and it's not a strategy.' And I was like, 'yeah', and so he made us, kind of, go away and rethink it. And I was having one-to-ones with him – although he's not my manager, there's somebody else in between us – but I was having one-to-ones with him, which was unprecedented."

Alison, director, LTU

Finally, reference was made to a third senior champion – an appointment made by Howard:

*"I think, with Howard, he's been better than I would have hoped because he came from an academic background but not an education background. And I thought: Ooh, y'know, what's this guy going to be like? He's an engineer, for goodness sake; what does he know about education? But he has proved really, really, really good. He's made a really astute appointment in the new director of our Learning and Teaching Development Centre, which is a team that we work really closely with; so, they're the educational developers, we're the e-learning people, but we work closely with them. And they were rudderless for, probably, ten years, I would say. They had a terrible sequence of appointments, and it really didn't work well, and so he has sorted that out – managed out the person who was not managing the team, got in a new director, Mary, who, again, **she's been fantastic and a great supporter of our e-learning strategy.**"*

Alison, director, LTU

Alison summed up her evaluation of these three senior colleagues: 'We're getting senior support in the way that we wouldn't have dreamed of before, which is fantastic. Without these people, none of this would have happened'

Premiership champions: the winning team

Progress in implementing Premiership University's TEL-focused strategic change initiative has clearly been a team effort. And this is evidently a winning team. This case analysis has been less of a narrative than have some of the others that we present, for there really was no story to uncover. Rather, it has taken the form of a series of profiles of this team's key players, outlining the nature of their work and the individual contributions that they make towards realising Alison's and Donald's vision of a culture where TEL is embedded in day-to-day academic practice. Of all five case studies that we present, this is the one that was the least in need of support from the CLL initiative, for most of the knowledge and support needed to bring about the progressing strategic change was readily available in-house and was utilised effectively. This is a case of a higher education institution whose participation in a CLL project probably made little impact on its capacity to enhance student learning; that capacity was already there. But what this case analysis has done is reveal something of the conditions and circumstances that make for effective leadership of TEL-focused strategic change – and which we examine in more depth in the final section of this report: a shared vision; committed colleagues; a well-maintained infrastructure; a good knowledge and understanding of learning technologies; a good grasp of the cultural context(s) within which the change must take place; and, most significantly, the full support of senior management, who were visibly championing – and sharing the driving of – the ongoing change effort. Most of these were evidently in fairly abundant supply at Premiership University, and so the value of this case study has been to expose, by implicit contrast, their absence in the HEIs featured in the other case analyses, and to serve as a yardstick against which those case study narratives may be measured.

Case 5: Fighting competing priorities: putting TEL on the institutional agenda

Background: project focus and impetus

For the institutional director of e-learning at Prestigious University, the CLL initiative seemed attractive because it offered the opportunity for introspection and taking stock: 'It was a chance for us to sit back and look at what's happening at institutional level. It was also a chance for us to, sort of, get away from the nine-to-five job, step back a bit and think about what we're doing'. The idea for the specific project to bid for came out of discussion amongst the learning technology support (LTS) team of six: they settled on requesting support for a project focused on three distance learning courses, located in three departments. In consultation with,

and supported by, the respective heads of department, the e-learning director submitted a successful application for support in analysing the needs of students registered on the three courses, and examining ways of better catering for them.

The rationale for the project reflected the LTS team's concern that, since the distance learning courses in question had all been quite recently developed, the academics delivering them may not necessarily have the knowledge and understanding needed to give students the support and service they needed and wanted:

"We've got this very traditional focus on what learning and teaching is. That's not to say that staff aren't doing interesting things, and students aren't, but people spend, kind of, seven hours in lectures and tutorials and things, and then suddenly distance learning was thrown into the mix!"

LTS team member

To better support these academics, the learning technology support team decided it wanted help in translating face-to-face teaching approaches into the kinds of teaching provision that was most appropriate for blended and online courses:

*"We're starting to see tensions appearing in that staff are feeling: well, how can I support these distance learners and can we do things better? but didn't really know how to do it. An example of that was on text book provision; [X] department still orders boxes of text books and posts them out, but that was because they couldn't find an easy way of doing it online and just sending e-books out. And it was all the nonsense about getting the agreements with the suppliers, and does it work on **this** device? and y'know, all the agreements. They couldn't find one person to supply all they needed, and they just didn't have the time to investigate it. So what we wanted was to get someone to come in and, sort of, try and share some of that sector experience and get people looking at: what does the experience of a distance learner look like?"*

LTS team member

With what was, from all accounts, minimal input from the pro-vice-chancellor for student education (one e-learning adviser described the PVC as 'the *official* sponsor' of the project), the LTS team identified the specific issues and questions that it they wanted to be a key focus of the CLL project, including: how could academics teaching the blended learning courses make best use of the limited face-to-face time available to them? How could networks within the student cohort best be developed to promote networked learning? Should the current policy of postal distribution of textbooks be retained, or are there more efficient means of distributing set texts? Do distance learning students want e-delivery of set texts, or do they prefer to receive hard-copy books? If e-format books are introduced, should they be in standard format, or compatible with students' own diverse devices?

An online learning expert consultant was assigned to work with those who had principally worked on the CLL project bid: the Prestigious University e-learning director and her LTS team.

From survey to strategy? The consultant's role and remit

At the strategic conversation day, it was agreed with the consultant that – as the colleagues had requested in their application – the project would be directed at understanding and evaluating the experiences of their distance learners. The rationale for focusing on this constituency of students was, in part, that they were often excluded from other institutional feedback mechanisms; as one member of the LTS team pointed out: 'those are the students that we tend to miss out in most of our institutional surveys, and if we've got pain points and focus groups they don't get involved'.

The answers to many of the key questions (presented above) identified by the LTS team lay, in the main, not with staff delivering online learning, but with students themselves – those registered on the three distance learning courses. It was decided that, bringing externality and objectivity that was likely to encourage candour and honesty, the consultant would survey the student cohorts, work with the LTS team on analysing the data, and advise them how to address the implications of the findings. This was to be a qualitative survey, aimed at uncovering students' lived experiences: what it felt like to be a Prestigious University distance learner.

Yet the project was also intended to go beyond the confines of examining the university's limited distance learning provision; a ripple effect was anticipated to raise the profile of distance learning within the institutional teaching and learning strategy and, from this, to raise awareness at senior management level of the potential of TEL, and to kick-start a TEL-focused strategic change initiative. The consultant was expected to advise on how best to promote such awareness. Indeed, the e-learning director had hoped that, simply by meeting with and talking to the consultant, the different constituencies participating in the strategic conversation might take away with them a heightened recognition of the importance of TEL:

"Just the fact that you come from somewhere else gives you a very different – or people interact in a different way – and also the fact that you're coming here just for one morning. So, y'know, other people will come and change their diary for that meeting because they've only got that one chance to talk, whereas they'll put other people off within the institution."

E-learning director

Uncovering the prestigious university distance learner

So, after what the CLL consultant described as 'a really well-structured [strategic conversation] day, seeing a variety of staff and students giving a variety of perspectives', the survey design went ahead. It had always been emphasised that the data gathered from students should convey a real sense of their experiences and attitudes. The outcome was a series of focus groups with distance learning students, and separate ones with staff who delivered distance learning courses:

"So we had, sort of, collaborative-type sessions running when we weren't present...well, actually, no that's not true, they were run through the CLL project, but we were there to provide a bit of context and just, sort of, to translate some of the local things. ... But we backed off, and we certainly didn't lead it."

LTS team member

The LTS team found the findings very enlightening. They were struck by the lack of communication between the three distance learning courses: 'essentially, we had three discrete groups doing distance learning in their own way and not really communicating' (LTS team member).

In relation to the principal focus of the survey – student perspectives – and the answers to some of the key questions they had hoped the project would address, the team acknowledged that the qualitative survey yielded 'a rich picture of distance learners' experiences, delivered in their own words' (e-learning director). More specifically, the focus groups revealed that Prestigious University's distance learning students recognise the calibre and experience of their cohort peers and, as a result, they appreciate activities that exploit this as a resource, particularly where such activities are preceded by ice-breaking events or situations, such as residential, face-to-face, participative events; effectively, it emerged that the students would like more socialisation incorporated into course delivery, and many of them expressed a keenness to have access to the course alumni networks, rather than be confined to interacting only with their cohort peers.

Students also apparently attach greater value to personal, real-time encounters, such as live webinars, than to highly polished content:

"The [online learning] materials have a corporate feel, so, a lot of the videos are green-screened and they've got the university crest and things, and so they look consistent from time to time. Not necessarily always what the students want. I think that some of the feedback we've got was: they don't want it to be quite as polished if it means it's not as personal. And they prefer the warts and all the coughs and sneezes if it's the person they know, and it's up to date, rather than the BBC production qualities."

LTS team member

In relation to support materials, the consensus was that students were impressed with the breadth of content available, which was often significantly greater than what had been available to them as undergraduates. Yet, although e-texts had been piloted, many students expressed a preference for retaining hard-copy texts, not least because of concerns that no single tool was available in all countries that could display content from every publisher, allowing them to highlight and annotate text and share comments with their peers.

Widened perspectives and ways forward: the benefits of the CLL project

Prestigious University's e-learning director identified considerable value in the CLL project. Asked to quantify it in terms of the benefits it yielded, she unhesitatingly responded 'I'd give it nine out of 10!'. The basis of her enthusiasm related to the insights the project had uncovered into how distance learners could be better supported, and, in turn, how she and her team could better support the academics delivering the programmes – for the focus group interviews with academics had also identified staff development issues that needed addressing. Distance learning, she felt, had now been placed on the agenda for institutional attention and development – on the pro-vice-chancellor's radar. More specifically, she (the e-learning director) discerned the emergence of a wider perspective on what constitutes distance learning and which students should be categorised as distance learners:

"And so, from that [the CLL project], we've got a range of issues now where we have regular distance learning meetings, and we've realised that a lot of staff have broadened their definition of what is distance learning. So, we were just thinking about [distance learners] as people who are never on site, but, actually, last month we ran a distance learning workshop and we had staff from chemistry, and modern languages, and things, and they've said, 'Well, we've got distance learners ... we've got students on placement, or who will go away and do a language abroad'. And some of them were saying, 'We think students are distance learners when they leave our lectures or our seminars, and we need to support those as well'. So that's been very positive. And it started us [the LTS team] thinking more about the technologies that we need to support them, but, more so, just making sure they're involved in the decision-making process. So things like, when we're looking at upgrading software or the provision of tools, we now make sure that distance learners are one of the groups that we have to approach, and make sure that our solution will help them too."

E-learning director

As what was essentially an information-gathering exercise, Prestigious University's CLL project did not culminate in a high-profile, tangible output whose benefits or potential were clearly visible – as might have occurred, under different circumstances, with the output of the team featured in case 1. Its value lay in its contribution to the professional development of at least two constituencies of staff: academics and learning technologists involved in distance learning provision or support. More tellingly, as the e-learning director emphasised, without the CLL participation, these issues – and the consensual commitment to addressing them – would almost certainly not have emerged. She attributed much of the project's success to the CLL consultant, and was explicitly appreciative of her (the consultant's) role, particularly her handling of the focus groups:

"[The consultant] just had a really good manner, in that she didn't come in as 'I know everything', but she managed, whether it was talking with students or staff, to just let them speak, and I think that really worked well. And had it been a different consultant, y'know, maybe it would've been a six or seven [that I graded the project]. I think we're just lucky, or it was well matched higher up, that the fit with her, and the way our staff and students wanted to talk, was very good. So she pulled out a lot of information."

E-learning director

In common with so many of our research participants' evaluations of their respective CLL projects, the Prestigious University group identified – confirming the expectations they had expressed earlier – the consultant's externality and objectivity as key benefits: 'Actually, I think some of them [focus group members] were probably happy because it was someone external. I think they felt [the consultant] had more validity' (LTS team member).

Yet, though it had been hailed as a great success, the CLL project had been expected to yield institutional benefits that went beyond the enhancement of the university's distance learning provision. Hopes had been expressed, particularly by the LTS team, of a ripple effect that would propel TEL towards a much higher position on the institutional strategic change agenda than it had hitherto occupied. For the most part, it seemed, these were to become forlorn hopes.

Competing priorities: barriers to a TEL strategic change initiative

The much hoped-for agenda-shifting CLL legacy apparently failed to materialise. The e-learning director expressed her disappointment and frustration at the slow progress being made in updating the university's e-learning strategy. The key problems, she felt, were that the pro-vice-chancellor for student education was not fully on board. Moreover, underlying this ambivalence on the part of senior management, was the university's preoccupation with what was clearly a competing priority: research. A member of the LTS team remarked, 'we're a research-led university, so research always trumps teaching'; another complained: 'the digital learning instrument is not very high up the university priority':

Interviewer: “For all this work that you’re doing – not just on the CLL, but in technology-enhanced learning generally – do you feel you’ve got support from up above?”

E-learning director: “Candidly, I don’t think there’s enough, no.”

More specifically, the e-learning director conveyed her interpretation of the pro-vice-chancellor’s stance on TEL, as it had been expressed in an interview with him, as part of the CLL project:

*“The PVC’s view was that learning technologies should be just like a utility; so – you go into a room, there’s a switch, you turn it on, the tech works, y’know, your projector works, you can project from this to screen – and that’s it! And that was a disappointing response really for me, y’know. It’s **not** just an add-on. And I don’t really think we’ve engaged in – well, OK, the needs of our learners are changing, their experiences are changing, the availability of information is changing; how do we need to adapt our teaching and learning to fit that? And where does technology have a role to play? So I think we’re not good at seeing the big picture. ... And there’s not really an individual who’s at the right level, driving ... or really arguing, that technology-enhanced learning position. So, that’s a problem.”*

E-learning director

The pro-vice-chancellor failed to respond to our request for an interview, so we are unable to present his perspective, but the e-learning director’s interpretation is evidently shared by others. The CLL consultant, for example, observed:

“I got the impression that learning technology was seen as a bolt-on, something that either had to be done, or was done solely at the discretion of individuals. ... There are some pockets of enthusiasm, and excellent practice, but I couldn’t see where these were shared, or where they were highlighted, or otherwise used for inspiration. The learning technologists and e-learning director demonstrated they had an excellent understanding of both technology and how it should be applied to support pedagogy. They seemed reflective and scholarly in their approach. However, for whatever reason, at several times during the day even the enthusiasts in the departments articulated in some subtle way – or, occasionally, more directly – that the LTS team were ‘tech support’ or ‘administrative’, and they didn’t use them for more strategic advice on the use of tech in learning. ... This may be a limiting factor when it comes to the PVC student education’s vision of technology disappearing into use; he told me, ‘Technology is just something that’s there, that we use.’”

CLL consultant

Similarly, an academic from one of the three departments that ran distance learning programmes – though not a member of its distance learning academic team – corroborated the perception that there was no senior institutional TEL champion:

*“There are individual [TEL] initiatives going on [across the university], in a kind of small, entrepreneurial way. And I think, organisationally, that’s because there isn’t a clear...I don’t see a clear champion in the university whose role it is to make that happen. For example, MOOCs – yeah, we’ve heard of them, y’know. Is anyone doing one at the moment? I haven’t heard of anyone doing them. There **might** be, but there’s not...well ... at the moment I don’t see any organisational lead from someone who would try. There is a PVC for student education, but he doesn’t like them [MOOCs]; he’s a physicist – a very nice person – but he doesn’t think in that way.”*

Academic

Unaware of any TEL or e-learning institutional strategy – ‘No, there isn’t that kind of strategic direction’ – a senior professor shared the perception that the message cascaded down from senior management was that research is the pre-eminent institutional focus and priority and everything else must come lower down the pecking order. The issue, he observed, was that since teaching was generally considered effective, there was no perceived imperative to embrace TEL in a coherent or systematic manner: only if and when the university became aware of being left behind other research-intensive universities in this respect, he surmised, was there likely to be a TEL strategic change initiative:

*“The whole emphasis is on the REF, and research, and doing all that. And the quality of teaching at Prestigious [University] is good on the whole, and people have a high degree of expertise and they’re quite imaginative in the way they design programmes in, kind of, conventional analogue ways. ... [It’s a case of:] ‘What’s broken?’ Y’know, ‘Why do we **need** to bring in this digital thing?’”*

Professor

Perceptions of such institutional complacency about teaching enhancement – and problems it posed for getting TEL onto the agenda – were shared by the LTS team:

“One of the problems we’ve got is all our departments, I think, are rated in the top 10 for teaching, which is really unusual, and a bit of a surprise in some ways. Does that mean they’re the top 10 best at teaching and learning? No, I don’t think it does; I just think it means that the students are happy.”

