



NORTHERN PERIPHERY PROGRAMME

Community Learning Networks

Final Project Results

Summary of Activities:

- Workshops to allow Project Team to meet, plan, agree objectives and undertake activities
- Project newsletter and project website developed to diffuse information across partner team area
- Final pilot delivery of 'Trends and Opportunities in Remote Learning' module has been successfully completed with students gaining hugely from the new type of delivery piloted and the pedagogy of learning in a collaborative style
- Development of Northern Heritage module between the partners and delivery of both pilots of Northern Heritage module have been successfully completed
- Project team met via video-conference on a monthly basis as well as regular contact via email
- Lectures were successfully delivered from all partner countries and some were recorded so that the lecture material could be streamed through the VLC
- Original work of the VLC development team has now been written up and will be presented as a paper which highlights both the level of the work involved and its originality
- A further paper and article were published regarding learning communities directly relating to this project and have been presented to a wide audience of academics
- The Trends development team plan to publish an academic paper to present to colleagues, and also to continue with collaboration once the project is completed

Value Added From Transnationality

The project has allowed partner institutions to share aspects of work in the field of distance learning, generated a greater understanding of common challenges, and has provided an opportunity to share examples of solutions and best practice, while simultaneously broadening the horizons of the staff and students involved. The modules have been undertaken using transnational student groups, which has provided students with additional benefits in undertaking the course and an opportunity to meet with others in similar professions from partner countries. Mainstream funding would not have allowed this type of innovative approach, such as the multi-media approach with use of video conference, actual meeting, as well as more traditional online methods. The development team have benefited immensely from working together and plan to carry on co-operating on other projects and ventures in the future. All partners face the same problems of remoteness and isolation, and this project has provided some interesting ways of overcoming these barriers and making the most of technology to do so.

Results in relation to Objectives

The following is an outline of some of the main results achieved in relation to the project's objectives:

- establishment of Virtual Learning Community to connect and provide support for rural learners and staff in learning centres or involved with distance learning

The VLC was developed and built by the Finnish partners along with colleagues in Scotland and Sweden to be used as a learning platform and communication tool, which increased the knowledge and experience of the whole project team. Both modules were successfully delivered using the VLC and several different forums were created for use in the different aspects of the project, including the lecture series, moderated discussion, and general information which was placed within the VLC.

- Skills enhancement for distance learning and learning centre staff and users

The 'Trends and Opportunities for Remote Learning' has been successfully implemented and the team worked in co-operation to create a module for staff development at postgraduate level, with an emphasis on the development of online learning past, present and future; and a focus on staff involved with learning centres and business plans. The module was delivered twice during the course of the project and was aimed at learning centre managers in the partner institutions. Feedback from students demonstrated that this was a very useful and wide-ranging module, giving a clear insight into the whole issue of online and distance education. It was particularly relevant to the work in which people are involved and also had the added value of allowing transnational networking in student groups, as well as at project team level. The module team are hoping to continue with the delivery of this module, and hope to create a larger Learning Centre qualification.

- Northern Heritage module, culture, heritage and environment of Northern Periphery area

As a five-partner project, this module was of particular value, as each partner contributed to the development of the module content. The module development and delivery was led by UHI and accredited through the Cultural Studies degree programme, at HNC level. The development and the project team have all learned lessons from piloting the delivery in this way: both what to avoid and the benefit of various approaches. All the students commented on the high standard of the content of the module and how interesting it was to be able to study each of these five countries under the headings of culture, environment and heritage, as well as the Northern Periphery in the present and future. This aspect of the project is also going to be taken forward by each of the partner countries, who are keen to maintain the network. In addition, a publication is being developed using the content of the module, which will also help to disseminate the valuable work achieved.

- Transfer of knowledge through the Master Class Lecture Series and Virtual Learning Community

As well as the lectures delivered as part of both the Trends and Northern Heritage module, four master class lectures took place within the delivery of the project. All four of these lectures dealt with different aspects of distance learning and the

learning centre networks, which was extremely interesting. They were all video-conferenced across different sites in the partner institutions and streamed within the Virtual Learning Community, so that they could be accessed at any time by anyone logging in to the VLC. Discussion boards were created following the delivery of the lectures. A publication is currently being developed from the Master Class Lecture series and other features, articles and discussions generated within the project. This will therefore continue to educate others across the partner countries.

- sustaining communities through the resource to businesses and individuals offered by learning centres

Those partners who already have fully functioning learning centre networks were all able to directly share experience and learn from each other through this project. Perhaps more importantly, those countries whose networks are not yet formed in this way – Norway and Finland - were able to see the benefits of using learning centres to reach more rural communities. The learning centre networks are still relatively new in Scotland and it has been of considerable benefit to learn from other partners what works well and not so well. One of the main aspects of learning centres when they are networked is that they form the ideal opportunity for business and agencies to reach communities in more rural locations that previously were disengaged. A principal outcomes from this group was the identification of means of increasing sustainability by ensuring that the business community and other individuals are able to make use of the resources housed within the learning centres right across the northern parts of the country. The final part of the Trends module involved the formation of a Business Plan for learning centres in the students' own area, which had to incorporate all the elements of sustainability – including community relevant learning and training opportunities, and ways in which to engage the business community and public sector. Some of these Plans are being reproduced within the project-generated publication 'Essays from the Edge – Reflections from a Learning Community'; adding to the dissemination activities.