



**University of East London**  
**E-Learning Strategy 2008-2009**

## Executive summary

This revision of the UEL E-Learning Strategy is designed to assist UEL in achieving the strategic vision of being a modern 21<sup>st</sup> century University committed to introducing new modes of learning. Technology is transforming the way in which people work, learn and communicate with each other and we aim to position UEL as a leading UK institution in e-learning.

The Strategy seeks to provide learners and staff with the opportunity to enhance the learning experience and support of students through the utilisation of new and emerging technologies. We wish to drive increased usage of e-learning throughout the University by providing adequate information, development and support to enable users to engage effectively with new tools and techniques.

Emerging technologies are revolutionising methods of communication in social environments, and we need to undertake continual research into the effectiveness of adapting these for use within the learning environment.

The Strategy has been developed to reflect the priorities contained within 'A Culture for Success'; the HEFCE Strategy for E-Learning; UEL Benchmarking of E-Learning Exercise and current developments in research and practice pertaining to learning and teaching.

We recognise that the requirement to work closely with the Director of Learning and Teaching and the UEL Learning and Teaching Committee is a key priority in implementing the Strategy.

Whilst pedagogical issues will drive e-learning, the creation of an electronic environment for learning and teaching will influence and be influenced by other UEL strategies (e.g. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, Information Technology Strategy, Teaching and Learning Facilities, Estate, etc.) as well as University policies in areas such as collaborative provision and disability services. As the implementation of this Strategy will have funding implications, it needs to inform and be informed by strategies and developments in these other areas.

### E-learning Strategy: Consultation Process

- Learning Technology Advisors team
- IT
- Learning & Teaching Committee
- Professional Standards Group
- CMT
- Academic Board

## UEL E-Learning Strategy 2008-2009

### 1. E-Learning Strategy Guiding Principles

This strategy is geared towards embedding e-learning institutionally and ensures that e-learning developments take forward the strategic aims of the University with regard to learning, teaching and research.

E-learning must be integrated, both physically and virtually, into all UEL policies and practices and all aspects of student experiences, including student support and the management of learning. Outcomes from the activities outlined in this document will allow us to contribute to e-learning developments nationally and internationally through research opportunities and collaborative work with external partners, government agencies and businesses.

This strategy is formulated to embrace the following **guiding principles**:

- E-learning is primarily driven by pedagogical considerations, not the demands and availability of the technologies themselves.
- We recognise and appreciate the diversity of teaching practice and learning styles, and believe that a clear understanding of the benefits offered by new learning technologies will drive increased and more sophisticated use of e-learning tools by staff and students.
- The e-learning team will provide an advisory service, staff development and support to UEL Schools and Services to help develop and redesign curricula to make effective pedagogic use of e-learning in all aspects of student learning and support.
- E-learning will be considered and developed as an integral part of teaching in the same way as other methods are (e.g. lectures, labs and seminars) and therefore linked with learning outcomes, module delivery and assessment aims.
- We will use e-learning technologies to produce a more interactive and independent environment for learners and to help strengthen the links between teaching and research.
- We will ensure our on campus and distance learning students enjoy the benefits of e-learning equally with convenient and reliable access to resources and tutors.
- We will make sure accessibility and usability guidelines are followed in all e-learning developments, initiatives and projects to provide the best experiences to our disabled students and colleagues.

- We will follow standards of copyright and intellectual property rights in e-learning.

## 2. Vision for E-Learning Developments at UEL

For this strategy, e-learning refers to any use of information and communications technology (ICT) and associated methodologies to facilitate and support learning, teaching and assessment both in blended environments (the combination of traditional face-to-face teaching and learning practices) and learning that is entirely online (when students and tutors are in physically separate locations).

Building on the UEL vision for learning and teaching as stated in its *Culture for Success* this E-Learning Strategy strives to realise the following **vision**:

**We use e-learning to enhance the student learning experience and to improve the support of learning, teaching and assessment providing the opportunity to create an innovative, flexible and accessible blended and online learning environment focussed on the needs of our learners and aspirations of our colleagues.**

**E-learning technologies and methodologies will be embedded into the range of teaching and research approaches used by academic staff, as well as in the learning and student support activities of non-academic staff and UEL policies and practices; ensuring that programmes can be delivered utilising the most appropriate teaching methodologies for students to achieve the learning outcomes; supporting widening participation, employability and lifelong learning; and fostering an environment in which creativity and innovation in teaching and learning is encouraged and enabled to maintain and advance UEL teaching excellence and research.**

Teaching supported and enhanced by e-learning already takes place at UEL, but its character and status vary. Taken together all e-learning developments have positively contributed to the elements of learning experience that UEL has long nurtured and advanced.

Our focus will continue to be on the fostering of student independence, self-motivation, critical abilities, global awareness, creativity, innovation, employability

and other characteristics, in addition to knowledge of their subject areas and the skills to acquire and utilise in their employment and career advancement.