LTS team member

Mobilising the student voice: the e-learning director strikes back

The CLL project at Prestigious University brought mixed fortunes. In many respects the e-learning director’s satisfaction with it was justified: in terms of uncovering the ‘lived experience’ of the Prestigious University distance learning student, it was an unqualified success; the staff and student focus groups yielded a wealth of data that the LTS team then put to good use in supporting and initiating enhancements and improvements to the design and delivery of the three distance learning programmes. Moreover, widened interpretations of what counts as distance learning resulted in the CLL project benefits reaching more people – staff and students alike – than had initially been anticipated.

But then the benefits, instead of gathering momentum, came up against too many barriers to continue on a trajectory that would take them as far as the university’s senior management and its change agenda, and they ground to a halt. The barriers were a combination of complacency about teaching effectiveness and a commitment to the (largely TEL-light) *status quo*, underpinned by a lack of managerial will to embrace the digital revolution and recognise its potential. The strategic change initiative that the LTS team had dared to hope for remained an unrealised aspiration. The current teaching and learning strategy, the e-learning director lamented, was woefully inadequate:

*“Well, Prestigious University had – and still has – the, sort of...the tumbleweed strategy that was written at the time it was required to release Hefce funding, and it was written by a committee, carefully done to make sure that we could do **anything** – y’know, they didn’t commit anyone to anything, really. So there’s some nice aspirations ... but it’s of no use really; it doesn’t say what we want; it doesn’t define how e-learning fits into our vision of what it’s like to be a student at Prestigious, and what’s important, and whether we’re trying to use the technology to meet particular teaching goals. It just says: ‘Oh, we’ll try and be the best, and use the best’, y’know – great! ‘And we’ll be a world-class university’.”*

E-learning director

But the e-learning director was apparently not one to give up easily. Whilst a less determined warrior may have been deflated and demotivated at having had his/her advances blocked, she and her team regrouped and decided to employ different tactics in the battle for Prestigious University’s TEL strategic development. They realised the potential of a valuable weapon: student opinion. As one LTS team member observed: ‘I think the only way we’re going to persuade staff to change their teaching habits, or get some credibility for trying to do that, is if you’ve got the evidence base to do it’.

What ensued was a project devised by the LTS team to systematically seek the views of students from across the whole university, on their learning and study-related experiences. Employing students to run student focus groups and report back their findings, the team hoped that the data gathered through this exercise would provide the ammunition needed to fight the complacency that underpinned resistance to change and scepticism about TEL. The e-learning director outlines the key findings of project Students Speaking:

“So, from that [project], yes, we did bring out some common themes. And a lot of it was: ‘Yes, we want lecture capture’ – because Prestigious University still doesn’t provide that. ... And there was generally a claim for more consistency. ... And we can say [the project] was robust because we’ve got the statistics to show that it’s representative of the cohort as a whole, and also we’ve managed to retain the students’ own words. ... And there’s nothing more powerful than going to an academic and saying, ‘Well, look, this is what the students said’. ... And if you can do that then suddenly you knock people, y’know, you pull the rug out from under their feet, and it’s a good counter to this wonderful, ‘Well, we’re in the top 10 for everything’.”

E-learning director

The Students Speaking project represents a bottom-up attempt, on the part of a resourceful and enthusiastic potential change agent, to circumvent the barriers that had been placed in her way as she tried to promote the wider take-up of TEL and put it on her university's strategic change agenda. It was a postscript to the CLL project, and it was one of its legacies. What progress it will achieve at Prestigious University remains to be seen; it is early days, but the last time we spoke to her, the e-learning director was optimistic about the waves it was making in some quarters. Most significantly, it had succeeded in putting TEL on the agenda of the university's teaching and learning committee. In the right fora, it seems, the student voice has the capacity to reverberate loudly.

The student voice

“I think it would be nice for the institution to actually do a lot more market research on what the students are thinking and how they behave, because I think we’ve got internal models of what the students do and how they act, but I think they’re based on suspicion rather than actually hearing their voices.”

TEL champion, Premiership University

Student participation was intended as a core feature of the CLL initiative; a requirement that was made explicit on much of the official CLL documentation that passed between the Leadership Foundation (representing the partners, listed above, that delivered the initiative) and the institutions participating in the programme. On the form, Outline for the Strategic Consultancy Conversation (which institutional representatives were required to submit in advance of the strategic conversation meetings), signalling an unambiguously expressed expectation, section 4 was headed: ‘What scope will there be for the consultant to engage with students (it is an essential requirement to include this in the planned conversations)?’ Similarly, on the post-strategic conversation feedback form that CLL consultants were required to complete, section 3 (on student engagement) included three key questions to be addressed in the report: ‘How did students engage in the conversation?’; ‘What key issues arose?’; and ‘How will they continue to be engaged?’.

Despite this explicit requirement, we found student engagement in CLL projects to have been patchy. Often it was minimal. It seemed that, if indeed they had been included in their institutions’ strategic conversations, in many cases, student representatives had thereafter had little or no further consultative involvement in the ensuing projects. In this respect, then – and evidently for practical reasons rather than out of more sinister motives – a key tenet of the spirit of the CLL initiative often became overshadowed or ignored. Students, it seems – and this impression is strongly supported by the evidence not only of our own experiences (related above) of trying to engage students in our research, but also by the data (presented below) provided by the students whom we did eventually manage to ‘pin down’ and interview – have, for the most part, no real appetite for involvement in strategic decision-making in relation to TEL.

This section focuses on the student voice in relation not only to the CLL initiative and its legacy, but also to TEL more generally. We entirely support the ideology underpinning the drive for – the insistence on – student involvement in the CLL initiative, for the learning that the initiative was intended to support and enhance is theirs. To omit them from, or limit their involvement in, the TEL discourse therefore seriously risks undermining its authenticity and value by telling, at best, only half a story. As the e-learning director at Prestigious University (featured in case 5, presented above) evidently understood, institutional staff – whether they be academics or academic-related support staff – cannot be certain of knowing precisely what students want, and why:

“We realised that there wasn’t enough drive from the students about what the learning experience is. Staff had a view of what they wanted it to be, but we didn’t really have the measures to know whether we were achieving it, and we didn’t know whether it was what the students wanted.”

e-learning director, Prestigious University

Similarly, Improved University’s Centre for Academic Practice (CAP) director, Danny (see case 3), remarked:

“When you develop your strategy for enhancing the student learning experience, unless you have ways of...communicating with students about priorities – shared priorities – if you’re not careful, you might be putting the emphasis in the wrong place.”

Danny, director of CAP

Below, we present and analyse our findings relating to students’ perceptions. These represent two main sources of data, gathered through one-to-one interviews (as described in the research design and method section, above):

- ‘second-hand’ data in the form of staff interpretations of students’ perceptions
- data obtained directly from students themselves.

We include the first category because, in the early data collection period when we struggled to identify and recruit student participants, we had to settle on the next best option available to us: seeking the views of our institutional employee interviewees on their students' perspectives and perceptions. Whilst we accept that these 'second-hand' interpretations of the preferences, priorities and motivations of another constituency potentially represent less authenticity than views obtained 'from the horse's mouth', we nevertheless feel that some of them incorporate an incisiveness and reflectivity that are lacking from most of the data obtained directly from students. Many of the 'second-hand' interpretations ring true insofar as they are consistent with established theoretical perspectives on human agency and motivation; moreover, they generally do not contradict our student participants' views. There is mileage, we decided, in presenting them as one of several pieces of the jigsaw that, when completed, would present a colourful and informative picture of the strengths, weaknesses, and nature of technology-enhanced learning provision in English HEIs.

But, whilst the term 'TEL' serves as neat shorthand for the multiple ways in which 'new' technologies are applied to the processes of educating students, we consider it important to scrutinise what, in the context of our research, is a key word within that term: *enhanced* – for interpreting its meaning is central to addressing the first of our two research questions: What is the extent and nature of *enhancements* to the student experience contributed by CLL projects and by technology-enhanced learning more generally? As Trowler et al rightly point out, 'enhancement' is 'much used but rarely defined, within the HE sector'³⁶; moreover, the absence of a consensual conceptualisation is problematic: 'It is not evident that a shared understanding has been developed in higher education of what constitutes an *enhancement* of the student learning experience'³⁷.

Certainly, definitions of 'enhancement' (in the context of higher education) may be found, but many are not applicable to our research – often because they are too contextually specific. Whilst they pass it off as 'wide', Roxå and Mårtensson's definition of enhancement in education, for example, is in fact narrow in being applicable only to specific elements of students' lives – 'Quality enhancement of education should here be understood in its widest form: everything that the University does or stands for which influences the students' learning and personal development in becoming professionals and good citizens'³⁸. This definition also falls short by omitting any reference to amelioration – of *value* being added to learners' experiences³⁹; the authors refer to 'influences' on students' learning and professional development, without apparently appreciating that influence is not necessarily perceived as an improvement, and may even be 'bad' or negative.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) presents a similarly narrow definition that, understandably specific to the QAA's mission and purpose, has limited applicability to our research: 'Enhancement is defined by QAA for the purposes of review as taking deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of learning opportunities'⁴⁰. Certainly, there is implicit reference to *improvement's* being a necessary condition for enhancement, but beyond the context of QAA reviewing and standards, we do not consider enhancements necessarily to be achievable only through deliberate effort; they could feasibly occur incidentally or accidentally.

In settling on an appropriate conceptualisation or interpretation, we adopt the definition of enhancement chosen by Paul Trowler and his co-authors: 'an increase or improvement in *quality, value, or extent*'⁴¹, which succinctly conveys our concern that enhancement must represent or lead to what is perceived as a 'better' situation or set of conditions or circumstances than existed before the change occurred that is labelled 'enhancement'. The problem is, perceptions of what counts as improvement, or an increase in quality, value or extent will inevitably differ. What a senior management team may consider an improvement, for example, may in other quarters be perceived as undesirable or as a retrograde step – some academics' opposition to or scepticism about the roll-out of lecture capture facilities in their universities is a topical example of such mismatch. We therefore extend the conceptualisation borrowed from Trowler et al by incorporating within it a *subjective* determination of whether quality, value or extent have increased or improved; in other words, as long as enhancement is perceived by *someone* as having occurred – even if this perception is not shared by others – the necessary condition for its identification will have been met.

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- 36 Trowler, P., Ashwin, P. & Saunders, M. (2014). The role of HEFCE in teaching and learning enhancement: a review of evaluative evidence. York: Higher Education Academy (pp6–7).
- 37 Kirkwood, A. & Price, L. (2014). Technology-enhanced learning and teaching in higher education: what is 'enhanced' and how do we know? A critical literature review. *Learning, Media and Technology* 39(1): 6–36 (p6) (original emphasis).
- 38 Roxå, T. & Mårtensson, K. (2011). Understanding strong academic microcultures – an exploratory study. Lund: University of Lund (p7).
- 39 Kirkwood, A. & Price, L. (2014). Technology-enhanced learning and teaching in higher education: what is 'enhanced' and how do we know? A critical literature review. *Learning, Media and Technology* 39(1): 6–36.
- 40 Quality Assurance Agency (2014). Higher Education Review (Plus): a handbook for alternative providers undergoing review in 2014-15. Gloucester: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, July 2014 (p27).
- 41 Trowler, P., Ashwin, P. & Saunders, M. (2014). The role of HEFCE in teaching and learning enhancement: a review of evaluative evidence. York: Higher Education Academy (p6).

Yet ascertaining whether enhancement has occurred is further complicated by consideration of the *extent* to which it has occurred, for, like Trowler et al, we accept that there are *degrees* of enhancement, which include a tipping point, at which point enhancement becomes something else. So it is not necessarily a simple ‘either-or’ condition that is either there or is absent, or that has occurred or has not occurred; we share the conceptualisation of enhancement ‘as a continuum which shades from limited into more radical change, at which point it ceases to be enhancement and becomes reinvention’⁴².

What degree of enhancement? Melody and descant delivering a polyphony of ‘student voice’

What nature and degree of enhancement – so defined and interpreted – of the student experience were identified by our research participants? We present our findings below, in two sections, each relating to the source of data: staff or students. Applying an analogy of medieval music, in which a *descant* was achieved by one singer’s *melody* accompanied with improvisations from other singers, our intention in drawing upon data derived from two constituencies is to present the student voice first through a *polyphony*: two or more simultaneous lines of independent melody, which, through our summative analysis, we then merge into a single-voice *monophony* that is aimed at explaining the bases of, and the factors that influence, students’ attitudes.

The descant: staff interpretations of students’ perceptions

The staff whom we interviewed shared with us their interpretations of students’ perceptions and evaluations of various elements and aspects of TEL. These fall into two broad categories: those that were impressionistic and based on experience of having interacted with students, and those derived directly from various forms of student feedback, both formal and informal. Three very broad, overlapping, issues were identified as key, either because they were believed to matter to students, or because they were offered as explanations for what motivates students: *consistency of provision*, *meeting expectations* and *relationships*.

Consistency of provision

A recurring observation was that students value consistency. The point was made by several of our interviewees that consultation with student representatives – often (but not exclusively) in the forum of the CLL strategic conversations – revealed a key source of dissatisfaction to be inconsistent TEL provision across faculties or departments, or for comparable programme cohorts. Frustration was believed to occur if, for example, within one degree programme, submission of, and/or feedback on, coursework was available electronically for some modules but not for others, or if some module tutors allowed their lectures to be recorded and made available to students, while other tutors were resistant or hostile to the idea of lecture capture. Any progress in reducing inconsistency, it was argued, was therefore regarded by students as an enhancement. One of our interviewees – an e-learning support director – summed up student feedback data gathered in her pre-1992 university: ‘A lot of it was: “Yes, we want lecture capture” – because we still don’t provide that. And there was generally a claim for more consistency’. Another interviewee – an academic developer – summarised the key issues raised by students in his institution’s CLL strategic conversation:

“The students gave us some examples of where it was working really, really well, but then, at the same time, they would say that on the same course – there were two students who were on science courses, and one of their particular lecturers embraced technology and would always post lectures in advance and make as many resources available to students in advance of the lecture as possible...encourage the use of mobile devices in lectures, would use technology well...and then another lecturer on the same course would ban the use of learning technologies – refused to post his lectures in advance. So, [the strategic conversation] was good in that it communicated to us in no uncertain terms that we had basic issues to address, as a staff, if we were going to avoid being beaten up by the students because our practice was so inconsistent.”

Yet the consistency issue is not as simple and straightforward as it may seem, for, according to our interviewees, it does not apply across all subjects. It is not a question of needing to ensure consistency across the board within an institution – a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, without regard to specific, subject-based norms and epistemic cultures; as Trowler observes ‘the academic’s modus operandi is conditioned ... by epistemology at both the disciplinary and sub-disciplinary level’⁴³. Illustrating perfectly the subjectivity issue that we refer to above, and that complicates consideration of what counts as enhancement, students of some subjects were represented as feeling that certain TEL initiatives were inappropriate for their subject, and that to apply them would be unhelpful. A specific example is mathematics students. The point was made by four of our staff interviewees – who were either mathematics academics themselves, or claimed to know and understand the issues raised by mathematics

42 *ibid* (pp6–7).

43 Trowler, P.R. (1998). *Academics responding to change: New higher education frameworks and academic cultures*. Buckingham: Open University Press (p57).

academics and, apparently, mathematics students – that mathematics teaching at higher education level does not lend itself easily to certain aspects of TEL, which, if imposed, risked undermining the quality of undergraduate mathematics education. It was pointed out that the most effective means of teaching many aspects of mathematics involves the tutor's explaining to the class her/his thought processes, whilst writing up calculations on a blackboard, which students then copy down (or photograph on their smartphones). This was summed up by an interviewee who, though not himself a mathematics academic, did have a mathematics degree: 'Maths is actually something of a performance art, strangely. In the process of seeing someone work through the material, it's rather like learning with a great musician; you learn from the gesture and from the thinking'.

The rationale for the standard blackboard approach was explained by mathematics lecturer, Laura, who, by the standards that prevail in her subject, is very TEL-focused; she makes video recordings that she uploads onto the VLE, for example, and flips lectures:

"If you're going to do maths live, in front of students – which is the only way they're going to be able to follow your thought processes, and therefore learn it – you just need to write it. And, yes, we could move to writing it on something other than a board in such a way that they can still see it. But, to be honest, doing it on the blackboard has worked for a long time and works very well. There are moments, yes, where it would be great to just get out some sort of 3-D visualising thing and show them what a surface looks like, and I can see people moving towards a little bit of that. But 95% of the time we're just going to be doing stuff on the board, and it works. So, in a sense, we don't really need interventions; and that's the overall feeling in the department – if we don't need this, why push it on us? and stop taking our blackboards away!"

