

IMPROVING LECTURERS' ICT SKILLS

DISCUSSION PAPER WITH 7 RECOMMENDATIONS



Although many institutions are keen to make their teaching more innovative, they have a long way to go when it comes to their lecturers' ICT skills. If ICT is to be used to make teaching more innovative, it is crucial for lecturers to have strong skills in this area. In this discussion paper, Ineke Lam and Riekje de Jong from Utrecht University offer seven recommendations as to how colleges of higher education and universities can improve the ICT skills of their lecturers. These recommendations are based on their study titled 'From professional development for lecturers to development in teaching' (original title: 'Van docentprofessionalisering naar onderwijsontwikkeling').

1 Focus on the development of teaching courses using ICT, not on the acquisition of ICT skills

ICT-integrated teaching is designed to enhance students' learning by using media which is suited to the objectives that lecturers wish to achieve. Allowing lecturers to develop this ICT-integrated teaching themselves is a more sustainable form of professional development for lecturers than offering them conventional 'training' in the form of individual courses in ICT skills. The most effective scenario is when lecturers develop ICT-integrated teaching together through a process of co-creation.

Involving senior lecturers with a wealth of experience in teaching and ICT (early adopters) in the discussion and development process will naturally result in the creation of professional learning communities in which participants learn in an informal way. Furthermore, inter-faculty presentations of good practices and the sharing of experiences will inspire less experienced lecturers and make the subject more accessible to them.

Students' learning should be at the heart of the ICT-integrated course development process. Mistakes may of course be made on the road to finding out how ICT can help to improve teaching. Such mistakes are there to be learned from. Mistakes are permissible and leeway must be given for them – this applies both for students and for lecturers.

2 The workplace requires students with good ICT skills and therefore lecturers with good ICT skills

The use of ICT in the workplace is increasing: the workplace requires graduates with good ICT skills. How do we ensure that graduates are properly prepared? What applies to the professional development of lecturers also applies to the education of students: it is critical to integrate ICT into teaching. The innovators and early adopters who understand the importance of ICT as a resource for managing and supporting students' learning must now share their knowledge with the early majority and the late majority.

3 Create scope for experimentation

Devote space in the timetable along with the time and financial resources for the development team to learn from the implementation of new ICT-integrated teaching. Evaluating the teaching with students, reflecting on the results in the context of the (original) objectives and principles, and decisions regarding adjustments are crucial phases in the learning process for lecturers. Only then can they learn collectively and effectively from each other. The regular quality assurance process (the Plan Do Check Act cycle) is able to provide lecturers the scope to experiment and learn from the implementation of ICT-integrated teaching. However, the fact that newly developed teaching methods require additional investment is often overlooked.

4 Ensure multidisciplinary support

When developing ICT-integrated teaching, all experts should be involved and an approach based on development teams should be facilitated. The development of ICT-integrated teaching requires a range of specialist skills which are rarely found in a single individual. This makes the development process complex and therefore requires input from a number of disciplines. As such, the design process should incorporate subject specialists and educational and technical experts.

Support infrastructure at both central and faculty or school level ensures optimum coordination and utilisation of available expertise, e.g. ICT and educational supporters who work together to facilitate the lecturer development teams.

5 An up-to-date portfolio for the teaching qualification (BDB/BKO) includes ICT-integrated teaching

Under pressure from the government's national performance agreements, the focus on the quality of lecturers' teaching (the Dutch teaching qualifications BDB/BKO) has shifted from quality of teaching to the quantity of certificates. This has undermined the value of teaching qualifications among lecturers. They are not willing to 'jump through hoops'. At the same time, new generations of lecturers are working hard and often with great enthusiasm on developing their teaching skills and substantiating them in the form of a BDB/BKO teaching qualification.

All colleges of higher education and universities offer professional development pathways for obtaining this teaching qualification, often in the form of a course in which teaching experience, reflections, products and evaluations are recorded in a portfolio. Since many of these courses are delivered either in full or in part in a virtual learning environment, lecturers gain practical experience of what ICT-integrated teaching can mean and what it requires of supervisors.

During the course, lecturers also gain experience in course development and incorporate their own examples into their BDB/BKO portfolio. ICT-integrated teaching is becoming increasingly common. Indeed, it is already a requirement in some institutions. The formal BDB/BKO teacher training process can therefore contribute to the development of ICT-integrated teaching and enhance professional development through course development.

6 Wherever possible, organise professional development at local level

Key policies for lecturers' ICT skills are the institution's strategic teaching policy, policy plans for ICT and teaching and professional development plans (as part of the HR policy). Involving management in what is happening at local level with regard to ICT in teaching is a key factor for creating and maintaining support within the institution. Conversely, local involvement in the definition of central policies is also important.

Since programmes vary, central policy must, wherever possible, be operationalised at local level and lead to professional development, e.g. by making lecturers jointly responsible for the development of part of the curriculum

7 Formulate a vision for teaching as a connecting policy framework

The focus of ICT policy is no longer primarily on efficient infrastructure and ICT hardware. Nowadays, the main issue is to determine how ICT can be used to enhance teaching. When seeking the answer to this question, the institution's vision for teaching plays a key role.

A vision can connect and inspire and serve as the invisible link in inter-faculty collaboration and exchange regarding the use of ICT in teaching, in coordination between support at central and local level, and in the collaborative development teams. Effort should also be made to ensure that there is synergy between the strategic vision for teaching and the priorities when defining ICT-integrated course development.

More information

For further information about professional development for lecturers in the field of ICT, see the report 'From professional development for lecturers to development in teaching': a survey of the status of professional development for lecturers in the field of ICT (original title: 'Van docentprofessionalisering naar onderwijsontwikkeling', Inventarisatie van de status quo van ICT-docentprofessionalisering, only available in Dutch).

The practical examples on which this discussion paper is based are set out in Chapter 5, 'Conclusions and inspiring lessons'.

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