

What is the HELP CETL?

The Higher Education Learning Partnerships Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning is part of a national network of 74 CETLs which are funded by HEFCE to reward excellence in learning and teaching and to promote educational research. The HELP CETL will be funded £500,000 for each of the next five years [2005-2010] to support HE in FE development. The HELP CETL is built on the existing excellence of the University of Plymouth Colleges [UPC] partnership within the South West region. The UPC Faculty was established in 2003 and supports a network of nineteen colleges.

The HELP CETL is comprised of a team of three full time staff and seven part time secondments from University of Plymouth and University of Plymouth Colleges [UPC] based at the University of Plymouth. The team provides core research, strategic and academic support, but the HELP CETL is predominantly made-up of college staff and other participants from the HE in FE community.

What is Knowledge Management?

Knowledge Management is the explicit and systematic management of knowledge and its associated processes of creation, organisation, dissemination, use and exploitation.

Within UPC there is a vast amount of knowledge and expertise held by a range of academics and learning and teaching support staff who are in different geographic location and are disconnected from other practitioners. The HELP CETL will create new knowledge and ideas and these need to be discussed, shared and disseminated across the network.

What is a Knowledge Management System?

Knowledge Management System [KMS] is an IT solution for managing knowledge in organisations; supporting creation, capture, storage and dissemination of expertise and knowledge.

The HELP CETL has invested in the Tomoye Ecco software product. This will be used to help build successful communities; to share information and knowledge and discuss common goals, good practice and gather information about common interests - otherwise known as "communities of practice".

What is a Community of Practice?

Communities of Practice [CoP] are groups of people who share a concern, set of problems, task or a sense of purpose. As (often) informal groups of experts, CoP serve to connect individuals in self-organising, cross boundary communities. A CoP evolves from a group or working party through sharing a way of thinking and practising beyond focusing on issues or problems. The characteristic of a CoP is also contingent on and reflective of, the members's interests and engagement.

Communities of Practice complement existing structures by promoting collaboration, information exchange, and the sharing of good practice across boundaries of time, distance, and organisational hierarchies.

How will members benefit from the Knowledge Exchange?

Knowledge is often held implicitly (i.e. not in document form) and only comes to light during discussions. The Knowledge Exchange is designed to promote discussions and 'capture' them, so 'back tracking' through a discussion to clarify a point is possible. Through the discussion tool, members are able to ask a question of fellow community members, initiate or add a point to an ongoing discussion.

Is the Knowledge Exchange a repository?

While the Knowledge Exchange can and does store documents, its primary purpose is to promote community discussion around knowledge. Documents are used in support of discussions and stored as 'knowledge objects' and their benefit and value to the community is explained by members, for members.

Is the Knowledge Exchange a Virtual Learning Environment?

The Knowledge Exchange is not a VLE. It takes the discussion forum idea of a VLE and maximises the potential for knowledge creation. It has been specifically designed to make the process of on-line discussions and knowledge creation accessible and efficient. The Knowledge Exchange is not a tool for use by students. It is explicitly designed to assist staff to develop in their areas of expertise and interest.

What is the UPC Knowledge Exchange?

The HELP CETL has tailored the Tomoye Ecco Knowledge Management System to form the UPC Knowledge Exchange. It is easy to use and provides a set of features designed to support community development and members' involvement. Some of the direct benefits of the Knowledge Exchange are:

- promotes teamwork and collaboration outside conventional boundaries
- provides a connection between people, knowledge and discussions
- enables the sharing of ideas, proposals, issues and good practice across subject disciplines and the UPC network
- supports the creation of new knowledge and puts it into context
- increases innovation through cross-pollination of ideas and good practice
- reduces duplication and promotes the re-use of knowledge
- provides a platform for getting feedback on informal and formal content
- allows the building of broader peer relationships
- facilitates the finding of experts and peers in other parts of the UPC network
- brokers trusted professional relationships that endure after projects conclude or organisational restructuring
- increases a sense of organisational belonging and identity

The Deployment of the UPC Knowledge Exchange

HELP CETL funding allows the development of the Knowledge Exchange as a long term project. In the first instance the Knowledge Exchange has been established as a proof of concept project to be trialed, evolved and evaluated. The system and approach will be tested by up to 400 staff from across the UPC network along with external collaborators through the HELP CETL. If the Knowledge Exchange approach proves valuable to users, further deployment will be planned.

If you would like further information on the Knowledge Exchange or to become a community member, or to enquire about training, contact:

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or Dr. Neil Witt Technical Director neil.witt@plymouth.ac.uk

Is the Knowledge Exchange it a replacement for the UoP Portal?

The Knowledge Exchange is based on a more active communication and collaboration model of working than the Portal and is not designed for student use.

Is Knowledge Exchange training available?

There will be a programme of training available to members of the Knowledge Exchange communities. The initial training will enable members to use the Knowledge Exchange from day one, but as is usual with a new tool, proficiency will depend on how much members use it.

Who manages the Knowledge Exchange?

The Knowledge Exchange has not been established with regulation by any outside authority. The communities that use the Knowledge Exchange are generally best regulated by their members, supported and guided by UPC and HELP CETL community leaders who have received training and development for this role.

For further information or to subscribe to the quarterly HELP CETL Circular distribution list

please visit our web-site:

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