Laura, mathematics lecturer, pre-1992, research-focused university

Asked if students shared this perspective, she responded:

"When they've been here for a while, yes. But the new first-years were going, 'Well, we were told that there would be recordings of all of our lectures; where are they?' I think they come with no specific expectations, and then we tailor them to think what we think, really. And it's a question of who gets to them first and sets their expectations. I don't think they really have enough context to compare."

Laura, mathematics lecturer

Other interviewees corroborated this interpretation that mathematics students accept TEL provision to be contingent upon what works within the subject and its epistemic cultures and norms. A learning technologist, for example, drew upon evidence from his institution's student feedback surveys:

"We did have that comment come up [in our feedback surveys], that some of the [maths] students were supportive [of their department's way of teaching], and I think they like the idea of understanding that was part of what being a mathematician was, was standing up and writing equations and seeing how people think. They understand the seminar environment, they understand lectures, and some of them were advocating the benefits of chalk and talk."

Learning technologist, pre-1992, research-focused university

Other subjects – including theoretical physics, chemistry, and subjects that include a focus on molecular structures – were identified as requiring similar 'chalk-and-talk' delivery methods. But a key point – one that we discuss below – was raised by mathematics lecturer, Laura, quoted above: 'I also think we get happy students because our students tend to do quite well'.

Meeting expectations

Two points about students' expectations frequently and repeatedly emerged from our interviews with institutional employees: first, that students' expectations are, on the whole, reasonable and measured; and, second, that their expectations are linked to convenience value.

Asked what benefits to students' lives – to the student experience, overall – TEL offered, and what the rationale was for prioritising it, our interviewees invariably spoke of expectations. Young people today, it was pointed out, have grown up and live in a digital environment; they employ social media and new technologies as part and parcel of their everyday lives, and they expect similar kinds of facilities to be available to them at university, particularly if they live off campus. The director of the learning technology

unit at a Russell Group university, for example, summarised the findings from the university's student feedback surveys over the last few years: 'The message was coming on quite strong from the students that e-learning and that online environment was an important part of their learning experience'. Students want the convenience, it was generally felt by our research participants, of being able to access campus facilities remotely, 24 hours a day. One interviewee referred to his own daughter:

"She's reading Spanish at [X] University, and she identifies the accessibility of learning resources as more important than the quality of teaching, because – she might have had a different perspective as a first-year student – but now, whether she's in a bedroom in her house, or in the library, she wants to be able to access those resources when she wants, and then she wants everything to run smoothly – management and organisation. And after that, she'd put [as her priority] some support from an individual – in other words, a module tutor. In other words, she recognises that she can get the resources – if everything works: if the VLE's operable and things are open when she needs them to be – then, after that, it's talking to someone she needs to [talk to]. ... certainly, if you focus on her learning experience, she wants to know that the way she works is catered for."

Similarly, where technology is perceived as making students' lives easier, it was identified as a facility that they valued:

"A new module descript[ion] will have reading lists automatically generated. All the feedback from students is wonderful. ... Why? It takes out some of the work for students in relation to finding materials. Student feedback on that is good."

CLL project lead, post-1992 university

Yet there was also a prevalent sense that students are, for the most part, not overly demanding, and that, despite representing a constituency that is technologically engaged in their personal lives, they were quite reasonable in not necessarily expecting their entire higher education learning environments to match the levels of digital engagement they enjoy outside the lecture theatre. Mathematics lecturer, Laura, who is quoted above as saying, 'I think they come with no specific expectations ... it's a question of who gets to them first and sets their expectations' made a valid point; as we discuss below, expectations can be manipulated and shaped, and much depends on timing.

A similar point was made by a learning technologist employed in a post-1992, teaching-focused university:

*"I walk around campus, and hear students talking, and it's: 'Oh, yeah, yeah – it's on the VLE'; and it's almost as if providing resources online is a given. And if they're **not** there, **that's** when they start talking about it. I think you only hear from students if they're not satisfied. One of the things I've noticed – and this came out of the CLL, too – is that students' expectations are fairly low. As long as they can access resources online they don't necessarily want to be doing all these different activities, and online blogs, wikis, whatever."*

Learning technologist, post-1992, teaching-focused university

The view that students have low expectations was shared by a CLL project lead – also from a post-1992 university – who had been impressed with the maturity and reasonableness of students who had participated in the strategic conversation:

"They were very reasonable in their expectations; they said, 'We don't expect the same level of engagement with technology-enhanced learning because there are people here who just don't have the skills to use it'. And they were saying, 'There are some people who use it really badly, and so it's better that they use pedagogies that they're comfortable with, as opposed to trying to do it in a particular way'."

CLL project lead, post-1992 university

Explaining the reason for his institution's use of Facebook to engage with students, a deputy vice-chancellor from a post-1992 university felt that, whilst they welcomed the convenience of combining all of their technological engagement within one place – their own social virtual spaces – students also wanted assurance that the line separating their personal social media engagement from their university-related exchanges should not become blurred to the point of invading their privacy and encroaching upon their other, social, selves:

"I spend a lot of time with the students union, talking to them about how students use technology in their learning lives. ... So my view is that the students don't really want me to engage in their social life, but when they engage in Facebook or anything else, they would also quite like to be able to access their learning live without me knowing what's going on."

Deputy vice-chancellor, post-1992 university

Some interviewees challenged the view that students necessarily expect – or want – learning environments that offer state-of-the-art technological facilities:

"We have a large proportion of students who don't necessarily walk around glued to their smartphone and asking for the next engaged technology session. And I think we probably have a large number of students who want to come and engage and participate on campus in classrooms."

Pro-vice-chancellor, post-1992 university

Yet the point was also made that, even for students who choose to engage in, or manifest a preference for, face-to-face contact as the predominant course delivery mode, TEL is nevertheless valued for the convenience it offers:

*"I've always been strongly of the view that, despite the fact that our students choose to come here because – at least the ones that we do recruit – [they] are happy to come along for face-to-face teaching, that you're never going to have students that are **disappointed** that you've put a lot of useful materials online for them, especially ones that are incredibly busy and are cramming more things into their life than they really have time for, because, y'know, this is the kind of thing that might help someone to scrape through rather than fail."*

Learning technologist, pre-1992 university

In identifying personal contact and face-to-face engagement as a potential priority for students, the pro-vice-chancellor quoted above implied that human interaction and relationships are a key consideration for many of his institution's students, and indeed relationships were included by several of our interviewees in their assessments of what matters to students in their learning environments.

Relationships

In contrast to the claim made by an interviewee (quoted above) that his daughter appreciates the convenience of effective technological facilities more than interaction with course tutors, teaching fellow, Robert (who features in case 4) argued that building relationships is of paramount concern to students – and, moreover, goes hand-in-hand with the technologies that he embraces in his teaching:

*"One thing I do – which is very weird, I know; even my students think it's a bit creepy – is, I learn all my students' names by the end of the second week – [there are] 100-plus students. So I can say in the first lecture, 'Hi, y'know, Hardeep, what do you think about this?'; 'Peter, you think of something'. But that allies to the flipped lectures; it means that my sessions can start out with immediately maximum impact. Wherever it goes after that, there's an immediate impact [on students]: [they think] this guy is here, he **cares** about us ... he's looking at us. It's two-way; it's the trust, it's also that they know they're not gonna just mess around; they know this is a serious intellectual endeavour. So it's all those kind of bigger, softer, more old-fashioned, things which, actually, I was using the leverage in the technology I do. It's not about the **technology**, it's about the **people**. It's about giving to the students what I think university education should be, and using the technology as best I can in my very clumsy way to do that."*

Robert, teaching fellow and TEL champion, pre-1992 university

But incorporating consideration of relationships with students into TEL is not confined to learning their names and manifesting a concern for their welfare and well-being; it may also be demonstrated through a concern that, in introducing them and providing them with access to technologies, institutional staff are contributing towards enhancing the student learning experience by enriching students' lives through offering convenience and easier paths through to graduation. A learning technologist explained:

*"I don't wanna even make it sound like I think this is simply a matter of meeting expectations, because I think it's also about giving [students] a better experience, giving them more flexibility around **when** they're going to be able to do things...making less wasted journeys here that are only because they need to get something from the library, or they need to hand in a physical assignment – things like that that are really unnecessary – because if their reading is digitised, or their assignment can be uploaded online, then that's a whole bunch of hours of their life they've got back."*

Learning technologist, pre-1992 university

Staff perceptions, then, convey an image of a tolerant student body that is reasonable in its expectations of TEL provision, particularly where subject norms and epistemic cultures are resistant to digital technologies. This is an image of a student body that is slow to criticise, and tends to do so only when expectations remain unmet. For the most part it is also an image that, our findings show, is corroborated by that presented by students themselves.

The melody: student perspectives in their own words

Since precisely what is meant by TEL remains contested in the discourse in the field⁴⁴, to maximise construct validity⁴⁵, every interview with a student began with a brief explanation of what we mean by 'technology-enhanced learning' – that we apply the term widely, to include the use of 'new' or digital technologies not only to course delivery and students' learning, but also to the administrative-related elements of their study-related lives, such as coursework submission and feedback and communications with, and information circulated by, university staff. Interviewees were then asked to evaluate, overall, the TEL provision at their institutions.

Responses were generally and broadly positive (with occasional qualifications diluting the positivity), indicating a student body that, on the whole, is relatively satisfied with the TEL facilities and provision that they encounter. These findings are consistent with those of studies that incorporate a focus on student satisfaction more widely⁴⁶.

The following are illustrative of our interviewees' comments:

"I'd say [the TEL facilities] are reasonably good."

Female postgraduate student, social sciences, pre-1992 university

"I would rate the TEL provision at [my university] as good."

Male undergraduate student, social sciences, pre-1992 university

"I'm very satisfied with the TEL here, yes."

Female undergraduate student, science, post-1992 university

"The TEL facilities aren't bad, but I don't think they're fantastic."

Male undergraduate student, arts and humanities, post-1992 university

Yet from the vantage point of those student representatives privileged to have a broader perspective – student union sabbatical officers – TEL provision in their institutions was recognised as very variable. The education officer from pre-1992 Premiership University's student union (featured in case 4) described his institution's provision as 'varied' and representing the full spectrum of teaching provision, from technology-enhanced to technology-free; since his comments on this issue are presented in full in the final main section of this report below, we avoid repeating them here. Similarly, the education officer from a post-1992 university's student union highlighted variability as a key feature of his university's provision:

44 Kirkwood, A. & Price, L. (2014). Technology-enhanced learning and teaching in higher education: what is 'enhanced' and how do we know? A critical literature review. *Learning, Media and Technology* 39(1): 6–36.

45 Evans, L. (2002). *Reflective practice in educational research: developing advanced skills*. London: Continuum.

46 Yorke, M. & Longden, B. (2008). *The first-year experience of higher education in the UK: Final report*. York: Higher Education Academy.

“Provision very much varies from faculty to faculty. ... I know flipped lectures are in practice in certain modules across the university⁴⁷ – particularly in the Business School; they’re very screwed on with trying anything new to benefit the students. Then you look across the board, at, say, for example, a history module; that might just be the stereotypical four hours in a lecture room, just sat there, listening, and not doing very much.”

Student union education sabbatical officer, post-1992 university

Consistent with staff perceptions, presented above, convenience emerged as a key factor in students’ evaluations: facilities that make their lives easier are evidently considered enhancements, whilst anything that adds complexity or creates inconvenience is a source of irritation, frustration or dissatisfaction. Many students readily provided examples of convenience-related enhancements; some related to the availability and ease of accessing learning resources:

*“We have Desktop Anywhere, which I never had for my undergraduate degree. And on my course there’s a lot of statistics and I need access to the programs, and it just means I can do it anywhere, basically. I think it is **really** good – just because I don’t run the risk of losing work, because it’s all on the system.”*

Female postgraduate student, psychology, pre-1992 university

“The tutors put everything – all the readings – online. And all the lectures – the PowerPoints – all go on either a day before the lecture or afterwards. I prefer it when they put it on before, because you can print it out and write on it, and that’s really helpful because, in some classes – because there’s so much information – you’re there to listen, rather than to take notes – because you can’t take notes when somebody’s speaking at 100 miles an hour.”

Female undergraduate student, science, post-1992 university

“All of our readings are on the VLE – all of our lecturers make sure that all of the reading is available online. Even if it’s a book it’ll be photocopied; everything’s available online. All the extended reading’s online, as well. I do go to the library, but I probably get most of my reading online.”

Female postgraduate student, social studies, pre-1992 university

Male undergraduate student, management, pre-1992 university: “Materials are normally very well uploaded; all my lecturers upload their slides after their lecture – immediately after – and they upload each week’s readings a week in advance.”

Interviewer: *“And do you actually read them?”*

Student: *“It depends on time constraints. About half the time, maybe, yeah – but I can read them afterwards if I feel the need to.”*

“The library facilities are good. The resources are pretty decent, to be honest; you can access a lot of stuff online. There’s a search engine, and you just type in what you’re looking for and it brings everything up and it’ll come up with articles, and whatever. It is a really helpful tool, actually. And we’ve got a library where I actually go, and there are computers in there as well, and online resources that you can access through them – articles, and things – so it is a good facility. It’s a really useful tool.”

Male student, history, post-1992 university

“Library resources are all very good. E-books and journals are accessed now. The search engine was improved last year and is now a lot easier. Not only can you look for journals, you can also look for e-books. I’d say it’s a really good system. Obviously, I use that alongside Google Scholar. It’s accessible 24/7.”

Female undergraduate student, biology, post-1992 university

Most of our student interviewees enjoyed the benefits of being able to submit coursework electronically:

“We submit our essays exclusively online, through Turnitin. It usually works well. There’ve been some issues with uploading things, but they normally resolve it quite well.”

Female undergraduate student, social sciences, pre-1992 university

⁴⁷ It became evident as the interview with this student progressed that he applied the term ‘flipped lecture’ simply to denote the uploading, in advance of lectures, of PowerPoint slides to be used in the lectures.

"If someone was given the option between manual submission of coursework and something like Turnitin – which we have at this university – people would want Turnitin, where they can check how much of their work is perceived to be plagiarised."

Male student union education sabbatical officer, pre-1992 university

"The advantage of submitting through Turnitin is it checks the word count. They're really strict – you can't go one word over, or you lose 5%!"

Female postgraduate student, social sciences, pre-1992 university

The student union officer at a post-1992 university did, however, highlight problems that he had encountered in trying to submit work through Turnitin at certain times of day, which he linked to the time of day in the USA (though none of the other student interviewees from this same post-1992 university identified problems with online submission):

"You have to avoid submitting at a time when it's the middle of the day in the part of America where our Turnitin system is operated from. If you don't pick your time, you could be in for a long wait. I once submitted when it was night time in America and it took four minutes; another time, when it was the middle of the day in America, it took four hours! It would've been much quicker to have come into the university and handed in a paper copy."

Male student' union education sabbatical officer, pre-1992 university

Lecture capture, or lecture cast – whereby lectures are recorded and the recordings made available to students, usually through having been uploaded onto a VLE – is currently (at the time of our research in 2015) the latest 'big' TEL facility to be incorporated into many UK universities' strategic change initiatives. Whilst it is being rolled out and promoted at the institutional level, with most Russell Group and many other universities having installed the requisite recording equipment in many of their teaching rooms, it has met with controversy⁴⁸; some academics are opposed to or wary of using it, and universities are having to address the issue of how to deal with such resistance.

Yet students are evidently very enthusiastic about lecture capture, even if they have not yet experienced it first-hand, and perceive it as an unqualified (potential) enhancement to their study-related lives. An engineering student outlined what he saw as its key advantages in terms of accessibility of taught content:

"A lot of what the lecturer says during the lecture isn't apparent anywhere in the lecture notes or online anywhere, so there's nowhere else you can access it, and to be successful in your coursework and your exams, you had to have been there. Now, I find I can't work well in the morning – that's because I'm not getting enough sleep, or whatever – and different people work best at different times during the day. So I feel that shoving everyone into a 9am to 10am session, and expecting everyone to absorb the same amount that you'd expect from the best student – I don't think that's a workable model. Having the lecture recorded, you can always go back and check it. ... And some people just can't get there, due to access reasons – they may have extenuating circumstances. There's a much greater number of pros as opposed to the cons."

Male postgraduate student, engineering, pre-1992 university

Similarly, an undergraduate student in a pre-1992 university was appreciative of the flexibility and convenience in terms of attendance that lecture capture offered:

Undergraduate student, pre-1992 university: "Some of the lecturers also use the online system to upload lecture cast – the video and audio recording of the lecture. That has, sort of, inspired me to miss one or two lectures, because you can literally watch the lecture online, and it is quite good if you can't make it."

