CoLab Proof of Concept Project Report JANUARY 2007

**Supporting collaboration
in a complex world**

STAGE 1 PROOF OF CONCEPT MARCH – JUNE 2007

The CoLab (short for collaboration) idea is based on the belief that students know more about emergent technology than we do so let them lead us to a better understanding. CoLab was established in March 2007 with sponsorship (£6000) from SCEPTrE, E Learning Unit and PTC&C to:

1) establish CoLab as an entrepreneurial student-based organization and develop a brand
2) pilot a range of workshops aimed at encouraging the transfer of knowledge and expertise in the use of technology contained within the student body
3) build a new website/internet social networking space for students on placement
4) build a web site to present and support the activities of CoLab.

Five talented and committed students (L1, L3 placement and 3 M Level) were employed from March to complete these tasks by July. Effectively this was stage 1 of a proof of concept experiment.

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE FOR PROFESSIONAL TRAINING STUDENTS

Background research: One of the members of the team is researching the phenomenon of social networking spaces for her M dissertation. She has conducted a survey to find out how Surrey students use such spaces and the results of the survey have informed the design process. Members of the team who are prolific users of such spaces also provided their expert advice.

Website host: Research identified **"Ning"** as being the best (functionality and adaptability) and most cost effective host for both the CoLab website and the social networking spaces.

The social networking site for PT students: A distinctive feature of the Social Networking site is that it will be run/mediated by students without staff involvement. The name OurSpace was suggested for the site and a domain name www.our-space.eu was acquired by SCEPTrE.

Design: Following small scale surveys of students by the CoLab team. A general guide format of the social website was created. The functions include

- Search function to look up students within university via student Email.
- Photo/ video sharing.
- Forum for general/ specific purposed discussion.
- "Wall/ message board" for students to send message to each other.

Testing the proto-site: The intention was to make the site available in early June for testing. But the site was not accessible until the very end of June by which time the CoLab team had effectively finished their task and gone on holiday.

Testing and development: is being undertaken during July and August. There are relatively few students available so this is having to be done mainly by staff. The two main issues identified during initial testing is the control of the site and branding.

Creative Control the site was created by Tony M. Only the site creator can give administration rights. Having completed his Masters Tony is now no longer a student so we are dependent on the maintenance of the site by someone who is not a member of staff or student of the university. This is clearly unacceptable. We are trying to establish whether the role of creator of a ning site is transferable.

Branding – the site is entered through the CoLab pages and it is branded as CoLab site for all University of Surrey students not as our-space for students on placement.

The potential solution to these issues is to create a new site under SCEPTrE control modelled on the CoLab Ning site but using software that could be customized.

Other developmental issues relating to the site
- The need to have adverts that reflect the placement support nature of the site. There is the potential to attract commercial placement organizations to the site.
- The needs to connect to other useful web sites like the rate your placement organization site developed by University of Loughborough students.
- The opportunity to include a wiki to support the sharing of knowledge about such things as ethics.

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER WORKSHOPS, DISCOVERY LAB AND TECHNOLOGY FORUM
The timing of these activities within the exam period was less than ideal but it was important to gain experience and fulfill the brief.

Workshops:
The three workshops that were run were met very well by the attendees. The Adobe Photoshop workshop was the most successful and the most informative, proving that the service is wanted as much as needed. Email responses to the Mac OSX workshops were very high and requested more forewarning of the event to be allow attendees to fit it into their timetables.

Technology Forum:
The Technology Forum event was run on Tuesday 15th May with keynote speaker Phil Cross from Microsoft. About 20 people participated. The event went very well with a great deal of interaction between speaker and audience making the event have more of a forum atmosphere where all the attendees, including the presenting company can get valuable feedback out of the event.

Currently, the forum is advertised on the general message board and via email. In future, these two methods will be our main focus, with addition to flyers in freshmen package and words of mouth from students who have attended the forum.

Points to consider:
More high profile companies – Make a larger event out of it.
Invite businesses from the research park to attend as members of the audience as well as presenters.

Discovery Lab:
The Discovery Lab (drop in opportunities) was not piloted mostly due to lack of hardware/software resources that would attract students. For the Lab to be an effective learning tool it will require a larger trialling period (this is planned to be carried out in Phase II - September). It was also decided that due to the timing (the middle of exam periods) that it would not be a good experiment for how effective the Lab could be.

Unexpected but delightful outcome
Following the Technology Forum Phil Cross from Microsoft offered Microsoft resources to support Discovery Lab.

CoLab Film Service
One idea to emerge late in the initial experiment extend the services offered by CoLab was to develop its capacity for filming events. Three members of CoLab agreed to undertake a days training and film the SCEPTrE conference. One of the students dropped out and two additional recently graduated students were recruited from the film/media course at UCCAF. While the overall results were good these were mainly because of the expertise of the external members of the team. It is clear that much more intensive training would be needed to acquire the awareness and expertise necessary to offer a filming service. The experiment did however enable SCEPTrE to identify two highly competent individuals who are now working closely with the SCEPTrE Team and CoLab.

