

RESULTS OF THE NEEDS ANALYSIS CONDUCTED AT HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY ON eLEARNING

Executive Summary

The needs analysis reported here was conducted as part of the 3C Project, a 2-year initiative funded by VP(AD) to promote the use of blended learning at PolyU. Blended learning is the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning, whereby face-to-face and eLearning opportunities are optimised and integrated to maximise student learning. Promoting the wider use of blended learning is a specific objective identified in the University's Strategic Plan 2008/09-2011/12 (p 9). To achieve the desired goal of increasing the use of blended learning, it was considered essential to understand the current use of eLearning and blended learning for teaching at PolyU, as well as the factors that inhibit or promote its use. In order to gain this understanding, data was collected using a number of different methods from individual staff as well as from Deans of Faculties and Directors of Schools and their representatives. Across these different data gathering methods, very consistent messages were received. These include that:

- most staff are using eLearning for low-level teaching purposes such as the provision of resources to students, with some small pockets of innovation occurring around the University;
- there is acknowledgement by staff that eLearning and blended learning could enhance the student learning experience, but currently the impediments to adoption are greater than the facilitating factors;
- there is a lack of awareness of possibilities for incorporating eLearning into current teaching practices, which is compounded by perceptions about lack of support or assistance;
- the widely held view of staff is that traditional, face-to-face teaching is superior to other methods and preferred by students. This view is accompanied by a general scepticism about the benefits of eLearning, even when it is used to compliment face-to-face teaching;
- problems with the usability of WebCT and issues with network speed and reliability are both significant impediments to staff at PolyU using eLearning at present;
- many staff believe that they should focus on research not teaching if they wish to be rewarded with career progression and recognition.

Activities to be conducted under the umbrella of the 3C Project have been designed to respond to these perceived needs and include:

- provision of professional development opportunities such as workshops and seminars to increase awareness of eLearning and blended learning and to promote its use by staff;
- projects designed to address needs identified by Faculties and Schools that use blended learning to address specific challenges or requirements;
- recognition of the achievements of staff in adopting blended learning approaches through the Teaching and Learning Innovation Award, the eLearning Showcase and the Symposium on Teaching and Learning Innovation.

In addition, the 3C Project Team are developing resources to assist staff to adopt blended learning for their teaching, such as the eLearning Mapping tool¹ and an online resource for blended learning. These resources and activities will assist in raising awareness about blended learning possibilities as well as making it easier for staff to adopt blended learning in their teaching, which is the outcome the 3C Project is designed to deliver.

¹ The eLearning Mapping tool and the associated Learning Design Templates is a software application being developed that will assist staff in identifying opportunities for incorporating eLearning into their teaching to achieve desired learning outcomes, in support of particular teaching approaches or to address identified teaching challenges – see www.3c.edc.polyu.edu.hk/feature_eLearningMapping.html for details.