Interviewer: *"And would you typically watch the lecture quite soon after missing it, or would you wait until just before your exams?"*

Student: *"I'd watch it quite soon after I'd missed it, otherwise, if I went to the next week's lecture I wouldn't get round to watching it, and we didn't have any exam-based marks for that course; it was all essays, so I had to do it during the term; I couldn't leave it to the end."*

An American visiting undergraduate student spending a semester at a UK university commented, without being prompted, on the convenience that lecture capture potentially offers students:

"The one thing I will say is that this [UK] university has lecture cast, which we don't have at my [US Ivy League] home university. None of my courses here have it, but I have friends who have it and they can just watch the lecture online – which seems convenient."

Visiting American undergraduate student, pre-1992 university

And a student union sabbatical officer highlighted academics' under-use of lecture capture as an issue that provokes students' dissatisfaction, and that he is frequently asked to address:

*"I'm sure everyone would say, 'Yes' to lecture cast – pre-recorded lectures. I'm sure they would want live streaming of lectures – that's something the university could explore. The students find it very frustrating and irritating when academics don't use lecture capture – especially when you're in a lecture room where you have the facilities and are not making use of them. I get quite a few emails saying, 'Why don't I have lecture cast?'; and I have a template for my response, because I get so many. I'm aware of people raising it with the department, and the department just saying, 'Yeah, we'll look into it,' and not much comes out. I've seen it in the comments section in the NSS [national student survey] as well. It's raised in all sorts of forums. And the interesting thing is that, once I've sent my response to the student, I don't get any response back. So it's a little bit like: Oh, let's just tell someone, and let's just let them figure it out! I think if people were a bit more proactive there'd be a bigger driving force towards lecture cast. I've raised it a few times with the pro-vice-chancellor. What he hopes to achieve before next academic year is: currently the default stance is that lecturers have to opt **in**, but he wants to move to an opt **out** model; so you'd have to give a very good reason why you don't, or can't, use lecture cast. ... I guess it's a step forward."*

Student union sabbatical officer, pre-1992 university

He went on to offer a more personal perspective on the convenience aspect of lecture capture:

Interviewer: *"Has lecture cast been available to you, as a student?"*

Student union sabbatical officer: *"Yes, on two out of the 24 modules on my course."*

Interviewer: *"And how did you most typically use it yourself? Did it encourage you to miss lectures?"*

Sabbatical officer: *"The morning sessions I didn't go to, so I had to go back and use the recordings. But even if I was in the lecture – because note-taking can vary a lot; sometimes you don't understand your own notes, and you need to go back and think: What did I actually mean when I wrote this? – so that's something that lecture recording really helped me out with."*

Our post-1992 university student union interviewee, it is worth mentioning, had not heard of lecture capture and had to have the principle explained to him by the interviewer, whereupon he implied that it was unlikely to be adopted in the foreseeable future in his university, because: 'Staff are very unwilling to be filmed. There are plenty of lecturers that already do it – in the Business School, again. But other departments aren't interested'.

In terms of the degrees of enhancement that we refer to above, it seems that the facilities or provision identified in all of the students' comments presented above have the potential to make students' lives easier, but none of these facilities is highlighted as having the capacity to enhance *learning*, in the sense of increasing understanding of course content. Essentially, these facilities involve the same basic processes that students would effect if the technological facility were not available – submitting coursework, finding additional reading material, listening to the words of the course tutor through her/his delivery of a lecture, recording what is said in lectures, etc. – they simply allow these processes to be effected differently – more easily, more conveniently, more speedily or more comprehensively – from what was typical in the 20th century. Arguably, lecture capture goes beyond this by having the capacity, indirectly, to enhance learning through the opportunities it offers for repeated exposure to lecture content, which may facilitate or enhance understanding; several of our staff interviewees referred to the potential for students with limited proficiency in English, for example, through replaying recordings, to grasp meanings that may elude them if they are exposed only to a single live lecture delivery. The point was also made that it sometimes requires several lecture recording replays for students to make sense of the pronunciation of some academics whose first language is not English. Yet this potential benefit is counter-balanced by research evidence from a US-based study of students' experiences and use of recorded lectures:

“Students indicated that they had difficulty concentrating when watching recorded lectures. They stated that they fell too easily for external distractions such as telephone or roommates; ‘there were a lot of times, when my roommate and I actually sat and chatted. I would turn down the volume... There’s a lot of times I would clean my room, just kind of listen[ing] to it.’ ... Other distractions while following the recorded lectures included multitasking with other activities at home such as surfing the Internet, switching to other television channels, or simply doing ‘anything but sitting there and watching it [the lecture]’ ... even when they did not divert to other activities, they would still fall asleep or simply lose their attention⁴⁹.”

(It is worth observing, however, that distractions and loss of concentration, albeit perhaps in different forms from those identified in the quote above, may just as easily or frequently occur where students participate physically in lectures.)

In the case of our student interviewees, due not only to its having been only recently introduced in most UK universities, but also to its take-up having been limited by resistance and opposition to it, few of them had direct experience of lecture capture; their comments were, for the most part, based on their perceptions of what they imagined or expected it could offer, and were focused on convenience-related rather than cognitive-related issues. Until it becomes a more ubiquitous feature of higher education provision in the UK, evaluations of its capacity for enhancing learning and influencing study patterns and behaviour will inevitably incorporate a degree of conjecture and assumption.

There is widespread, and longstanding, acceptance that students’ learning – by which we mean the processes by which students increase their knowledge or understanding – is often fuelled by communicative exchanges with others, through discussion that involves questioning and responding in ways that promote reflection, analysis, and knowledge restructuring and revision; encouraging what TEL champion, Robert, who features in case 4, referred to as ‘a learning community’. These exchanges may involve student–teacher or student–student interaction. Traditionally, depending on the subject and discipline, opportunities for such exchanges have been presented through fora such as tutorials, seminars, practical sessions, examples classes (in the case of subjects such as physics), and student discussion groups – indeed, research has shown some academics to believe that, through such engagement, students may learn as much from each other as from their tutors and lecturers⁵⁰, and several researchers have revealed student peer groups to be highly influential on academic achievement and success in higher education^{51,52}. In the digital world, fora such as online chat rooms, wikis and blogs appear to have very similar potential for promoting and increasing student learning, yet our findings suggest that students have little appetite for participating in them. All except one of our student interviewees responded ‘No’ to being asked whether they engage in course-related online discussion fora, and one of the student union officers whom we interviewed confirmed that, at his university, chat rooms are seldom visited:

“All the Moodle discussion forums are empty. Moodle’s just seen as: this is where I get my lecture notes from, and this is where I sometimes upload my coursework. It might be that, if there was a different platform – something more tailored to discussion – maybe then it would be used. I don’t know what the answer is, but the underlying issue is: it’s a big challenge trying to find out what students want.”

Student union sabbatical officer, pre-1992 university

In fact, this interviewee’s point about the need for a more discussion-friendly platform is evidently a valid one, for the one student interviewee – a postgraduate psychology student who, ironically, is registered at the same university as the student union officer quoted above – not only explained the basis of her preference for a specific alternative platform to Moodle as the facility with which discussion threads can be identified, but also outlined the nature of its capacity for enhancing her own learning:

“For one of my classes, we had a thing called Flipbook, which, actually, was really useful. You can directly engage with your lecturer and the module convenor, as well as all the other students – like, asking questions. It’s a chat room specifically for that module, and you sign in for it. And I’ve never had that before – I’ve had chat rooms on Moodle, but the problem with that is that

49 Cilesiz, S. (2014). Undergraduate students’ experiences with recorded lectures: towards a theory of acculturation. *Higher Education* 69: 471–93.

50 Evans, L. & Abbott, I.D. (1998). *Teaching and learning in higher education*. London: Cassell.

51 Thomas, S.L. (2000). Ties that bind: a social network approach to understanding student integration and persistence. *Journal of Higher Education*. 71(5): 591–615.

52 Titus, M.A. (2004). An examination of the influence of institutional context on student persistence at 4-year colleges and universities: a multilevel approach. *Research in Higher Education*. 45(7): 673–99.

you'd lose track of the threads, whereas, with this Flipbook, you can find all of the threads. I find it a really useful online platform – especially for that course, because you didn't really know what you were doing, and you couldn't get it from reading; it was more talk. And you can write it anonymously – which I also think is the best part about it; you can choose either a post with your name, or an anonymous one. Especially if you're asking questions about things that you don't really understand, if there's, like, 300 people on your course, you don't want everyone to know that you don't know that. ... And we had a take-home exam. So, over the holiday, we could ask any question we liked and the tutor said, 'The only reason I'll answer it on this is that everyone will get treated the same'. So, it's your choice if you want to look at it or not, but it helped me understand things more – which I felt was really useful."

Female postgraduate student, psychology, pre-1992 university

The visiting American student offered an interesting perspective on why chat-room provision evidently features less in his home university than in his host pre-1992 UK university:

Interviewer: *"Do any of your courses here at [X] University have follow-up chat rooms or wikis, or anything like that?"*

Visiting American student: "One of my courses has a chat room, for students who're having issues, but I've never gone on it."

Interviewer: *"Do students like chatrooms?"*

Student: "I'm personally not that interested in them, and I don't know anyone who has been. At [US Ivy League university] I think it's easier to meet up with classmates and work interactively – everybody lives close to each other, whereas, here, people live further apart and it's not as easy, so maybe chat rooms would be more helpful here. But only one of my classes here has one."

An undergraduate interviewee from a pre-1992 university, whilst confirming that module- or course-related chat rooms attract little take-up from students, explained both his views on his university's use of Facebook for engaging with students, and students' self-initiated course-related online group interaction. The latter is evidently convened out of necessity, for purely instrumental purposes, facilitating collaborative work and preparation that the course demands, rather than for extending class discussions:

Interviewer: *"Do any of your modules or courses have follow-up chat rooms or wikis, or anything like that?"*

Undergraduate student, pre-1992 university: "I think there's a chat room for each of them on the online system. It's very rarely used. The professors communicate through email, and the administration of the course is done through the Facebook page."

Interviewer: *"Do students actually like things on Facebook?"*

Student: "I think posting things on Facebook can be a bit hit-and-miss. They uploaded a petition to change the structure of the degree on Facebook, and I didn't even see it until after they'd made a decision! I was a bit annoyed that they'd used Facebook to do this."

Interviewer: *"In your private life, what digital materials – what technology, and what social media – do you use?"*

Student: "I use Facebook. Nowadays I probably use Facebook most for university work, to keep in touch with my friends. We have so many group assignments that you create a Facebook group page for each one, so we can work remotely and we don't have to meet up every time we need to do something. That's our own initiative and I think that's what most people do – you use Google Drive to work together."

If students' learning is to be supported and enhanced by the kinds of discursive exchanges that academics have long considered valuable elements of course delivery, then our data suggest the likelihood that this will continue to be achieved principally through traditional, tried-and-trusted, fora rather than through their 21st-century digital equivalents, unless student engagement and enthusiasm are successfully harnessed through the kinds of media and platforms that manage to strike a chord with them, as Flipbook evidently has done with the postgraduate student quoted above. For their part, students have an important role to play in ensuring that those who work together to design and deliver their courses – principally, academics (sometimes supported by learning technologists) – are aware of their study-related needs, and of what is likely to spark their interest and motivate them, as well as what holds little allure or attraction for them. To be effective, such communication is dependent upon students making their views known vociferously. But how realistic is this? We asked all of our student interviewees if they – the student body – have a voice within their institutions.

All affirmed that there were institutional mechanisms in place, at various levels and through various routes (eg, departmental level; at programme or module level; through the student union), for them to have their say, but some added that, in reality, the wheels of change seem to move very slowly. The following comments are indicative:

"Yeah, the students are listened to, but I don't always think it's handled, like, in the best interests of the students. If the students make a lot of noise they do tend to be listened to."

Male undergraduate student, social sciences, pre-1992 university

"I'm not one of those people who'd particularly – who'd ever say anything. But we have student representatives and stuff like that, and they're very approachable, and I think it's – I do definitely notice a different dynamic from [that on] my undergrad [course]; you're treated as an adult, so if you had a problem with the course you can go and tell them, and it wouldn't be... they, kind of, respect your opinion, I think, in a different way. And we do have feedback at the beginning of every semester – we'll have a feedback form."

Female postgraduate student, psychology, pre-1992 university

"I don't think I personally have a voice, no. I know that we do have course representatives, but I don't know how much of a voice they have."

Male undergraduate student, humanities, post-1992 university

One of the student union sabbatical officers whom we interviewed outlined a new mechanism that his university was introducing for the purpose of being more responsive to students' concerns:

"The e-learning service is looking into ... an online platform that's supposed to close the feedback loop. Let's say a student has an issue with anything; they will raise it with their course rep, and then the reps have two annual meetings with relevant staff members from the department, and then they'd raise it there. The staff members there would then raise it at the relevant faculty-level committee, and this whole cycle takes about a year. That's one feedback option. There's also end-of-module feedback, and all that stuff. And what [the new initiative] tries to do is ... supplement it, with having issues resolved in a much shorter timeframe. ... It's a little bit like Facebook; people would raise an issue, and others would vote to 'like' it. That would get highlighted, and the course rep can take that through to the, sort of, the exclusive section, where it's just the course rep and staff. Other students can still see it, but they can't edit it. And then the staff would be able to appropriately respond. And so, that could take a few days, as opposed to an entire year."

Student union sabbatical officer, pre-1992 university

And the other student union interviewee outlined the procedures and processes whereby he feels able to make the student voice heard in his post-1992 university:

Interviewer: *"Do you feel you have a voice here at this university? Are students' views listened to?"*

Student union sabbatical officer, post-1992 university: *"Yes, I think so. If I wanted something to go across the whole university I'd work quite closely with the pro-vice-chancellor for teaching and learning. And, to be fair, he's been absolutely fantastic in working with the students union. And if I come to him with a good idea he's more than happy to approach the board of governors and, sort of, the hierarchy of the university, to get it put in place."*

Yet our findings also suggest that, for the most part, students are relatively uninterested in making their voices heard. We detected amongst our interviewees a lack of interest that borders on apathy in communicating their views to those with the capacity to make changes. Indeed, one of the student union sabbatical officers quoted above highlighted student apathy as a major frustration in his role:

"It doesn't help that students themselves are quite apathetic to anything the university has to say. In the end-of-module feedback forms most people will quickly just tick 4 out of 5 for everything, just so they can go to lunch!"

Student union sabbatical officer, pre-1992 university

Supporting his view that students are generally uninterested in engaging with the university's TEL-focused strategic change initiative, he provided an example of their apathy:

"The e-learning team had this huge event for students called DigiScene a few months ago, and they thought it would be something that loads of people would attend – it was a three-day event. And you could count on one hand how many students actually turned up. Only about three or four people actually came, and they were expecting about a hundred. To me, that means: either the stuff they produced just was not tailored to students, or students just didn't care about what they had to offer...or it was just the wrong time."

Student union sabbatical officer, pre-1992 university

But what is it that accounts for students' apparent reticence, or apathy: their reluctance to have their say about the teaching and learning facilities and provision in their universities? Does our finding simply indicate a high degree of satisfaction amongst the student body, or does it reflect students' cynical reservations about their voices being taken notice of, even if they are heard?

In addressing these questions, below, we draw upon selected theoretical perspectives in the field of human motivation and satisfaction to outline our own explanation for our findings.

The polyphony: uncovering the bases of student attitudes

We begin by returning briefly to a comment made by mathematics lecturer, Laura – drawing upon the example of the use of blackboards for teaching mathematics – that the academics in the mathematics department are able to manage students' expectations in a timely manner. (It is worth adding that Laura's perception – and those of other staff – of students' views on the issue of blackboard use were corroborated by her university's student union sabbatical officer. Asked if he was aware of mathematics academics' opposition to TEL facilities having replaced blackboards in many teaching rooms, he responded: 'I heard it was the *students* that wanted to keep the blackboards; a student actually emailed me saying, "We need more blackboards or whiteboards because that's just how we learn maths; you do the examples in the class". As a student, I had some maths modules, and I can actually see where they're coming from, because there's masses you have to do, rather than just listen and absorb!')