Contributions to SCEPTrE Conference

The CoLab team made a valuable contribution to the Student Voice strand of SCEPTrE's Learning for a Complex World Conference. They are excellent ambassadors for the university.

Evaluation of stage 1 proof of concept
- Recruitment showed that there are many talented and enthusiastic students who are interested and willing to contribute to CoLab
- The outcomes from the enterprise are good given the time available and the timing of the experiment – Easter vacation and exams both inhibited full engagement.
- The participants including SCEPTrE have gained much learning and useful experience.
- The CoLab model is an innovative 'real world' / educational device that needs to be more thoroughly explored.
- Communication within the CoLab team and between the team and SCEPTrE needs to be improved.
- More thought needs to be given to the management/coordination of CoLab and issues of continuity between successive incarnations of CoLab.

Elaboration
- The loosely managed approach with no-one leading or coordinating within the CoLab made it difficult to monitor progress, get progress reports or sometimes to find out what was happening quickly. Although the team was given a clear project brief individuals chose to interpret the brief in particular ways and to change the emphasis according to their own interests. In future students will be contracted to work against specific project briefs with explicit plans and meeting and reporting procedures.
- The original idea was of a self-regulating entrepreneurial student enterprise. But there are real tensions with this when the University requires certain specific tasks to be undertaken and has strong views on the desirable outcomes e.g. the social networking web site. The model of working and relative scope for autonomous working and working that is deeply connected and co-created to university needs further development.
- Leadership and coordination of the CoLab teamwas a significant issue. In future there will be a designated coordinator for each project who will be responsible for liaising with the appropriate University member of staff.
- Maintaining continuity from one set of projects to the next is an issue. The issue of sole creator for the social networking site revealed the problem of a transient member of the CoLab team having control over a product. More thought will need to be given to the ways in which CoLab products and ideas are connected to the university so that the enterprise can be sustained beyond the life of individual participants.
- Recognising the learning – CoLab is an immersive real world problem working and learning enterprise and as such the learning gained needs to be recognized. The new experiential learning award being developed by SCEPTrE offers the possibility of doing this in future projects.

STAGE 2 PROOF OF CONCEPT SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2007
The second stage of the CoLab pilot began in September 2007 with the recruitment of four students. SCEPTrE and the E Learning Unit were sponsors of this phase of the work and USSU Sabbatical Officer and RES assisted in the recruitment process. The CoLab 2 team included a team leader/coordinator; two students who are particularly interested and expert in using and sharing their knowledge of technology, who will organize and support a programme of workshops, drop-in sessions and the Technology Forum and one student with an interest in Second Life virtual world. Each student had a customized contract and one of the students is helping to pilot the Learning through Experience Award.

Objectives Autumn 2007
- Launch and support for the new shareexperience Social Networking Space developed by SCEPTrE but based on earlier CoLab experiments.
- Programme of technology sharing swapshops, drop-ins and a Technology Forum for technology businesses to share their products.
- Experiments and workshops relating to Second Life.
- Campaign to raise funds through sponsorship for CoLab Café.

Share Experience Website

Shareexperience.net is a social networking site for University of Surrey students, primarily set up for students on placement to keep them connected whilst away from campus. The aim of the site is to encourage students to share their rich and challenging experiences, enabling them and others to learn from these experiences. The site faced many technical problems during its creation, stalling the launch date until 10th November, but now is a very nice looking and original site. There are currently around 200 members registered, but activity on the community blog is slow. However groups using this site for a purpose, such as Cultural Academy, are finding the value of the site and demonstrating its potential. One limitation that is apparent though is the inability to grade the posting of a blog; that is a blog can only be private or viewed by everyone. This somewhat limits the potential for mentoring and may also result in the apparent lack of community activity. Exploring the use of groups is a way to overcome this.

The set up of the site and initial testing and use has been successful, and the next stage requires a targeted marketing campaign to increase awareness. Also required are a few dedicated students to use the site very regularly to demonstrate to other users how it could be used and be of benefit.

Discovery Workshops

Adobe Photoshop, Mac OSX and Dreamweaver Beginner and Intermediate level workshops were run. These workshops were very successful and hugely oversubscribed, with over 120 bookings in 2 days. Evaluation of the workshops showed high levels of satisfaction, with requests for more of the same. One consistent criticism was the lack of individual computers for attendees to actually try out the skills taught whilst in the workshop. Very useful comments came from the workshops, with ideas for future topics of workshops, the need for online resources on the CoLab website and the need for a more efficient, automatic booking system.
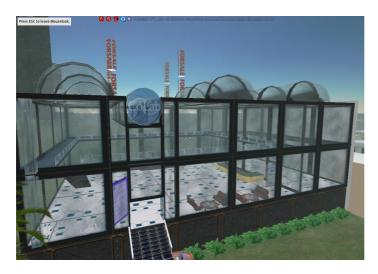
The response to these workshops demonstrated the need for such skills workshops and the demand for the activities CoLab is running. It also demonstrated the limitations of what CoLab can provide without its own equipment and space, especially considering the difficulty of room availability, particularly for the numbers required.