E-learning technologies, appropriately used and supported, can enhance current educational practices in several ways. Among many other things, they can

- facilitate anytime anyplace learning, thus contributing to UEL's widening participation agenda
- engage students in collaborative learning by improving peer-to-peer communication
- improve support and level of feedback to students
- provide access to learning materials in various formats both on campus and off campus
- help focus, intensify and enrich students' preparation for classroom activities
- facilitate students' acquisition of essential skills
- enhance and facilitate the assessment process
- facilitate learning for students with various disabilities and learning needs
- offer tools with the potential to simplify administrative tasks for academic and other staff.

### **3. E-Learning Aims and Objectives**

Our sustainable E-Learning Strategy aims to support achievement of our strategic priorities through the following objectives:

- Embedding e-learning institutionally
- Enabling and supporting the culture shift and re-skilling of staff
- Ensuring quality evaluation and enhancement of e-learning
- Accessing, sharing and reusing e-resources
- Using VLE and other e-learning tools to support distance learning provision and to improve learning experiences and retention of our campus-based students
- Ensuring effective VLE management and integration with other UEL systems.

Guided by the *Culture for Success*, we will

- Systematically collect student feedback regarding their experiences of e-learning at UEL, act upon it and inform students about the results and changes.
- Investigate availability and effective utilisation of student owned technologies for learning and student support.
- Initiate e-learning research and enhance research-informed teaching.

- Fully implement and integrate UEL Plus into students' learning experiences and evaluate its effectiveness.
- Monitor and strive for continuous improvement of e-learning experiences of students to include but not be limited to quality of VLE usage in all modules, accessibility and inclusivity, and embedding new technologies.
- Make e-learning induction an integral part of UEL staff induction.
- Support colleagues using e-learning tools and methodologies through staff development activities in various formats.
- Utilise an e-learning lab as a challenging and supportive environment for staff to pilot their innovative projects, evaluate e-learning tools and make informed judgements about their appropriateness for learning and teaching.
- Nurture an e-learning community of practice across UEL Schools and Services.
- Work closely with Library and Learning Services and Student Services in shaping and delivering their e-strategies.
- Recognise and showcase achievements of e-learning champions.
- Use e-learning tools to make learning materials and practices appropriate and accessible for all students.
- Enhance the relationship between e-teaching, e-research and scholarship to benefit students' learning.
- Increase the range of full and part time modules we offer through blended and distance learning.
- Ensure continuous growth and improvement of distance learning programmes and awards.

We will work closely with Schools and Services to determine how e-learning tools and methodologies can facilitate the resolution of various challenges and needs faced by students and staff in individual units. We will select and recommend e-learning technologies based on their pedagogical soundness, appropriateness for the task, user-friendliness, usability, accessibility and cost effectiveness. E-learning tools and resources outlined below are by no means an exhaustive list of possible technologies.

#### **Rapid E-Learning Development Tools**

There are various tools on the market that can facilitate development of materials suitable for e-learning quickly and inexpensively. We will explore, set criteria for selection and recommend tools for alternative development of module content suitable for both blended and distance learning.

#### **Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Tools**

By September 2008 UEL Plus (Blackboard Learning System) will become the sole VLE in use at UEL. The migration will be completed according to

individual School plans monitored by Schools' Learning and Teaching groups and facilitated by the e-learning team comprised of Learning Technology Advisors, VLE developer(s), E-Learning Manager and Learning Systems Manager.

Regular centralised staff development activities will precede any VLE innovations and introduction of new tools. Additionally, online staff resources will be made available to colleagues to support their adaptation of UEL Plus. Staff development topics will vary from basic introductions to more advanced usage of selected features and VLE tools.

Systematic and regular research activities on studying perceptions of students and academics using UEL Plus will be conducted until the end of Semester A 2008-09.

We are developing quality assurance standards and mechanisms for VLE module sites that can be used for self-assessment, peer observation and other purposes.

### **Web 2.0 Technologies**

We will explore various Web 2.0 technologies (web-based communities and hosted services such as social-networking sites, virtual worlds, blogs and wikis) and promote and embed their usage to encourage collaborative and innovative forms of learning and teaching, social networking, communication, sharing and dissemination of information.

### **E-Learning Lab**

The E-Learning Lab will be a vehicle for promoting e-learning usage and research-informed teaching at UEL. Staff will have access to new learning technologies and will have an opportunity to test them in safe and supported environment before widely adopting in their teaching.

### **E-Learning Resources**

We will conduct a scoping study of resources available to staff in a variety of areas and subjects and facilitate their access to electronic resources in various formats. We hope that a virtual library of text, audio and video materials will be embedded into the curriculum design and development and provide enriched learning experiences for our students. We will actively contribute to the foundation of the digital repository at UEL and external repositories, e.g., JORUM.