Laura's implication was that people's – in this case, students' – expectations can be managed if they are encouraged to accept and assimilate a certain perspective or viewpoint before a competing one has presented itself (or been presented) to them sufficiently forcefully to allow it to take seed in their consciousness. In the vernacular, this may be more cynically expressed using terms such as 'getting in first' or 'making a pre-emptive strike'. This reflects a sound observation of human nature and people's malleability, but the wider, underlying, issue is one of comparativity: essentially, recognition that people will accept a perspective in the absence of what they consider a 'better' one. In terms of theoretical perspectives, what this fundamentally illustrates is the axiom of comparison, 'which formalizes the long-held view that a wide class of phenomena, including happiness, self-esteem, and the sense of distributive justice, may be understood as the product of a comparison process'⁵³.

53 Jasso, G. (1988). Principles of theoretical analysis. *Sociological Theory*. 6(1): 1–20 (p11).

In the context of our research findings, what the axiom of comparison translates into is that, in the case of mathematics undergraduates, if they have experienced nothing other than reasonably successful learning through chalk-and-talk teaching approaches, and are able to apply such methods usefully to their preparation for assessment, and if they are unable to envisage a better (for them) way of learning mathematics, then they will have no reason to want or expect anything different, so their needs and expectations remain met. The proof of the pudding, mathematics lecturer Laura also implied, is in the eating: expectations-meeting is reinforced when students experience success – for example, if their assessment grades are satisfactory – and under such circumstances they remain satisfied. Since Laura’s department generally recruits high-calibre – often gifted – students, then on the basis of this reasoning, they tend to remain content. Their expectations therefore correlate with the epistemic culture and norms promoted and perpetuated within their department, because these have been found to work for them; they are perceived as features or ingredients of a successful student learning experience.

This leads on to the issue underlying an observation made by another staff interviewee, presented above: ‘I think you only hear from students if they’re *not* satisfied’. This observation of human psychology is borne out by research into satisfaction and motivation. In relation to satisfaction in the workplace, for example, research has revealed people’s far greater tendency to identify and highlight sources of *discontent* or *dissatisfaction* than sources of satisfaction, because the satisfactory elements of their work quickly become taken for granted⁵⁴, in the way that the interviewee, quoted above, implied occurred with students: ‘I walk around campus, and hear students talking, and it’s: “Oh, yeah, yeah – it’s on the VLE”, and it’s almost as if providing resources online is a given’. The same principle applies in any context; dissatisfaction encourages vociferous complaints, whereas satisfaction is seldom perceived as anything to shout about – unless it exceeds expectations. Students are no exception to this principle.

If we dig a little deeper into what influences degrees of satisfaction – what determines where people, or students, find themselves on a hypothetical satisfied-dissatisfied continuum – we return to the axiom of comparison⁵⁵. Fundamentally representing this axiom, the apparent apathy that one of our student union officer interviewees ascribed to the student body stems more specifically from what one of us has called the ‘relativity factor’⁵⁶, whereby satisfaction or dissatisfaction occurs as a result of an individual’s evaluation of her or his current situation in relation (or relative) to her or his comparable experiences. Such comparable experience may take the form of one’s own previous experiences, as in the case of one of our postgraduate interviewees who evaluated the TEL provision that she currently enjoyed more favourably than the facilities that had been available to her as an undergraduate at a different university:

“We have Desktop Anywhere – which I never had for my undergraduate degree. ... We did have Moodle on my undergraduate course, and you can post questions on that, but I find it confusing and frustrating when you have to go back through pages to find something, whereas with Flipbook you can search for things you want to find, to see if it’s been spoken about, and if it hasn’t, you can ask the question.”

Female postgraduate student, psychology, pre-1992 university

Indeed, an observation from a student union sabbatical officer succinctly illustrates the relativity factor’s influence on satisfaction levels: ‘The most dissatisfaction comes from postgraduates. And it’s usually about something that they had at their previous institution, but don’t have here.’

Similarly, the visiting American student whom we interviewed evaluated aspects of the TEL provision and facilities that he was experiencing in his UK host university less favourably than those experienced in a different, but comparable, context: his home university:

“I think I’ve found that, at my US university, the technology they have is more helpful – there’s a little more substance; more interaction with the technology. ... There’s more information given by professors through, either emails, or just updates on the Blackboard website. For instance, if something was unclear and a couple of students emailed the lecturer to ask questions, they would be likely to put an announcement out on Blackboard, saying, “Here’s a sheet that describes this in more detail!””

Visiting American undergraduate student, pre-1992 university

54 Evans, L. (1998). Teacher morale, job satisfaction and motivation. London: Paul Chapman.

55 Jasso, G. (1988). Principles of theoretical analysis, *Sociological Theory* 6(1): 1–20.

56 Evans, L. (1998). Teacher morale, job satisfaction and motivation. London: Paul Chapman.

In other cases the comparator – the yardstick against which the individual measures the satisfactoriness of her or his current situation – may take the form of *other people's* comparable experiences, which one may have observed first-hand, or heard about second-hand. This was presented as the basis of students' dissatisfaction with inconsistent TEL provision within a post-1992 university:

"Students notice the lack of consistency. You hear them saying, 'My friends doing other modules have this; why can't I have that?' That's when it becomes frustrating because you can see clearly that one person's doing it, so there's no reason why it can't happen. So I think consistency is a big thing. I think it's a real, big, problem in particular here."

Student union sabbatical officer, post-1992 university

And it was a source of dissatisfaction for a student who evaluated his own situation as less satisfactory than that of his friends:

*"The TEL facilities aren't bad, but I don't think they're fantastic. Some of my friends from other universities have got a lot more – just the amount of stuff they can access for their assignments. We just, literally, get just the lecture slides. **They** get links to other pages, with stuff that will help them, but **we** have to access all that ourselves."*

The relativity factor may also take the form of comparison between one's own experiences and an *imagined* alternative – potentially better – experience that represents an 'if-only' kind of hypothesising about what *could* be:

"It might be nice to have a mobile app for notices about room changes and that kind of thing – notices from lecturers – because I don't always have my laptop with me to check my email every hour or so."

Male undergraduate student, pre-1992 university

"The students find it very frustrating and irritating when academics don't use lecture capture – especially when you're in a lecture room where you have the facilities and are not making use of them."

Student union sabbatical officer, pre-1992 university

The polyphony of student voice, then, represents a chorus of relative satisfaction with TEL. Asked if they could think of any TEL-related facility, provision or practice that they would like to be available or extended to them, or that they felt could enhance their learning experience, very few student interviewees were able to identify anything – the very few facilities that were suggested were the mobile app referred in the quote above, and live streaming of lectures.

Students, it seems, are easy to please. For the most part, they seem to want little more than they already have, in terms of TEL provision and facilities. Perhaps their relative satisfaction stems from their being sufficiently equipped, digitally, in their personal lives that they find themselves able to manage perfectly well by overlapping or merging their personal digital lives with their study-related lives.

Or perhaps they simply lack vision: vision of what, given the vast array of digital technological equipment and facilities that are continually populating the cyber-world that is defining 21st-century life, could transform, rather than simply enhance, their lives as students. If this is so, then it is perhaps fortuitous that TEL development in universities is driven and determined, not, essentially, by students, but by academics and academic-related staff – some of who, our findings revealed, are true visionaries.

Improving the student experience through TEL-focused strategic change: lessons learned and ways forward

To what extent, then, and in what ways, are English HEIs incorporating technology-enhanced learning into their strategic change agendas, and with what effects on provision directed towards improving the student experience? And, in relation to these issues, what has been the nature and extent of the contribution of the CLL initiative?

In this section we address these questions in the light of our research findings, and draw out lessons to be learned about TEL-focused strategic change: what contributes to, and what undermines, its success – and how such success may be defined and measured.

From ‘traditional’ to digital: the evolving landscape of higher education pedagogy

As we imply in the opening section of this report, it is now a given that, in the words of Fullan and Scott, within the higher education sector ‘the IT revolution is creating new expectations and opportunities for how students want to and can learn’⁵⁷. Yet expectations and opportunities do not equate to provision, and our findings have revealed a fairly broad spectrum of commitment to a TEL agenda, and an even broader one of TEL initiatives in practice. Of the four institutions that feature in our case analyses (cases 1–5), only one – Premiership University – could boast the infrastructure, capacity, support from senior management, strategic vision, and degree of TEL provision that was in place and operational, to justify locating the institution towards the ‘enhancement as reinvention’ end of Trowler et al’s enhancement continuum. This university’s educational provision – as reported both by representatives of its Learning Technology Unit and by TEL practitioners, including departmental TEL champion, Robert (case 4) – denoted, out of Trowler et al’s five indicative categories of enhancement, the two lying closest to this ‘most-enhanced’ end: category 4: ‘do[es] some completely different things in some new ways’ and category 5: ‘do[es] completely different things completely differently’⁵⁸. (Here we interpret ‘differently’ as both relative to what prevailed in that institution before the enhancement, and, more broadly, to what appears to be state-of-the-art across the English higher education sector generally.) Given the reservations expressed by some of our Premiership University interviewees, including the student union sabbatical officer (case 4), category 4 – with its repetition of the key qualifying adjective ‘some’ – seems the more representative indicator of this institution’s TEL-focused progress and achievements.

Drawing upon our full dataset, we present below snapshots of other HEIs whose CLL project institutional leads portrayed them as having achieved, or being well on the way to achieving, similarly impressive degrees of enhancement in relation to TEL provision. Yet our findings – particularly those presented in cases 1–3 and 5 – clearly indicate that some English HEIs still have a long way to go to catch up with the most TEL-focused institutions. It is evident that, across the English higher education sector⁵⁹, changing the higher education learning landscape – to borrow the title of the initiative that is the subject of our research – is not guaranteed to be a quick or an easy process. Depending on the HEI, it may involve more evolution than revolution.

Our research data were drawn from HEIs that had participated in the CLL initiative, which implies a commitment of some degree to TEL (even if this was on the part of only a small number of people) – moreover, as we observe in the research design and method section above, reluctance to participate in our research on the part of individuals who are sceptical or have reservations about TEL provision in their institutions has unfortunately left us with a skewed sample that is relatively pro-TEL. Despite this bias, only one of our case analysis HEIs (Premiership University) had formulated a TEL strategy before participating in the CLL initiative⁶⁰. The institution that features in cases 1 and 2 had recently made TEL a ‘strategic imperative’ (which the pro-vice-chancellor distinguished from having developed a TEL strategy), but was evidently still grappling with the issue of how best to embed TEL provision within its culture; in the case 3 institution, Improved University, a strategy was being drafted as a result of the institution’s CLL participation, but none of the colleagues who had collaborated on its development felt sufficiently competent in or knowledgeable about TEL to be confident that they were proceeding on the right track; and at Prestigious University (case 5), a group of colleagues who were pushing forward the TEL agenda were struggling to engage senior management in widening their focus from one that was fixed squarely on research excellence.

57 Fullan, M. & Scott, G. (2009). *Turnaround leadership for higher education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass (p7).

58 Trowler, P., Ashwin, P. & Saunders, M. (2014). *The role of HEFCE in teaching and learning enhancement: a review of evaluative evidence*. York: Higher Education Academy (p7, Fig. 3.2).

59 The CLL initiative was not UK-wide in scope; it focused only on England.

60 We interpret progress in developing a strategy as broadly illustrative, rather than unequivocally indicative, of commitment to TEL; we recognise that some institutions may decide not to formulate a TEL strategy, as was the case with two institutions that participated in the CLL programme.

Added to these cases are those of English HEIs from whose employees we gathered data, but that we decided not to analyse and present as cases. Most of these – according to their CLL institutional project leads who were our interviewees – had already demonstrated considerable commitment to TEL before engaging with the CLL initiative, and if these interviewees' accounts are to be accepted as reflecting more than institutional rhetoric, had undertaken TEL-focused strategic change that was yielding relatively impressive results. In a post-1992 university, for example, the head of e-learning explained his institution's considered and reflective approach to developing its TEL provision:

*“So, one of my roles is to write an e-learning strategy. Approximately every five years we revisit our e-learning strategy, and alongside that sits an annual e-learning implementation plan, which the faculties write now – so they respond to that strategy and say what they're going to do. So, as part of that strategy, we've got various aims within it, and one of the aims relates to innovation and changing and exploring. And so this idea [for our CLL project] was met with one of those strategic aims, which was to experiment with technology and explore the impact of that. The reason is that we're very much more interested in having technology implementation that's research-informed, rather than just: 'Well, **that** looks like a good bit of kit! Let's get it in there.' We really want to demonstrate potential impact of that technology in a learning and teaching capacity, before we've deployed it, and so we're taking a bit of a shift, I think, whereas before... the VLE's a good example, y'know, historically you buy a VLE because you **need** a VLE. I think now we're much more about: 'Well, OK, we know we want a VLE, but, actually, usability is much higher on the agenda than functionality.' So I think we recognise that we can have all the functionality in the world but if it's not usable, it's not going to be used. So these are the kinds of the ways we explore that.”*

Head of e-learning, post-1992 university

The pro-vice-chancellor for teaching and learning at another post-1992 university outlined his institution's TEL-focused vision and achievements that had been in place before its engagement with the CLL initiative:

“We had a vision – ‘we’ being ‘me’ – and we had a vision of what could the campus look like four or five years down the line with technology. ... But we also knew that we were using Panopto, we were using Camtasia, we were using different types of activities And I was interested in creating a set of parameters within which all programmes will operate, consistently, but flexibly and variably. ... So the idea was: how do we bring centralisation to it, but allowing some flexibility? And [we were developing] a new IT strategy that said we were looking and willing to spend fairly good, substantial, amounts of money. So that's a long way of saying we had quite a vision.”

Pro-vice-chancellor, post-1992 university

And the deputy vice-chancellor at yet another post-1992 university first of all outlined his institution's current strategic approach to TEL:

“Everything we do is based on course teams for teaching and learning, and so each course team can develop its own strategy for online approaches. And then they publish a short action plan about what they're going to do the next period. So, I engage with course teams through those sorts of processes. ... I think in our next teaching and learning strategy, we'll commit, within the three years that follow that, to 20% of the classrooms being flipped. The very best example in the world at the moment is a Korean university who are claiming to have flipped... they're claiming to be the first flipped university. It turns out they've done about 96 modules out of 2,500, so I think that's quite a long way off being fully flipped! But I understand what they're saying, and I think I have an advantage in... by encouraging modules to collapse into module projects ... I can encourage a more coherent assessment strategy.”

Deputy vice-chancellor, post-1992 university

He then spoke specifically about his university's involvement in the CLL initiative, which had resulted in a strategic conversation with a consultant, who had then apparently advised him that participation in a CLL project could do nothing to enhance the university's already impressive, sector-leading, TEL provision:

Deputy vice-chancellor: “We sent a, sort of, an agenda, and asked for [the CLL consultant] to meet with people in our e-learning service, in our online learning, so: Moodle, VLE people, the learning development team, etcetera. ... The request that we made was about effectively auditing where we were on a scale of technology-supported learning, effectively. We had our plans and

we had an approach to use to take us where we were going, but it was, sort of, at the peak time of MOOCs and, y'know, it was that 2012 phenomenon. So we thought this would fit in rather nicely, just to understand how we fit into the general picture. ... And, anyway, the strategic conversation went in such a direction... we talked about what we did, the consultant asked a series of questions, and it resulted in a, sort of, fairly simple statement that we were ahead of the game, in terms of thinking, in the way we were going, and that he was fascinated by what we were doing. And therefore it ended up in rather the wrong direction of conversation (laughs)."

Interviewer: "Were you expecting that?"

Deputy vice chancellor: "No, I wasn't; not at all. I was expecting to be rather a long way **behind** – and whilst it's always nice to know that you're thinking in line with the sector, but perhaps a little **ahead**, when you're hoping to get something out of it, it didn't quite go the way we expected. I'm not saying we didn't get **anything** out of the engagement, not at all. But it **is** the reason we didn't take up the other consultancy days because the consultant's report was very clear that there was nowhere further that that he could take us, and he wasn't aware, I don't think, of anyone who would've been able to take us on easily that was in the Leadership Foundation pod. ... But, we're **not** very far ahead. We're not ahead at **all**, really, I don't think. We use an online learning environment in a fairly standard and, sort of, staid sort of way. I'd like to go much further. We were thinking about MOOCs and flipped classrooms, and all of those sorts of buzz words, but we were thinking about them in buzz-word territory, rather than in practice. ... We went out a little bit further down the line towards practice, but not much. What I think the consultant was impressed by was the fact that the university was willing to invest some serious amounts of money in technology-supported learning, and so we'd just announced that we were putting £2.5 million into a project which is about [describes the TEL-focused project]. ... And, y'know, I expected, sort of, some information about some sharing of the experience from other institutions who had moved down the MOOC route – some information perhaps about FutureLearn which was just being announced through the OU."

