CoLab Proposal January 2006

Development of the idea – Between September and December SCEPTrE acted as a champion and broker to progressively develop the idea of coLab – *a student-led and operated enterprise trading in the tacit knowledge contained within the student body, focused on discovering current and potential uses of personal /emergent technologies and providing a range of services to the university, students and commercial technology producers*. The concept and potential benefits are summarised at the end of this paper.

The innovative idea has the potential to provide a focal point for collaboration of many partners and the E Learning Unit, ILab, Students' Union, AVS, ITS and UNIS Direct (Nigel Biggs), and the Director of the BSc Technology Entrepreneurship, IT and Business programme and Professor David Kirby (Professor for Entrepreneurship) in the Management School have all been involved in shaping and endorsing the concept.

Student interests and involvement - SCEPTrE's student networkers have been involved in discussions to shape the idea and the VP Education and Welfare Students' Union Officer was consulted at an early stage. Our student networkers conducted a survey of over 80 students (a random population interviewed around the campus during lunchtime) and demonstrated that those polled see coLab as having the potential to be a valuable addition to the students' experience and university resources for students. The survey indicates that:
- *Over 75% of students polled who currently use a lot of technology, would use CoLab and are willing to share their expertise*
- *Over 80% of students polled who do not currently use a lot of technology would use CoLab*
- *All students felt CoLab would be valuable, with over 60% of students believing it would have both an academic and a social value*

Issues relating to space, resources and quality management – The SCEPTrE Executive Group endorsed the original idea and encouraged SCEPTrE to develop the idea with potential partners. Arguments for SCEPTrE's involvement include:
- The opportunities provided by coLab for SCEPTrE to help develop entrepreneurial forms of professional training and to learn how to support this type of education to promote entrepreneurial attitudes and achievements.
- SCEPTrE's interests in mobile interactive technologies as a means of supporting enquiry-rich processes for learning.
- SCEPTrE's interests in developing collaborative forms of learning in which students and staff are co-developers of knowledge.

However, as the idea has taken shape questions have been raised about the degree to which SCEPTrE would need to be involved in order to ensure that the project was a success and whether this investment was justified given the scale of the strategic work SCEPTrE has to undertake. There are also issues relating to the funding required to support students on placement in coLab, the provision of spaces and facilities needed to host coLab and the quality assurance / management infrastructure to support such an enterprise.

Proposal

The proposition in December 2006 was for a full engagement with the coLab idea based on a team of about 10 students (1 fulltime, 2 half-time students on professional training placements and a number of students on part-time one day per week contracts) operating, with institutional support in a dedicated space provided by the university. As a result of further deliberations in the light of the issues raised above, SCEPTrE is proposing a lower level engagement in 2007 to conduct some experiments to demonstrate the viability of the concept, opening the way for a more intensive engagement in 2008.

Proposed actions and activities

1   **Piloting strategies for student participation and engagement**: SCEPTrE and E Learning Unit and UNIS DIrect to establish a small development fund (£6000 spring 2007) to recruit and support a small group of committed student entrepreneurs interested in participating in small-scale experiments aimed at developing and trying activities and services that are envisaged for coLab. Students will be paid on the basis of task fees for specific projects. The results of the pilot will be reviewed in June and if successful a second stage of piloting could be undertaken in the autumn using a similar level of funding.

     The first project will be to develop a website/internet social space for students on placement. A grant of £3000 has been provided by the Professional Training and Careers Committee to start this process and up to three students will be recruited to help.

2   The coLab project will be hosted by SCEPTrE and supported by SCEPTrE, E Learning Unit and UNIS Direct (Nigel Biggs). The Students' Union and I Lab will also be partners in the enterprise.

The sustainability of coLab will be dependent on embedding the enterprise in the curriculum and existing quality management structures. Our initial development work suggests that the BSc Technology Entrepreneurship, IT and Business programme could form a curriculum home for such an enterprise and we will discuss this further with the Programme Director.

CHARACTERISTICS

- Friendly, accessible and distinctive **drop-in space** located in a well-used part of the campus.

- **Experimental space** containing a range of technology that will be available for playing with or loan.

- **Familarisation & training space** providing a programme of demonstrations and training in the use of equipment and software, also just-in-time opportunities.

- **Virtual community spaces** within which information about mobile interactive technologies and their uses can be grown, stored, connected and made accessible, together with the results of experiments and practitioners could exchange information and discuss challenges and issues.