### **Staff Development and E-Learning**

E-Learning will become an integral part of UEL staff development starting with introductory e-learning sessions during UEL-wide staff induction, regular staff development activities on a variety of topics, showcases, short

courses, HEA accredited courses and programmes through UEL Professional Standards Framework.

### **Video and Audio Recording and Streaming**

The E-Learning Strategy envisages the provision of facilities and infrastructure for conducting video and audio recording. Additionally, we are exploring the opportunities for acquisition of commercial packages for the recording and dissemination of lectures and supporting materials both for on campus and distance learning students.

### **Webconferencing (Audio and Video)**

Audio and/or video-conferencing is made available for use via Skype that was adapted by UEL IT Services to provide better network security. We will use this and other tools to enhance communication on and off campus; facilitate collaborative research activities with colleagues; provide opportunities for guest-lecturers, experts, or remote tutors; facilitate other kinds of cross-campus or off-campus interaction that might accompany teaching and learning, including access by and to external examiners.

### **Simulations and Virtual Reality**

There is an increased level of interest in computer-based simulations, virtual reality systems, or parts of such systems at UEL. It is foreseeable that demand for them will be made in an increasing number of cases over the next few years. We will organise resources and facilitate access to certain tools (e.g., SecondLife) for our staff and students.

### **Computer Assisted Assessment (CAA) and Turnitin**

The pedagogical implications and possibilities of new forms of assessment, and of the need for steps to ensure that these are appropriately designed and implemented are currently under consideration by the UEL Learning and Teaching Committee and appropriate groups.

UEL Plus provides a comprehensive set of assessment types ranging from multiple choice and simple tests to more advanced methods. Where pedagogically appropriate automatic marking will be considered.

We will use the Turnitin, teaching tool and plagiarism detection software, to its full potential. Though varying from School to School, the adoption of this system will be guided by academic requirements and UEL-wide policies governing academic integrity, reporting mechanisms, dealing with offenders and other issues.

### **E-Portfolios and E-PDP**

E-portfolio and PDP initiatives are driven in part by national policies and lifelong and personalised learning aspirations. We will proactively contribute

to analysis, selection, implementation and evaluation of various tools to develop an effective practice to support students and staff.

### **New Kinds of Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum Development**

The adoption of E-Learning practices and emerging technologies will lead to the emergence of new types of module design and development and new methods of arrangement for contact-time between staff and students without compromising the quality of learning and teaching.

## **4. Strategy Implementation and Evaluation**

Responsibility for the development of this Strategy rests with the School of Distance and E-Learning and UEL Learning and Teaching Committee. An E-Learning Manager will develop and propose to this committee a full strategy implementation plan and outline plans, with SMART School/Service specific objectives, target outcomes and clear allocation of areas of responsibility to persons/groups within the University. The Learning and Teaching Committee will assume responsibility for:

- Co-ordinating Strategy-related activities by bringing together key members of the University, including those responsible for resources underpinning University strategies.
- Recommending learning and teaching objectives and target outcomes for the next academic year.
- Monitoring and reviewing progress made against target outcomes.
- Advising the CMT of resource requirements for implementing the E-Learning Strategy.

We will base our measures for success in e-learning on seven strands highlighted in HEFCE Strategy for E-Learning\*. UEL will realise its vision for e-learning and its aims for teaching and learning through continually making e-learning one of the UEL priorities and addressing the following issues and critical success factors:

- Our e-learning infrastructure meets the needs of our students and colleagues, develops appropriately in line with these needs and is well maintained and supported.
- E-learning becomes an integral and embedded part of UEL Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy to strengthen the link between learning, teaching and research.
- Central support for e-learning design, development and staff training is provided by School of Distance and E-Learning.

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\* HEFCE strategy for e-learning 2005-2015  
[http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05\\_12/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05_12/) and Measures of Success

- UEL colleagues are proactively using learning technologies to support the wider student experience, the University's outreach activities and lifelong learning.

This Strategy should not be viewed as a prescriptive document. It is more of a general outline of the scope and aims of UEL in embedding e-learning tools, techniques, methodologies and actions needed to achieve e-learning aims and objectives.

It is anticipated that e-learning will grow rapidly to become an essential part of UEL provision for learning, teaching, assessment and research. We envisage that e-learning will have become embedded in the University's normal educational activities. As both the E-Learning Strategy and the UEL Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy develop over the next few years, it is anticipated that the vision and the aims of this strategy will become embedded in future iterations of the University's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy.

### **Risk Assessment**

Implementation of the E-Learning Strategy is dependant upon successful collaboration with all Schools and Services, and effective change management of e-learning culture, infrastructure and expertise, together with the commitment to ensuring the robustness of the technologies utilised.

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

E-learning can positively impact equality by providing a learning environment which reduces the effect of gender, race and disability issues.

Accessibility is a key priority in the provision of e-learning at UEL and we will use a focus group to consult on such issues.

Approved by Academic Board: 6 February, 2008