What was interesting was the number of staff attending the workshops, willing to learn from a student alongside other students. This is great evidence of CoLab benefitting all on campus, not only students, and CoLabs role in encouraging student/staff working partnerships and learning.

Second Life Discovery Lab

A Second Life Discovery Lab was held in SPLASH solo work area. There was a great response of those wanting to trial Second Life, but due to a lack of computers supporting Second Life and no large room available, many people were turned away. Also, with only one Second Life expert, people at times had to wait for help and advice.

A CoLab Cafe has been built in Second Life, and future events on Second Life will focus on exploring the use of this space as a way to teach Second Life skills to people.

This discovery lab showed the interest on the campus in Second Life. It also demonstrated the failings of the discovery lab drop-in format, informing CoLab on how to structure this type of discovery lab in future to make it more beneficial to those attending. CoLab is going to run a Second Life workshop and work in partnership with computing to take Second Life on campus forward.

Technology Forums
A technology forum was held, with Nigel Biggs as speaker, focussing on being an entrepreneur in the technology world. More than 20 people attended and it was very well received, provoking some interesting discussion. More of these need to be held, with marketing further in advance and perhaps clearer advertising of content of the session. Some attendees expected more of a business focus than technical.

A technology forum and business networking event was held in partnership with AMac Ltd, a business networking company that an ex-CoLab member works for. The evening event saw two high profile speakers presenting to a room of around 50 top business representatives and around 50 students. With very technical speeches appealing to the engineering students, such as a former Formula One Ferrari engineer, the business networking afterwards appealed to the business management students attending. The evening was a great success, with the last to leave at 10:30pm.

This partnership is the first example of CoLab working with alumni and the business world to provide real world experience and access to business, particularly demonstrating the important process of networking, not otherwise provided on campus. CoLab team members, through networking, obtained offers and contacts from business representatives wanting to speak or attend future events, and also offering ideas on how they could see their businesses using CoLab as a gateway to students. They had many suggestions for how they would like to work in partnership with students, and saw CoLabs potential in facilitating this. The feedback from the event was incredibly positive from both students and business representatives. It was also clear that at future events, students need to be encouraged to network more using incentives relating to number of business cards obtained.

CoLab Cafe
CoLab Cafe is a vision of a highly visible, flexible networking space on campus. This space would be available for all on campus to use, and would give priority of its space to students and student activities. This space would enable business to link with students, and provide an area to represent partnership working between students, staff and business. Run by students, it would be unique to any other space on campus and would enable CoLab to build a stronger brand. With this presence, CoLab could build its team through student volunteers and internships, this enabling its enterprise and scope of activities to be taken forward. It would be a space to encourage enterprising, innovative working partnerships, helping to change the university culture to one of students as partners. CoLab Cafe fits strongly into the 10 year strategy, as it would ensure professionalism from business links, quality and something

unique to Surrey. Online market research conducted had an astounding 593 responses, 33 percent from staff, showing almost all respondents rated the idea 7 out of 10 of higher and answered yes of maybe to a need for such a space. Whilst one grant application has been unsuccessful, a strong focus of CoLab next semester is to run a fundraising campaign for CoLab Cafe, and build awareness and support for the idea.

Evaluation of Stage 2 proof of concept
- Changes in the way we approached the management and coordination of the team have vastly improved the performance of the team.
- The team leader gained valuable experience of coordinating, communicating and leading.
- The outcomes from the enterprise continue to be good. The teaqm showed it was possible to respond quickly to new opportunities.
- Engagement with Apple have resulted in a useful partnership and the additional resource of another team member.
- Partnership with AMac Ltd provides an excellent model for student-business interaction and extends opportunities for students to encounter employer representatives within the university environment. Exposure to business networking must be adding value to the Professional Training enterprise.

Concluding comment
Eleven months after being formed, CoLab has achieved all its aims and has learnt valuable lessons to aid further development. Working partnerships are already active with Amac Ltd (an external networking business) Apple, USSU, SPLASH and the computing department.

The CoLab model is an innovative 'real world' / educational device that is beginning to fulfill expectations. There is a huge potential for the university to grow this enterprise and to incorporate it into an identity around the idea of *real world education*. What the proof of concept work has demonstrated is the great need and demand for a student-led organisation on campus, and the many activities it could be involved in. It is also apparent that with no resources or space dedicated to CoLab, building it up as an enterprise will be incredibly challenging.

The enterprise would be significantly enhanced if there was a dedicated space for CoLab to operate in.