- **Gateway to external resources** and training providers and new on-line tutorials in the form of video and podcasts developed by the collaboratory

- **Links to leading-edge research** into the use of mobile and personal technologies through collaboration with iLab and via SCEPTrE other Centres for Excellence specialising in the use of technology for learning.

- Capacity for ongoing **evaluation of teaching and learning experiments**. Facility to record experiments on video to provide both an exemplification resource for teachers and material for evaluation.

- Repository for a knowledgeable practitioner **database** (both students and staff).

- **Observatory** providing information written by students for students about emergent new developments.

coLab – collaborative enterprise where students, university staff and technology producers come together to learn and discover useful things

CORE ENTERPRISE

- A student-led and operated enterprise (Ltd Company) trading in tacit knowledge/know how contained within student body, providing a range of services to the university, students and commercial technology producers.
- Focused on discovery around current and potential use of personal /emergent technologies and the enhancement of teaching and learning and students' higher education (including placement) experiences

*Business plan developed in consultation with a small board: Chair of Board coaches/mentors student CEO. University partners – **SCEPTrE, E Learning Unit, ILab, UNIS Direct, Students' Union**, DAVE, SPLASH, IT Services, AV Services, Faculties. Additional support via Alumni entrepreneur network and major corporate sponsors.*
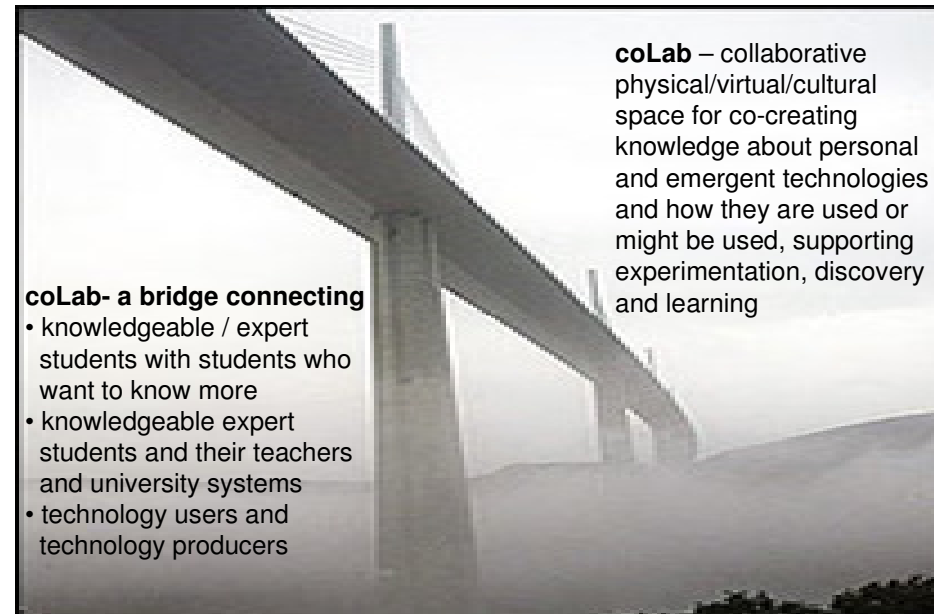
coLab- a bridge connecting
- knowledgeable / expert students with students who want to know more
- knowledgeable expert students and their teachers and university systems
- technology users and technology producers

coLab – collaborative physical/virtual/cultural space for co-creating knowledge about personal and emergent technologies and how they are used or might be used, supporting experimentation, discovery and learning

POTENTIAL SERVICES TO TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPERS & PROVIDERS

Partnerships to facilitate discovery of user interests and concerns, the co-creation of new applications and engage in proof of concept experiments in the natural laboratory of a university.

SERVICES TO STUDENTS

- The chance to discover new and current personal technologies for learning. e.g. electronic pens, podcasts, ultra light notebooks, collaborative environments, etc.
- This would be effective for better time management, creative thinking sessions, group meetings, data collection, survey taking- this could lead to improvements in academic performance

Social deliverables to students will include:
- Personal development: increasing IT proficiency, e.g. sign up for certified Microsoft Office training; improve presentation and interview skills through visual recording, etc.
- A place to buy and sell technologies at discount prices.
- Benefits for clubs & societies. e.g. hire computing, audio, video equipment.
- Test current and new technologies.

Provider of **paid work placement** opportunities for up to 10 students with expertise in use of personal technologies, and /or market research and networking skills.

Priceless opportunity to learn how to be entrepreneurial through being entrepreneurial in a relatively low risk environment.