Compared with some of the scenarios presented in our case analyses, these outline accounts of three HEIs' approaches to, and strategies for developing, TEL – particularly the third one – stand out as impressive. Despite the reservations expressed by one institution's deputy vice-chancellor about the accuracy with which his university's activity had been evaluated, these snapshots – for that is all they are – smack of innovative thinking, vision, focus and commitment that stand out as being beyond what seems, within the English higher education sector, to be state of the art; certainly, they surpass the overall institutional, TEL-focused achievements outlined in cases 1–3 and 5. It must be remembered that each of these three snapshots represents just one institutional representative's articulated perspective. Moreover, in each case, that individual is the one who has responsibility within his (they were all men) institution for driving the TEL strategic change agenda. Yet if they do indeed reflect more 'reality' than hollow rhetoric, then, to varying degrees, these snapshots extend, beyond that indicated and represented by most of our cases, Trowler et al's continuum of degrees of enhancement⁶¹ as demonstrated by the TEL-focused policy and practice of English HEIs. Specifically, as with Premiership University, they extend it *towards* (even if, like Premiership University, they may be perceived as falling short of reaching) the 'enhancement-as-reinvention' end.

But what accounts for these three universities' apparent 'success' in terms of prominent TEL-focused activity? And, bringing into the equation *all* of our findings – including the five case analyses – what accounts for the variability in relation to TEL provision and strategic engagement between the HEIs that featured in our research? This is a variability that is mirrored on a larger scale, evident in approaches to and implementation of e-learning in HEIs across Europe, which, it is suggested, 'may have to do with the [institutional] profile and mission, availability of resources and access to additional funding, the focus on certain subject areas, the type of students they attract, and different stages of experience in e-learning and paces of technology adoption, also due to openness of staff and their particular skills'⁶². In English HEIs – the focus of our research – do progress and achievements depend on (inter-related) factors such as: resources, overall institutional vision and priorities, university mission group, student demographics, institutional culture, or leadership and management? For institutions trying to develop or enhance their TEL provision – or for individuals who wish to champion such development or enhancement – what lessons may be learned from our research findings?

We begin addressing these questions, in part, by examining the extant knowledge base, drawing upon selected relevant literature in the field to inform our analyses.

61 Trowler, P., Ashwin, P. & Saunders, M. (2014). The role of HEFCE in teaching and learning enhancement: a review of evaluative evidence. York: Higher Education Academy (p7).

62 Gaebel, M., Kupriyanova, V., Morais, R. & Colucci, E. (2014). E-learning in European higher education institutions: results of a mapping survey conducted October–December 2013. Brussels: European University Association (p9).

Leading and managing change: informed analyses of our findings

We start with the case of the post-1992 university that the CLL consultant deemed too innovative to be helped by participation in a CLL project. For ease of reference, we call this Innovative University, and its deputy vice-chancellor, Mick. Limited to drawing upon the information that Mick conveyed during a one-and-a-half-hour interview, we have identified four features of his leadership that struck us as potential facilitators of the TEL-focused strategic change that he appears, from his own account, to have driven in his university: his seniority and status; knowledge of 'new' learning technologies and digital resources and of the TEL field; knowledge and understanding of his institution and its people; and vision for TEL in his university. Do these features hold the key to effective TEL-focused strategic change leadership? Stripped of Mick's personal agential ownership or application of them, could they, appropriated by other leaders of change, make for the kinds of digital enhancements to students' learning and experiences that appear to have been achieved at Innovative University, and that so impressed the CLL consultant?

To address these questions, we examine each feature in turn below, outlining the nature and extent of its broader potential for supporting a TEL agenda.

Seniority and status as vehicles for driving change

As the deputy vice-chancellor, in his institution Mick was second in seniority and status only to the vice-chancellor herself. This is of great importance; his active leadership of the institutional TEL change agenda conveyed an unambiguous message – particularly to staff – that TEL is taken very seriously at the very top. The need to have TEL strategic change spearheaded by senior leaders and managers is evidently widely recognised in HEIs; over 80% of the European universities recently surveyed implied by their responses that strategic responsibility for TEL lay with senior staff such as heads of e-learning centres, vice rectors, or special advisers to institutional heads. The survey report interprets these data as evidence that TEL is being taken very seriously within European universities:

"The senior leadership status of most respondents reflects increasing institutional interest in e-learning. It also indicates changes in governance and management structure. Positions such as "vice-rector for information management and technology" or "adviser to the President for ICT-based learning" are very recent creations. Furthermore, the titles and status of respondents suggest that e-learning at many institutions is supported through centralised institutional structures and special projects and initiatives⁶³."

This recognition of the importance of senior leadership in driving TEL-focused strategic change was shared by our interviewees. Academic developer, Danny, for example, attributed the impetus behind Improved University's strategic change agenda (see case 3) to what he saw as the very significant intervention of the deputy vice-chancellor – and implied that more would probably have been achieved if the vice-chancellor himself had publicised his support of the TEL agenda:

"The fact that, at the onset...the deputy vice-chancellor was there – I mean, don't get me wrong; we can guess that if the vice-chancellor had been there, and been involved...such is his power and his influence, that that would've pushed it [TEL] up even higher [on the agenda]. We've said that to him before: 'If you decide that this is a key priority, everyone will buy into it.'"

Danny, CAP director, Improved University

Contrast this level of engagement on the part of Improved University's senior management to the 'nominal' leadership and support of the pro-vice-chancellor at Prestigious University (case 5) who, to the disappointment and frustration of the e-learning director, perceives learning technologies, we were told, 'just like a utility' or as 'an add-on'. Contrast it, too, with the limited involvement of senior management (specifically, the pro-vice-chancellor) in the bottom-up online learning module development at City Centre University, described in case analysis 1, prompting the junior colleagues who had led the project to complain that their efforts and achievements had gone unnoticed and were not being capitalised on. Yet where senior management proactively champions the TEL strategic change agenda – and, moreover, is perceived to be heavily involved in driving it, as seems to have occurred in Premiership University (case 4) – the institutional culture, notwithstanding inevitable pockets of resistance, begins to shift in line with the vision enshrined in the strategy, as staff gradually come to accept the importance and value of being 'on message'.

It is probably no accident that Premiership University – which, as we suggest above, out of all four HEIs to feature in our case analyses, had evidently made the greatest progress towards embedding TEL within its culture – was also the one with the most visibly committed and TEL-supportive senior managers (though we accept that other factors – such as this institution's relatively abundant resources – undoubtedly influenced the progress it achieved). In contrast to the shambolic situation described in case 2, where City Centre University's two senior managers were operating at cross purposes and pulling in different directions, Premiership University's senior management had got its act together and was delivering it to script.

The importance of committed senior leadership has long been recognised by key analysts of transformational change. In what has come to be regarded within the business and management community as something of a seminal analysis, Kotter makes what seems a rather obvious observation, 'Change, by definition, requires creating a new system, which in turn always demands leadership'⁶⁴. Yet, whilst Michael Fullan argues that in the leadership of change 'neither centralization nor decentralization work (both top-down and bottom-up strategies are necessary)⁶⁵, if Kotter's reasoning is sound, it points to a key factor that is often lacking from bottom-up change initiatives of the kind described in case analysis 1: a focus on *systemic* change. At City Centre University (case 1), a group of committed and enthusiastic colleagues – most of them junior academics – developed what was considered by most of those who encountered it as a mould-breaking online module that the CLL consultant described as 'revolutionary for the sector'. This initiative exemplified what Taylor calls 'lone ranging' – which he defines as 'a radically bottom-up approach to innovation', identifying it as 'the principal source of innovation in academic practices'⁶⁶. Yet this project also illustrates Taylor's observation:

"While this [lone ranging] may be a very effective way to develop innovative practices, the challenge is to achieve innovation at the institutional level – the reinvention of cultures. Until this happens, the very innovative practices that need support may be inconsistent with – even at odds with – broader institutional priorities and practices"⁶⁷.

Despite the City Centre University project's pioneering, ground-breaking nature, it remained for many months an unnoticed, isolated, pocket of innovative practice. It did not – to use Kotter's words – create a new *system* within the institution. For it to do so, it would have had to have been championed by a senior leader with the influence and the motivation to embed it within, or to build around it, a strategic change initiative. At Premiership University (case 4), in contrast, the Team TEL Champions CLL project – and, indeed, the wider TEL-focused changes initiated by the Learning Technology Unit – were not only embedded within the institution's e-learning strategy, but, to give them additional credibility, also had the full weight behind them of the recently appointed pro-vice-chancellor, and two other highly significant senior managers.

Indeed, it may be no coincidence that Premiership University's very supportive senior leadership represented three relatively recent appointees; highlighting the importance of visionary leadership as a driver of change, it has been noted that: 'Transformations often begin, and begin well, when an organization has a *new head who is a good leader and who sees the need for a major change*'⁶⁸. The success of TEL-focused strategic change initiatives in HEIs may therefore be dependent, to some extent at least, on leadership that is able to offer new perspectives, bringing the 'breath of fresh air' that Alison, the head of Premiership University's Learning Technology Unit, associated with the leadership shown by pro-vice-chancellor, Howard, who helped her drive forward the e-learning strategy.

As was implied by several of our interviewees, the more senior the leader lending her/his support to a change initiative, the more influence that leader generally has within the institution, and the wider is likely to be the take-up of the change initiative. Danny, at Improved University (case 3), for example, commented: 'I think, given the way our university works, the key ingredients [of successful strategic change] are: the more senior – the more visible presence a senior member of the institution has – the more chance you have that it'll be taken on board'. Consistent with this reasoning – though it is presented in terminology that reflects the business context within which it was developed – Kotter's analysis highlights the importance in the strategic change process of supporters' seniority and status:

64 Kotter, P. (1995). Leading change: why transformation efforts fail. Harvard Business Review March–April 1995 59–67 (p60).

65 Fullan, M. (1993.) Changes forces. London: Falmer Press (p22).

66 Taylor, P. (1999). Making sense of academic life. Buckingham, Open University Press, p. 80.

67 *ibid* (p80).

68 Kotter, P. (1995). Leading change: why transformation efforts fail. Harvard Business Review March–April 1995 59–67 (p60, emphasis added).

“It is often said that major change is impossible unless the head of the organization is an active supporter. What I am talking about goes far beyond that. In successful transformations, the chairman or president or division general manager, plus another 5 or 15 or 50 people, come together and develop a shared commitment to excellent performance through renewal. In my experience, this group never includes all of the company’s most senior executives because some people just won’t buy in, at least not at first. But in the most successful cases, the coalition is always pretty powerful – in terms of titles, information and expertise, reputations and relationships ... Senior managers always form the core of the group⁶⁹.”

With Mick driving it, then, the TEL-focused strategic change agenda at Innovative University has an excellent chance of being realised, because of his influence within the university. But what also stood out in Mick’s interview – and which must clearly be an advantage in his driving of that change agenda – is his evident knowledge and understanding of the field.

TEL-related knowledge and expertise: the basis of informed decision-making

In his interview, Mick exuded an impressive grasp of learning technologies, the pedagogy underpinning them, and the latest developments, worldwide, in TEL adoption within higher education, referring to examples of what he believed to be pioneering adoptions of learning technologies at UK and overseas universities. In contrast, the deputy vice-chancellor at City Centre University (case 2) charged with leading the institution’s second CLL project, was described by his senior management colleague: ‘the DVC was leading it because it was agreed that it was an important piece of university work, but *actually he didn’t know very much about this – he’s not somebody ... who is embedded in pedagogy* – so he came with a different focus⁷⁰. There is an important implicit message embedded in this evaluation of the City Centre University deputy vice-chancellor’s leadership of the CLL project, which becomes more apparent on examining the full case 2 narrative: despite the need for high-profile leadership, it is potentially problematic to embark upon TEL-focused strategic change without a sound understanding of the issues surrounding the change focus. Although the CLL consultant summarised it as ‘by-the-skin-of-our-teeth-successful!’, the project featured in case 2 is evidently the least successful of all the five cases analysed. This was largely because the university’s senior management approached this strategic change opportunity with a poorly coordinated sense of the direction in which the project could go, which, in turn, was exacerbated by the institutional project lead’s – the deputy vice-chancellor’s – evident inadequate grasp of the TEL landscape.

Whilst it is clearly helpful, it is not essential, however – nor is it realistic – that all senior leaders or managers supporting and championing TEL-focused strategic change have the kind of encyclopaedic knowledge or familiarity with the field that Mick demonstrated. But it is essential that *someone* on the team driving the change initiative has sufficient knowledge and expertise to make informed decisions and advise other team members, and the effective senior leader will recognise that expertise and utilise it. In cases where this expertise and knowledge are absent within the university they will need to be pulled in from external sources. At Premiership University (case 4), the TEL experts were Alison and Donald; at Prestigious University (case 5) they were the e-learning director and her team; at Improved University, the institutional project team had to rely upon the CLL consultant to fill in the gaps in their own knowledge and were happy to accept her advice. Such specialist consultancy advice was also available to City Centre University for both projects 1 and 2 (cases 1 and 2 respectively), but a key distinction between project 1 – which the CLL consultant deemed to have been ‘*really successful*’ – and project 2, which was impoverished by its initially resulting in very limited change, lies in the appropriation and use of TEL-related expertise in each. Project 1 involved, from the start, not only TEL experts in the form of the institution’s own learning technologist and two of its appointed departmental e-learning champions, it also involved the consultant’s expertise, which the City Centre University team appreciated and utilised effectively. Project 2, in contrast, *initially* failed not only to draw upon this in-house expertise – the project 1 team – but also to make best use of the CLL consultant’s expertise. Only when this knowledge base was eventually tapped, with the original project 1 team’s being reconvened, did the project begin to head in the direction of useful change, when the pro-vice-chancellor stepped in and tasked faculty pro-dean, Freda, with rolling out project 1’s online module template across the university.

Knowledge and understanding of the institution, its culture and its people

Having been employed at it for over 20 years, Mick knew Innovative University well. He had seen – and been involved in – its growth and evolution, and understood the contextual background and the history that has shaped and determined the nature of the institution. But, more significantly, he spoke of keeping fresh this knowledge and understanding – and, to him, a key institutional constituency whose needs, interests and expectations should inform the TEL strategic agenda are Innovative University’s students. He explained:

69 *ibid* (p62, emphasis added).

70 Extract from anonymised transcript of interview with the City Centre University pro-vice chancellor (emphases added).

"I spend a lot of time with the students' union talking to them about how students use technology in their learning lives ... Not having an office is really, really helpful. I wander round and I, sort of, sit next to students in the library and have conversations. And – once they get over the nutter-talking-to-them-type problem – they're really very open, and very much more engaged in that situation than most others. So, yeah, I'll talk to student union meetings; I'll go to student rep meetings."

He also claimed to engage regularly with the academics delivering taught courses:

"I talk to faculty boards and things like that about [TEL] because they have a different view [from students]. ... Everything we do is based on course teams for teaching and learning ... So I engage with course teams through those sorts of processes."

At Premiership University, too, as a member of the Learning Technology Unit explained, the e-learning strategy was purported to be informed by knowledge of what students wanted, derived from engagement with student representatives: 'It's in response to the student demand, and I think a lot of the stuff we've been doing since I've been here – about four or five years – has been a kind of a bottom-up response to what the students want' (Donald, Learning Technology Unit member, Premiership University).

This kind of engagement – with those whose lives will be most affected by any change initiatives, and those who must be involved in implementing such change – represents the kind of semi-formal or informal knowledge-seeking networks that effective change leaders and managers develop, to ensure that their decision-making is appropriately informed⁷¹. Such networks are evident in most of our case narratives – in the TEL working group set up by education quality director Jim at Improved University (case 3), to inform the development of the e-learning strategy; in the extended, unofficial, Blended Learning Working Group that CLL consultant Graham eventually initiated at City Centre University (case 2) to break the deadlock in progressing an e-learning strategy; and in the Students Speaking focus group initiative (case 5) initiated by Prestigious University's e-learning director.

Yet, to be effective in informing strategic change, knowledge and understanding of the institution, its culture and its people must incorporate recognition of the diversity and heterogeneity that shape these, and that underpin institutional complexity. Such recognition includes what Knight and Trowler explain as 'getting to grips with the multiple realities of the main participants', which 'is crucial in implementing change, as is remembering that no one responds to realities other than their own'⁷². A 'one-size-fits-all' approach to championing change flies in the face of acceptance that people's responses to strategic change initiatives are shaped by these multiple realities, and that conflict and resistance are inevitable by-products of them; indeed, it has been argued that 'it is therefore not possible to arrive at an optimal goal or an optimal strategy; strategies must be compromises which allow the organization to go forward'⁷³.

