

ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY
e-LEARNING STRATEGY 2005-2009

1. CONTEXT

AU's mission and vision for learning and teaching is clearly articulated in *The Strategy for Learning and Teaching 2004-2009*. Building on the achievements of the first five year strategy it updates strategic aims for learning and teaching and identifies a raft of supporting action lines designed to maintain excellence and promote innovation in an ever changing academic environment. One of the ways identified in the Strategy in which AU intends to improve the learning and teaching infrastructure is to:

'Promote and facilitate the appropriate use of information and communications technology (ICT) as a means of improving access to learning and enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the learning and teaching experience.

- Develop an institutional e-learning policy and strategy
- Provide local and remote access to suitable digital content, web-based learning materials, software products and virtual learning environments
- Strengthen mechanisms and, if possible, increase resources to support staff and students in their use of e-learning resources, technology based techniques and online tools'

(Aim 2.3 Learning and Teaching Strategy 2004 – 2009)

Although e-learning has already been widely adopted at AU and will in a matter of time cease to require separate attention, the next stage of development and growth needs to be more consciously planned if the distinctive benefits that advances in technology can bring are to be made generally available. AU recognises that if it wishes to make the transition to a situation in which e-learning is embedded in the University's normal academic activities for both campus-based students and those studying at a distance then it must provide strategic leadership and appropriate central provision. This document consequently seeks to provide a strategic framework within which AU can ensure the highest standards of provision and that the uptake of e-learning is consistent with the overall aims and objectives of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. For the purpose of this document e-learning is taken to mean any systematic use of new technologies to support, enhance or deliver learning and teaching.

2. INSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIVES

The strategy outlined in this document is designed not only to facilitate and promote the use of e-learning but also to contribute to the University's overall mission and wider institutional goals as outlined in its annual Strategic Plan and other associated documents. In particular, it seeks to:

- enrich student learning
- support staff in their teaching
- increase choice and the flexibility of provision
- facilitate increased Welsh medium provision
- widen access to learning
- improve access to information and knowledge
- facilitate collaboration within and between institutions

3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In formulating this e-learning strategy the following assumptions have been made about the most appropriate approach for AU:

- that our preference is for a richly varied learning environment in which students based on and off campus will have equality of access to a choice of learning styles, offering a blend of both traditional and new methods of learning and academic enquiry
- that the e-learning strategy will be driven by pedagogic considerations rather than technical issues, with the overriding consideration being the desire to make the learning process more effective, engaging and accessible to students who have increasingly diverse requirements and learning preferences
- that the intention will be to facilitate and support e-learning as one of a variety of approaches and learning styles adopted at AU. Although e-learning is likely to have relevance for all disciplines the extent to which it is embedded in departmental teaching practices will remain a decision for the professional judgement of academic departments and their staff
- that as an integral and increasingly indistinguishable part of a wide spectrum of learning and teaching methods, e-learning must be fully integrated into mainstream quality assurance procedures and contribute to the general objectives established in the AU Learning and Teaching Strategy

4. STRATEGIC AIMS

AU considers that e-learning can enhance the quality of the student learning experience, improve the effectiveness of its teaching and more generally contribute to achievement of the University's strategic aims, including widening access to learning and increasing participation. Through this e-Learning Strategy it seeks actively to support and encourage the appropriate use of information and communications technologies (ICT) in learning and teaching at all levels within an environment in which staff and students derive benefit from a blend of traditional and new learning and teaching methods that best suit their particular learning and teaching needs. The broad strategic aims and associated action lines outlined below reflect the issues that have been identified as being critical to the successful roll-out and take-up of e-learning across the University as a whole.

AIM 1: to encourage and empower academic staff to take advantage of the ways in which technology can invigorate and enhance the effectiveness of their teaching and contribute to learning outcomes

- 1.1 to raise general levels of understanding and awareness amongst the academic community of the potential of e-learning and the ways in which it can provide students with new learning opportunities
- 1.2 to ensure that arrangements for providing support for the use of e-learning are sufficient to provide academic staff with access to the necessary skills, training and guidance at both an institutional and a departmental level to enable them to take full advantage of the opportunities that e-learning provides
- 1.3 to recognise and reward excellence in the use of learning technologies within the learning and teaching environment

AIM 2: to ensure that students have the necessary understanding to make informed decisions about e-learning and the skills required to take advantage of the opportunities it provides

- 2.1 to make students fully aware of the technologies, tools and assessment methods associated with e-learning and of the pedagogic and technical support they can expect to receive
- 2.2 to ensure that generic and discipline dependent e-skills training and support is available to both campus based and remote students and that the requirements of students with special needs are taken fully into account
- 2.3 to ensure that e-learning is used to widen choice for students, for example, by extending Welsh medium provision
- 2.4 to ensure that students pursuing modes of learning that are flexible or distributed (including distance learning), and that incorporate elements of e-learning, have parity of access with campus-based students to information, feedback and support as appropriate to their learning needs

AIM 3: to ensure that the technical infrastructure and other centrally provided facilities are fit for purpose and capable of supporting current and anticipated levels of demand for e-learning

- 3.1 to provide staff and students with the teaching room facilities, network infrastructure and specialist systems, tools and information resources that are a pre-requisite for the widespread uptake of e-learning provision
- 3.2 to address a range of issues likely to be associated with the provision and use of electronic information, including electronic submission of work, copyright, licensing, plagiarism, security data back-up, retention and preservation

AIM 4: to ensure that e-learning is fully integrated into strategic planning processes at both an institutional and departmental level and that e-learning developments are, as a matter of course, subject to quality assurance procedures and mechanisms

- 4.1 to ensure that the development of e-learning is considered at a strategic level within the broader framework provided by the institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy and that academic departments incorporate e-learning into their own learning and teaching strategies
- 4.2 to consider what incentives and models for strengthening support might be employed to encourage e-learning initiatives and facilitate the development and uptake of e-learning programmes and modules
- 4.3 to ensure that in respect of its design, delivery and assessment e-learning meets required academic standards, is subject to robust quality assurance procedures and engages fully with the appropriate precepts in the QAA Code of Practice
- 4.4 to ensure that the provision of e-learning helps the University to deliver its policy on supporting Welsh medium provision and the requirements of the AU Welsh Language Scheme

5. IMPLEMENTATION

This e-Learning Strategy will be implemented through a series of annual action plans devised and monitored by the Learning and Teaching Strategy Implementation Group (LTSIG) in conjunction with its annual review of the AU Learning and Teaching Strategy. Priorities will be identified for each academic year within the planning period and a schedule of actions prepared and circulated to those identified as having responsibility for implementation. Annual reports from key stakeholders will be used to monitor progress and measure impact and will inform decision-making about the following year's targets and priorities.

6. OUTCOMES

By the end of the 2008/2009 academic year it is envisaged that:

- e-learning will be firmly embedded in the curriculum as a means of enhancing the quality of teaching, meeting students' expectations and responding to the needs of the workplace
- AU will offer an attractive portfolio of taught courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels that offer students a range of choices in respect of teaching styles and modes of delivery and that make best use of new and emerging technologies
- AU will have investment strategies in place that ensure adequate provision for the IT infrastructure, digital resources and user support necessary to underpin use of new learning technologies
- all students and staff to have access to the competencies, skills training and support needed to make most effective use of e-learning methods and technologies