



collaboration in  
a complex world

## Progress Report March -June 2007

### BACKGROUND

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 (PULSE is also involved) 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.

### 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. The team, who are also prolific users of such spaces have 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 first publicly accessible site was made available June 25<sup>th</sup> (Appendix 1).

**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.

**Design:** A general guide format of the social website was. 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:** Ourspace is now being tested and feedback is being sought from a small volunteer group. The site will be actively promoted in July/ August.

**Promotional strategy:** Once the website is functional under testing in June, advertisement and promotion will be carried out. The website will be marketed to placement students using the following strategies:

- Inform all senior tutors to ensure that they are aware of the existence of the website and could let the placement students know about it.
- Email students who are going on placement about the website.
- Place a message on ULearn so that students are aware of the website.
- Post notices on the USSU placement web pages

### 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 fulfil 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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. 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. Two CoLab students also helped form a filming team to support the conference working with two expert students recruited from the film course at Farnham.

**Initial evaluation of proof of concept**

- There are many talented and committed students who are interested and willing to contribute to CoLab
- The creation and management of opportunity is best achieved through project-based management plans that are co-constructed rather than open-ended employment within the organization.
- Leadership, coordination and communication and consultation with institutional stakeholders have all been issues that will need to be overcome in future projects.
- The outcomes from the enterprise are excellent given the time and resources available.
- The participants have gained much valuable and useful experience.
- The CoLab model is a groundbreaking 'real world' educational device that needs to be more thoroughly explored.