Universities – generally more so than the typical businesses or companies that define the contexts within which is located much of the management of change literature – have multiple layers of diversity and heterogeneity: at faculty level, at departmental level, at the subject, silo, or intra-departmental academic 'tribes and territories'⁷⁴ level – each of which represents a sub-culture that will potentially respond to change initiatives quite differently from the others. Moreover, administratively, most university faculties and departments enjoy considerable autonomy, which in some cases and under certain circumstances may place them out of the change agent's reach or jurisdiction. Getting them on board can therefore pose significant challenges, as occurred with faculty pro-dean Freda's (case 2) leading the rolling out of an online module template across City Centre University:

"And now I've been charged with this idea of making it happen across all of the departments, which is actually incredibly difficult, because they each are their own, kind of, little universes and worlds, and to make something happen uniformly across these different kingdoms in some ways is quite tough, and I think that's been the problem. ... I think it could all fall apart if it doesn't have the support, say, of the deans and the departments, because they each have their own agenda."

Freda, faculty pro-dean, City Centre University

71 Quinn J.M. (1993). Managing strategic change In C. Mabey & B. Mayon-White (eds). *Managing Change* (2nd revised edition). (pp65–84).

72 Knight, P. & Trowler, P. (2001). *Departmental leadership in higher education*. Buckingham: Open University and the Society for Research into Higher Education (p25).

73 Johnson, G. (1993). Processes of managing strategic change. In C. Mabey & B. Mayon-White (eds) *Managing Change* (2nd revised edition). pp59–64 (p60).

74 Becher, T. & Trowler, P. (2001). *Academic tribes and territories: intellectual enquiry and the culture of disciplines*, Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

Taylor warns that ‘extrapolation from the work of lone rangers to the general academic community needs to be done with great care. That community is a very broad and multicultural church⁷⁵ – a consideration that had greatly influenced pro-dean Freda’s cautious and somewhat under-ambitious initial dissemination of her team’s ‘product’. Faced with a situation that illustrates Knight and Trowler’s observation that ‘actors at the local level ... have their own situated rationality, which can lead them to amend or ignore aspects of centrally derived policy⁷⁶, even the pro-vice-chancellor at City Centre University found his hands tied in trying to lead change across autonomous faculties whose deans were not answerable to him:

“I’d asked each faculty to come up with some kind of technology-enhanced learning working group within their own faculty – because they didn’t want a university one – so, y’know: ‘Think about it, your faculties do it your way, and get people who are enthusiastic to come and do that’. And one dean said to me, ‘No, I won’t do it, and if you set up anything at university [level] I won’t send anyone!’ And there is no recourse that I have for that. Deans have their own devolved structures in the faculties, and they can run their faculties in the way that they please, so everything that I do as a pro-vice-chancellor has to be through persuasion. I have no line management at all. I have no line management for the pro-deans for learning and teaching, for example. And the deans can have a final voice, so that becomes a really big issue in trying to think about institutional initiatives and how to invent them.”

Pro-vice-chancellor, City Centre University

Armed with the kind of local knowledge that has been labelled ‘micro-political literacy⁷⁷ – which involves knowing who is who in an organisation and having sufficient familiarity with key personalities to be aware of who has influence, whose views hold sway, and who might, in turn, be cajoled into coming on board – resistance to change may be eroded by stealth. Such was Freda’s strategy for winning powerful and influential allies who would support and champion in their faculties, the online module template that she had been tasked with rolling out:

“What I’ve decided to do...you’ve got to...it’s getting the right person; to have one or two individuals from each faculty. And they’ve got to be interested enough to be able to want to put the time and effort into this, and they’ve got to be senior enough and significant enough within their faculties in order to have enough clout with the deans to make it happen. And that’s quite a tricky thing. And so, for instance, in the Faculty of [X] that’s worked really well because there’s a very interesting colleague who’s also a deputy dean, and, yeah, if he’s on board it will happen.”

Freda, faculty pro-dean, City Centre University

To be most effective as a tool for leading change, knowing and understanding one’s institution, its culture and its people must include awareness of the norms that prevail within specific organisational divisions, and a capacity to gauge the strength and nature of feelings within sub-cultures that challenge or resist strategic change initiatives. At Improved University (case 3) such resistance came from the university executive; at Premiership University (case 4) it came from a specific department, as members of the Learning Technology Unit explained:

“At the moment we’re having a tussle with [X department], because there’s a campaign from a couple of academics in [the subject]. ... They’re talking about the expensive gadgetry that’s in lecture theatres at the expense of having blackboards, and [this subject’s] staff need blackboards. So we’ve got this, kind of, tussle. ... They set up a Facebook group and they’ve got a Twitter, and one of the tweets a couple of weeks ago was: Those morons in e-learning - look what they’ve done to this room! And then they went on and talked about ‘arseholes’ in e-learning. ... A number of people are contributing to this Facebook thing, and they’re still saying things on that Facebook site about: this room sucks!”

Alison, head of LTU, Premiership University

“[X subject] is quite interesting because I’ve been here about six years, and I remember going to a departmental meeting there and really having a tough time. They were really against technology at the time. ... And I did my bit – well, usual stuff – but they were really quite aggressive.”

Donald, LTU, Premiership University

75 Taylor, P.G. (1999). Making sense of academic life. Buckingham: Open University Press (p81).

76 Knight, P. & Trowler, P. (2001). Departmental leadership in higher education, Buckingham, Open University and the Society for Research into Higher Education (p4).

77 Kelchtermans, G. & Ballet, K. (2002). Micropolitical literacy: reconstructing a neglected dimension in teacher development. International Journal of Educational Research 37(8): 755–67.

Faced with resistance – particularly if it is aggressive – the effective leader of change applies her/his local cultural knowledge to weigh up the situation and make a decision about which battles to fight to the death, and which to surrender to the opposition. S/he also recognises when compromise may well offer the most gain, applying knowledge and understanding, not just of departmental or epistemic cultural norms, but also of the personalities that make up the resistant constituencies. At Premiership University, the Learning Technology Unit identified the main protagonist in the battle for the blackboards and opted for appeasement and compromise, as Alison outlined: 'One of the [Learning Technology] team is with the guy from [X department] right now, doing a walk around of rooms, taking photographs and seeing if there are any quick wins that we can do'. With other, less aggressive, manifestations of resistance – such as from technophobes or techno-sceptics – a different kind of knowledge is called for: knowing how best to reel them in, which will come from understanding their concerns; as the e-learning director of a post-1992 university observed: 'I think very much, for the dinosaurs, you've got to go and see them face to face. You can't expect them to come to your service and look at online resources, so you have to have a starting point where it is face to face, supportive, nurturing, individual small-group activity'.

Local cultural knowledge, then, is an invaluable tool in leading strategic change, but a key element of its effectiveness is its capacity to inform and enhance the vision that strategies are focused on realising.

Visionary leadership

It is generally accepted that effective leadership of strategic change requires a vision:

"In every successful transformation effort that I have seen, the guiding coalition develops a picture of the future that is relatively easy to communicate ... In failed transformations, you often find plenty of plans and programs, but no vision. ... Eventually, a strategy for achieving that vision is also developed"⁷⁸.

A realisable vision for developing TEL provision in an HEI incorporates both knowledge of the institution, its culture and its people, and a sound knowledge of TEL. In the CLL project cases that we analysed (case studies 1–5), success appeared to correlate with leadership vision. In case analysis 1, we present an analysis of a bottom-up change initiative led by a small group of colleagues who shared a vision for a module that would have specific features, in order to reach, and meet the learning needs of, a specific constituency of student. This was not principally a 'big' or expansive vision; it was small scale and modest. But it was entirely fit for purpose; it allowed the change leaders – the group – to set specific, achievable goals by focusing on a mental picture of an outcome that they were able to imagine and share with each other. Moreover, it was not a static vision, carved in stone; it evolved, reshaping itself in response to input on it from the CLL consultant. Most significantly, in its evolved form, it was realised. As a cog in the wheels of strategic change at City Centre University, this CLL project achieved very limited success initially, but as a discrete project it achieved much of what it was intended to achieve, not least in realising a vision for a specific teaching innovation that would enhance the student learning experience.

Case analysis 2, in contrast, relates a project without a clear vision. The deputy vice-chancellor who was leading the initiative seemed, from all accounts, to have no fixed idea of the direction he wanted the project to take, and any ideas that he did have were liable to change – indeed, he had at one point allowed himself to change tack by following the consultant's suggestion to develop flexible learning approaches; then – possibly resulting from his limited knowledge and understanding of learning technologies and the TEL field – he later nailed his flag to the lecture capture mast. For the purposes of participating in a CLL project, this initial uncertainty and lack of direction were perfectly acceptable, since one of the purposes of the CLL initiative was to help and support HEIs, not least by giving them direction through encouraging their strategic thinking and to contribute knowledge and experience where they were lacking – indeed, we present above the example of a case of an institution whose strategic direction was deemed too developed to be able to be enhanced by CLL consultancy. But for the wider purpose of his leading institutional TEL-focused strategic change, this senior manager's underdeveloped vision significantly undermined his capacity. It is unsurprising, then, that case 2's project was the least successful of the five CLL projects that we analyse. As a strategic change project it was heavily criticised and perceived as a failure by several City Centre University interviewees; asked to rate its success on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 denotes high success), one of them gave it 5 and another gave it 1.

In contrast, leadership with vision is evident in the most successful of the projects that we analyse, as well as in those three post-1992 HEIs that, at the beginning of this section, we highlight as snapshots that convey impressively TEL-focused contexts. These are visions shot through with implications of the kinds of knowledge and understanding identified above as important facilitators of successful leadership. Asked to share their visions for developing TEL provision in their universities – despite Kotter’s suggestion that effective transformational change leaders should be able to communicate their visions in five minutes or less and provoke a reaction that shows both interest and understanding⁷⁹ – many of those presenting themselves as our most visionary interviewees spent considerable time (in some cases up to 10 minutes) explaining the precise details of their plans and their developing strategies, sharing their ideals, their goals, and their priorities. The following selected, illustrative extracts from some of these communications convey something of the breadth of knowledge and understanding that these strategic change leaders demonstrated:

“What I would like to see is a fully integrated learning experience for students. By that I mean that when they come to the university, they’d know that they would be provided with equipment – maybe that’s a device; whatever that might be – to undertake that study. They don’t need to bring any of that with them, we would equip them with that, and on there would be all of the resources that they need for that base-level experience – including quick links to support. It would all be on that single device, one-stop-shop, pre-loaded content, pre-loaded information, searchable. ... I also think we need to learn to communicate more effectively. I think in an ideal world you can go to websites now and it says, ‘Would you like to sign in with your Facebook account, your Google account?’ Imagine coming to university and it saying, ‘Would you like to join our university with your Facebook account, and your Google account?’ You don’t have use the university email address; you choose how you want to join our university and then our services will all funnel it through that channel – your preferred method. ... And with that kind of device wherever you go: Here’s your device, sign in with your university email account if you wish, or with your Google account, or with your Facebook account – it doesn’t matter; and everything will be there for you as well. And you take that device with you; it has everything on there that you did, so, even though you’ve left the university and the VLE is now gone, it doesn’t matter; we’ve downloaded it... that content is now on that device with you forever.”

E-learning director, post-1992 university

“For me, it involves a course working very much as a course, not just modules. It involves integration and a problem-based or enquiry-led approach to learning. So, in a semester, a business faculty might have a module in marketing in strategy and finance, I’d say. Those three tutors come together to design a case which addresses all three. I embed a subject librarian – or a custodian of data, or whatever – into the course team, who helps the academics build a repository of verified information ... which is what the students need to learn, I think. But we provide, not the normal 100% sort of space; we provide the 500% space! So there’s lots of opportunity for them to go off and pick at pieces and to be inquisitive, whilst still knowing that, of course, they’ll go beyond our safe zone and into the general web, and then for us to focus the classroom on that case; on how that case really developed in real practice in the real world, and why certain decisions may be taken at certain points, and for the student then to be leading the demand for input. It takes away some of the control the tutor has, and it means that they’ve got to be prepared in other stuff, but they should do that anyway; that should become a practice. It is a little bit unsettling to begin with, but it would then be about whether the students were developing. If it was a finance question, part of the finance side of the case – developing a financial model – they might need some maths input. And then we can bring some maths input – and it might only be half an hour’s input rather than the fixed hour or two hours of lecture, but we should be capable of being sufficiently flexible to do that. ... So it’s about adding a flexibility and real-world problem-solving into the students’ experiences.”

Mick, deputy vice-chancellor, Innovative University

“I think that the first thing I’d like to see is things to be a lot more experimental: so, you can walk into the rooms here and they’ve all got the same sort of kit; it’s been decided by some sort of committee. But I’d far rather have spaces where you’ve got students using them, moving stuff around, y’know – some things are experimental, so there might be a funny bit of kit in different rooms. It could be as simple as just things like an Apple TV, and a couple of big plasma screens in some places, and saying, ‘Right, OK, we’re not going to give you lots of keyboards and stuff. If you want to use your kit, fine, let’s see what’s happening’. Or availability of more recording equipment, or whatever it is – or trying to make some spaces that are soundproof, or little booths that people can work away in, and just see what happens.”

E-learning director, Prestigious University

79 *ibid* (p63).

“What I would like to see in five years’ time is an institution whereby students who are on campus – and that would be the majority of our students – use technology more...effectively, or, through learning and teaching, technology is used more effectively... er...to keep students on task, engage them in effective, active learning, that staff and students have high levels of what I would call ‘digital literacy’ skills and standing – able to critique and adapt – and that we would also have some programmes (as I say, particularly postgraduate, particularly CPD) which are again high-quality, online blended, kind of, delivery. I know some of my colleagues are involved in those areas; that for them is a key issue: how do we ensure the quality of what is done?”

Jim, education quality director, Improved University

“My ideal picture would be that, right from the moment of programme design – module specification – there was a really clear indication that people had thought...that colleagues had thought about the pedagogical issues in teaching the groups of students that are coming to them, and how best to support their flexible learning through a pedagogical way in, rather than through everything else. ... And what that looks like, I think, would be very different across the university. But I would like to see people thinking just as readily about a range of different technology that they might include in the same way as they might think about: should we have just essays in this piece, or should we have a range of different assessment methods?”

Pro-vice-chancellor, teaching and learning, City Centre University

What these selected comments illustrate is the range of visions held by those of our interviewees who were institutional CLL project leads, and who held TEL-focused strategic change leadership roles. All such interviewees were asked to share their visions. The first three illustrative quotes presented above have been abbreviated, and represent only fractions of the visions that were shared with us; the last two are presented in their entirety. Whilst implying no criticism of the Improved University and the City Centre University interviewees – we fully appreciate that both their own knowledge of learning technologies and of the TEL field, and their respective universities’ engagement in TEL, are considerably less developed than those of the other three interviewees quoted here – we were nevertheless struck by a noticeable alignment between institutions’ apparent TEL-related focus and achievements, and the quality of TEL-related vision expressed by members of their senior management and strategic change leadership teams, in terms of the level of specificity incorporated into the visions and the knowledge and ambition that they conveyed. We could not avoid noticing the expansiveness and specificity incorporated into those visions presented by representatives of HEIs whose TEL provision was the most ambitious and impressive, or – as in the case of Prestigious University’s e-learning director – where TEL provision was being championed by a knowledgeable and informed, but frustrated, visionary.

The implications of these observations are clear: effective leadership of TEL-related strategic change must be focused on a well-formulated strategy that reflects an informed, ambitious, but realisable, vision. To merit all three of these adjectives, the vision must be grounded in sound knowledge and understanding of learning technologies and of the TEL field, and of the context in which the strategy is to be applied: the institution, its culture and its people.

In relation to the last of these – knowledge and understanding of the people – we supplement our analyses with a brief theoretical perspective that we propose below as representing a different ‘take’ on leading and managing change: strategic change leadership as professional development.

Flipping the theory: leadership of change as professional development writ large

For the most part, the literature on leading and managing change – whether it is referred to as transformational change or systemic change or strategic change – focuses on the leader’s position and perspective. The perspective of ‘the led’ or ‘followers’ is under-examined and under-represented^{80,81,82}. By the same token, change initiatives and the business of achieving or imposing change are generally – with a few notable exceptions^{83,84} – examined and analysed from the perspective(s) of the change agents or initiators; the ‘narrative’ that is developed when it comes to addressing implications or making recommendations for policy and practice is focused on their agency, their reality and their consciousness. Moreover, both academically and practically, change is

80 Evans, L. (2015). A changing role for university professors? Professorial academic leadership as it is perceived by ‘the led’. *British Educational Research Journal* (accessible on Early View).

81 Evans, L., Homer, M. & Rayner, S. (2013). Professors as academic leaders: the perspectives of ‘the led’. *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership* 41(5): 674–89.

