Enhancing strategies for pedagogical development

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Abstract: We have recently finished two projects focusing on staff development and pedagogical innovations. The projects have had a major impact on the working culture of our unit, and also for the teaching staff directly involved in our teaching activities. However, when the project funding runs out, the emerging questions are "are these initiatives sustainable or not?" and "will the money invested in them yield long-term effects?"

The objectives of this seminar are to describe strategies for pedagogical development and the impact of short-term initiatives for pedagogical change. During the last three years, the Center for Teaching and Learning at Umeå University, Sweden, has run two projects focusing on staff development and pedagogical innovations. The overarching purpose of these projects was to provide support for teaching staff and management at all levels in the acquisition of the skills necessary for excellent teaching and the pedagogical implementation of ICT in education.

The projects have resulted in a well-developed and comprehensive range of training activities for staff in the form of courses, seminars and workshops on various aspects of teaching, for example the pedagogical use of ICT in education. To provide additional support, a Virtual Educational Resource (ViPER) has been established where university employees can obtain information and exchange experiences with colleagues concerning teaching and learning in higher education. The existing pedagogical action plan was evaluated and then revised to better fit the current university organization and the needs of teaching staff. A network of ICT coaches has been formed with the aim of creating a grass-roots ICT support to inspire, support and assist staff within their own institutions in planning, developing and implementing technology enhanced teaching and learning. Finally, work on strategic issues related to the value of excellence in teaching and environments for technology-enhanced education has identified the need for a clear vision and strategy for the implementation of these principles in higher education at Umeå University.

These projects have had a major impact on the working culture of our unit, and also for the teaching staff directly involved in our teaching activities. In our own unit, there has in the past been a tendency to separate the "pedagogical" from the "technical" support and professional development offered to the university's teaching staff, with personnel working mainly within their own field of technology-enhanced learning or campus-based teaching. However, one of the direct effects of working with the two projects has been to integrate the two fields resulting in an increase in the pedagogical implementation of ICT in the courses offered by the unit and a corresponding increase and blending in the competences of the unit's staff.

However, when the project funding runs out, the emerging questions are "are these initiatives sustainable or not?" and "will the money invested in them yield long-term effects?" We don't have answers to these questions yet, but it is our hope that a discussion of these issues and any other questions raised during the seminar will provide a useful exchange of ideas and experiences.