82 Evans, L. (2011a). Leadership and management in education: reports of its death have been greatly exaggerated. *Research Intelligence* 115: 25

83 For example, Marris, P. (1974). *Loss and change*. London: Routledge.

84 For example, Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change*. Abingdon: Routledge.

most often considered as an imposition; occasionally, in more enlightened analyses, it is presented as an opportunity. We present a different perspective that draws upon the work of one of us^{85,86}: change as professional development.

What is often overlooked is that change in the workplace impacts upon professionalism. Though it is seldom explicitly recognised, change initiatives represent attempts to change people's, or a workforce's, professionalism: to renovate it, replacing an old professionalism with a new professionalism. Another, related, point that is often overlooked is that changing professionalism constitutes professional development. When a government introduces reforms or other measures intended to foster or impose changes to the professionalism of a particular workforce, it does so because it wants these practitioners to develop in ways that result in their practice's better matching its (the government's) ideologies and aspirations, in order to better meet its goals. This constitutes (intended) professional development at the macro level. Similarly, a university senior management's – or any other university change agent's – attempts to introduce new forms of practice to the academic workforce, such as the adoption of digital technologies into teaching practice, constitutes (intended) professional development at the meso (institutional) level. TEL-focused strategic change initiatives therefore represent (attempts at) professional development writ large. To better understand what influences the degree of success of such initiatives, we should therefore be looking not only at conventional management of change theories, but also at how professionalisms change, and, by extension, how people develop professionally.

Leadership for professional development: an alternative perspective on initiating and leading change

Although the last few decades have seen the proliferation of the publication of useful models of professional development, none has elucidated fully the internalisation process that occurs in individuals in order to prompt them to adopt this or that new practice or process: the cognitive process that leads directly to individuals' professional development. This process has been referred to as micro-level development, defined as:

the enhancement of individuals' professionalism, resulting from their acquisition, through a consciously or unconsciously applied mental internalisation process, of professional work-related knowledge and/or understanding and/or attitudes and/or skills and/or competences that, on the grounds of what is consciously or unconsciously considered to be its/their superiority, displace(s) and replace(s) previously-held professional work-related knowledge and/or understanding and/or attitudes and/or skills and/or competences⁸⁷.

Micro-level professional development – to illustrate the minuteness of its scale and the potential narrowness of its focus – is about an academic's discovering a better way of teaching the theory of relativity to a single struggling undergraduate, rather than her more expansive commitment to becoming an overall better physics lecturer.

A key processual component, or stage, of micro-level professional development is the individual's recognition of something as a 'better way' of 'doing' things (applying a broad interpretation of 'doing' to include mental as well as physical activity): better than what preceded, and than what is superseded by, the newly accepted and adopted professional practice (again, applying a similarly broad definition of practice to include mental activity) which, by definition, manifests professional development⁸⁸. Without this recognition, there is no perceived rationale for change. To accept a new, or modified, professionalism, and to embrace it wholeheartedly, academics must see it as, on balance, a 'better' professionalism than the one that it replaces. To some extent such evaluation or comparison of professionalisms will reflect disciplinary and related epistemic conventions, which implies, as Paul Trowler points out, that 'any attempt to understand academics' responses to change ... must primarily be informed by an understanding of the nature of the discipline in which they specialize'⁸⁹. Yet acceptance – or rejection – of change applies first and foremost not at the collective, whole-institutional workforce, level, nor even at the disciplinary community (of practice) level, but at the level of the individual academic⁹⁰. So the academic who opposes the replacement of blackboards with digital

85 Evans, L. (2011b). The 'shape' of teacher professionalism in England: professional standards, performance management, professional development, and the changes proposed in the 2010 White Paper. *British Educational Research Journal*. 37(5): 851–70.

86 Evans, L. (2014). Leadership for professional development and learning: enhancing our understanding of how teachers develop. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 44(2): 179–98.

87 Evans, L. (2011b). The 'shape' of teacher professionalism in England: professional standards, performance management, professional development, and the changes proposed in the 2010 White Paper. *British Educational Research Journal*. 37(5): 851–70.

88 Evans, L. (2014). Leadership for professional development and learning: enhancing our understanding of how teachers develop. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 44(2): 179–98.

89 Trowler, P.R. (1998). *Academics responding to change: New higher education frameworks and academic cultures*. Buckingham: Open University Press (p56).

90 In fact, Trowler (1998) questions – and presents his own research data that undermine – epistemological essentialist-informed conclusions about academic professionalism and culture. In his later collaboration with Tony Becher, the two authors (Becher & Trowler, 2001) revisit and modify the epistemological essentialist paradigmatic basis of Becher's single-authored analysis (Becher, 1989) on the grounds that it privileged an elitist interpretation of power and influence within disciplinary culture(s) that was not borne out by empirical evidence.

technologies as teaching aids is resisting the imposition of a new academic professionalism for her subject area that the TEL-focused change agents are promoting. To her, this represents a worse, rather than a better, academic professionalism than the one that is characterised by, *inter alia*, teaching through chalk and talk. The teaching fellow who embraces lecture capture, on the other hand, and recognises the TEL change agenda as, for him, a 'better way', personifies professionalism-changing professional development in action.

Effective TEL-focused strategic change leadership in HEIs requires an understanding of what academics may – either immediately or over time – recognise and accept, on balance, as a 'better' academic professionalism. It involves appealing to their perceptions of a professionalism *that works for them*, and with which they can identify. In this respect, a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to work in a university setting, where epistemic tribes, territories and tribalistic rituals determine local, departmental cultures. Of course, the bigger picture is more complex and involves many more issues than this; initial local resistance and opposition may prove temporary, being gradually eroded.

Conceptual models of both professionalism and professional development recently developed by one of us trifurcate each into: behavioural, attitudinal and intellectual components⁹¹. Whilst behavioural development may be imposed on people – exemplified in our research findings by many universities having introduced mandatory baseline standards for academics' use of the VLE – attitudinal and intellectual development are impossible to impose; they are arrived at by the developpee's replacing an attitude, or a way of thinking or understanding or a knowledge structure, with what s/he perceives as a 'better' one. Conscious or unconscious recognition on the part of the developpee of a 'better way' is a necessary condition for attitudinal or intellectual development; people cannot be *ordered* to develop in relation to these components – they must arrive at them freely, of their own accord. The skill in effective leadership of change involves convincing people that the new way is a *better* way – or, as Paul Trowler puts it, 'profitable'⁹².

Promoting TEL as a 'better way': the contribution of the CLL initiative

This leads us finally – and briefly, since it has featured throughout this report – to a summative consideration of the contribution to enhancing the student experience and improving student learning made by the CLL initiative. Despite the fiasco that, from all accounts, was City Centre University's second CLL project (case 2), and the bemusement of Mick at Innovative University on learning that he was beyond CLL help, and the rather limited value that the CLL project was deemed to have added to Premiership University's TEL profile and progress, the initiative was universally applauded by those of our research participants who were aware of it – particularly the CLL project institutional leads. Moreover, the project's success is recognised beyond the community of its participants, with Trowler et al suggesting that Hefce 'could [usefully] focus on learning the lessons from successful interventions such as Changing the Learning Landscape'⁹³.

The perceived key benefits of participation in the projects have been touched upon in our analyses above: it ensured that the institutional teams remained focused on and disciplined themselves to progress the requisite tasks, rather than lapse into procrastination; it sustained the motivation of, and revitalised, the institutional teams; it fostered a sense of achievement; it offered practical support and expertise that was often lacking or in short supply in-house; it brought objectivity and externality – in the person of the consultant – that broadened perspectives and challenged the *status quo*; and it provided leverage – again, in the person of the consultant who was recognised as an expert in the field – for institutional teams to push through their change agendas in the face of resistance.

91 Evans, L. (2011b). The 'shape' of teacher professionalism in England: professional standards, performance management, professional development, and the changes proposed in the 2010 White Paper. *British Educational Research Journal*. 37(5): 851–70.

92 Trowler, P.R. (1998). *Academics responding to change: New higher education frameworks and academic cultures*. Buckingham: Open University Press (p153). Trowler identifies as a key factor that conditions responses to change: 'the perceived profitability of an innovation for those charged with implementing it. Where an innovation is potentially profitable it may be adopted relatively unproblematically even where there are incompatibilities with existing cultural characteristics on the ground ...'. We infer a broad interpretation of profitability here – one that is not narrowly focused on financial considerations, but that equates to the kinds of perceptions of 'betterness' that we identify as recognition of something as representing 'a better way'.

93 Trowler, P., Ashwin, P. & Saunders, M. (2014). *The role of HEFCE in teaching and learning enhancement: a review of evaluative evidence*. York: Higher Education Academy (p27).

More specifically – and to ‘zoom in’ on just a few selected cases of CLL-participating HEIs that featured in our research – the legacy of the CLL initiative includes: a commitment at City Centre University to roll out flexible learning across the institution; the ongoing development of an e-learning strategy at Improved University – including the establishment of an active TEL working group; enhancements to Prestigious University’s distance learning delivery – and a widened perspective on what constitutes distance learning. In particular, the CLL initiative added most value to those HEIs that were lagging behind and have the most distance to make up. So the greatest gains have been at institutions like Improved University, and City Centre University, and – for the leverage it lent to the e-learning experts there – at Prestigious University.

The CLL initiative was a professional development initiative. What it has done – its greatest legacy – is to put TEL on the agendas of HEIs that had not really, or seriously, confronted the digital revolution. In those institutions it has kickstarted the dialogue that is a precursor to institutional cultural evolution. Like all effective professional development initiatives, it has signalled to those HEIs what they have all come to accept as a ‘better way’, and supported them in taking that way.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: template of information letter sent to research participants in advance of interview⁹⁴

Dear X

Improving student learning outcomes through strategic change

Further to our recent email exchange, in which you were kind enough to agree to participate as an interviewee in our research project, *Improving student learning outcomes through strategic change*, below is further information on what you can expect in the interview, and what your rights are as a participant.

The purpose of the project, which is funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, is to examine the nature and extent of the learning which has resulted from the Changing the Learning Landscape (CLL) project, and to shed some light on what influenced the CLL's successes and failures. [Name of recipient's institution] was one of almost 70 UK institutions to be involved in the CLL project and I would like to hear your perspective on how successful (if at all) the project was at your institution. I propose to do this – with your permission – through a research interview that I anticipate will last for a good hour.

We plan to interview many of the people who were involved (however significantly or marginally) in the CLL project in their institutions. We hope to treat some of the participating institutions as case studies – anonymously (the names of the institutions and of the participants will not be divulged to anyone outside the research team). In other cases, we shall content ourselves with interviewing only the project lead or other key players (in relation to the CLL project) within an institution. For those institutions that become case studies, we expect to interview a range of the staff and students – ideally, around 6–9 interviewees per case study institution. Since we have committed ourselves to protecting the identity of all participants, and to avoiding using gatekeepers, we propose not to reveal to any interviewees whether or not research data collected from members of their institution are likely to be analysed and written up in the form of a case study – there's nothing sinister in this decision; it's simply that if participants know that their institutions are to be treated as case studies, on reading the research report (which is likely to feature only around 5 cases studies) they may be able to work out the identities of some of their institutional colleagues who have acted as participants, so we want to do everything possible to avoid this.

Since interviews are intended to provide us with rich, qualitative data, we very much hope that participants will feel able to speak frankly and candidly. Interviews ideally take the form of a conversation, rather than a rigid question and answer format, and incorporate the flexibility to follow up in depth issues that arise in the conversation. We are seeking to shed light on what are the features of institutional strategic change initiatives – specifically, the CCL initiative – that successfully engage people, and what accounts for lack of success. In your interview (which will be conducted by me), I shall accordingly be asking you, *inter alia*, about your level of engagement in the CCL initiative at [name of institution]; how effectively you felt the initiative was handled within your institution, what could have been done better, what was particularly effective, and why.

We would like to record the interview conversation to facilitate our analysis, using a digital audio recorder. The audio recordings will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. **If you are unhappy about this please let me know as soon as possible.**

I assure you that anything you say during the research interview – and which will be treated as research data – will be kept strictly confidential. Only the research team (which will include a transcriber who is very experienced and whose trustworthiness and discretion are proven) will have access to your identity. Your identity will not be revealed to anyone else at any point in the future, and we will take great care to remove or disguise any references to you or your work or circumstances that will allow you to be identified. To preserve this anonymity, you may wish to avoid telling anyone that you've participated as an interviewee in our research, otherwise there's a very slight chance that they may, if they later see the research report when it is placed in the public domain, be able to work out which anonymised comments were made by you – but this is your choice, of course. **If you wish to withdraw your participation at any time between now and the research interview, or during the research interview, or after it – by asking for the data provided by you to be withdrawn – you obviously may do so without needing to give a reason.**

⁹⁴ The precise content of the letter varied, depending on factors such as the recipient's role in the CLL project, and whether s/he was a first-, second- or third-wave interviewee (explained in the research design and method section, above).

Otherwise it is our intention to retain the dataset for up to 10 years, since we may wish to revisit it and perhaps re-analyse it for application to other studies that we may undertake in the future.

The research interview length will be influenced by how much you wish to say – in this sense it will be very much determined by you. You may refuse to discuss anything that you are asked about and to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You may ask for the recorder to be switched off at any point – temporarily or permanently – or you may bring the interview to an end at any point.

If, as I hope, you are still willing to participate as an interviewee I shall ask you to sign a consent form before we begin – I attach a copy of the form, for information. I'll bring a print-out of it for you to sign before we begin the interview on [date].

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Once again, thank you very much for agreeing to participate, and I look forward to meeting you on [date] at [time], at [place].

Best wishes,

Professor Linda Evans,

(Principal investigator of the *Improving student learning outcomes through strategic change* project)

Appendix 2: template of interviewee consent form

Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Improving student learning outcomes through strategic change

Research team: Linda Evans and Neil Morris (University of Leeds)

Please **initial** inside each box to indicate your agreement with the statement listed to the left of it.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the letter dated [insert date] explaining the above-named research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. Should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research, except where I agree that this may occur and give my permission (e.g. in dissemination events in which I choose to participate).
4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research under the conditions identified in 3 (above). If at any time in the future I change my mind I may contact the principal investigator at l.evans@leeds.ac.uk who will remove from the dataset those data provided by me that I wish to withdraw from further availability.
5. I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the principal investigator should my contact details change, so that I may be contacted if my permission for anything is sought.

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Prof. Linda Evans

Name of researcher taking consent

Date

Signature

About the authors

Linda Evans is professor of leadership and professional learning at the University of Leeds School of Education. Spanning both the compulsory and the higher education sectors, her research focuses on professional working life, including: professionalism and professional development; morale, job satisfaction and motivation; and leadership and management. She has authored five books, including *Teaching and learning in higher education* (1998, published by Cassell), and numerous articles and chapters. Her first edited book (with Jon Nixon), *Academic identities in higher education: The changing European landscape*, was published by Bloomsbury in 2015. She is an associate editor of the journal, *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership* and between 2010 and 2013 was editor-in-chief of *The International Journal for Researcher Development*. A former student of European studies and modern foreign languages, she remains a fluent speaker of German and French and has a wide network of European colleagues, frequently engages with francophone researchers, and often presents her work in French. In 2011 she lived in Lyon as visiting professor at l'Institut Français de l'Éducation, within the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon. She is a vice-chair of the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) and the founding convenor of the SRHE's International Research and Researchers' Network.

Also employed at the University of Leeds, **Neil Morris** is chair of educational technology, innovation and change and the university's director of digital learning. He is an internationally recognised expert in digital learning, blended learning and leadership of teaching and learning. A national teaching fellow of the Higher Education Academy (HEA), he has won a number of national awards for teaching excellence. He has extensive experience of leading strategic change for innovative teaching and learning at Leeds, and currently has academic leadership responsibility for implementing digital technologies across the institution, including MOOCs for FutureLearn, lecture capture, open educational resources, the virtual learning environment and student response handsets. Neil regularly advises higher education institutions on strategic leadership of learning and teaching, and speaks at many national and international events on digital strategy, and leadership of learning and teaching. He has developed and authored strategies and policies for the university, including the Digital Strategy for Taught Student Education, the Blended Learning Strategy, the audio and video recording policy, the MOOC vision and strategy, and the open educational resources policy. With a research background in neuroscience, his current research interests lie in educational technology, and online and blended learning. He has conducted several published research studies on the impact of mobile technologies on student learning and engagement and is the co-author with Stella Cottrell of *Study Skills Connected*, a Palgrave Macmillan textbook on using technology effectively to enhance learning, published in 2012.

Notes

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