Flexible Learning Leaders 2002
Final Report

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FLEXIBLE LEARNING LEADERS 2002

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Flexible Learning Leaders 2002 Final Report

Introduction

This Final Report is a requirement of the Flexible Learning Leaders 2002 project. This report will be loaded to the website and collated for distribution to the Steering Committee, ANTA and FLAG, project sponsors and other interested parties.

This report covers an analysis of my experiences as a Flexible Learning Leader and the outcomes of my involvement in the project. It identifies some of the benefits of my involvement in the project to my self, my organisation and the state. It includes how I have shared my ideas and knowledge with others and any input I have had into future directions of the organisation. It also addresses my role as a leader in the present and in the future and identifies key points or directions for flexible learning in VET in the next two years.
Analysis of experiences as a Flexible Learning Leader and the impact on flexible learning in VET

I have learnt a great deal through my involvement in this project. Through research, site visits and participation in flexible learning forums I have gathered a great deal of information to improve and expand what has already been achieved at the Gascoyne Campuses of Central West College of TAFE.

From visits and networks across the nation focusing on administration procedures, student management and staff development processes I believe that:

- Flexible learning needs to be approached as a wholistic approach to learning. That is, each of the illustrated areas below must be developed alongside each other as each area impacts on the other.

![Diagram of AQTF STANDARDS]

- **Environment**
  - Class Facilitation
  - Flexi Learning Areas
  - Access to Computers/Internet

- **Students**
  - Access to lecturers
  - On going motivation/feedback
  - Social/networking with others

- **Lecturers**
  - Timetabling
  - Documentation Teaching Hours
  - Documenting First Attendances
  - Entering Results

- **Resources**
  - Books/Materials
  - Online Materials
  - Literacy/Numeracy Support
  - Library Support
  - Technical Support

- **Staff Training**
  - Facilitation Skills
  - On Line Delivery Skills

- **Student Management**
  - Mentoring

- **Administration**
  - Roll Creations
  - Enrolment Forms
  - Printing Rolls
  - Creating Student Files
• the focus of learning must lie with the client or learner. The ultimate aim of the Flexible Learning Strategy is to provide anything, anywhere, anytime. To achieve this we need to look at what the client wants, how they want to learn and where is the best place that suits them to learn. The next step is to look at how we as practitioners can offer them the support and learning they have identified. Our procedures and policies must be able to support this. Currently flexible learning is operating under an infrastructure that is in place to support a traditional style of delivery. This dictates how we deliver to a great extent, how we record, how we report and so reflects a system bound to traditional standards. Creative thinking allows some organisations to “push the boundaries” in how and what they do in relation to flexible learning while still meeting Australian Quality Framework (AQTF) standards.

• measuring teacher time in flexible learning also reflects this traditionally based form of delivery. The nature of the teachers’ roles in flexible learning have changed. Relationships with clients need to be built in new environments that often rely on technology. In flexible learning, time spent on the different roles involved with delivery varies with the individual client. Quality processes, administration, reviewing and evaluating suitable material whether text based or on line in an ever changing environment must also be taken into consideration when determining lecturing hours. Teaching awards still maintain lecturing hours associated with time in a classroom. Changes at a different and higher level must happen if we truly want to reach the ultimate in flexible learning.

• legal issues relating to producing and using materials in flexible learning need to be made clearer to all those involved in flexible learning. Issues such as copyright licenses, intellectual property, regulations in regard to content and the privacy law are often not stressed to new users of flexible learning material.

• there is an access and equity issue in relation to practitioners of Flexible Learning from remote and rural areas. Most organisations whether TAFE or private Registered Training Organisations simply do not have the extra funds to promote research and training for staff to develop their skills in Flexible Learning. These skills range from technology use, facilitation skills and pedagogical effectiveness that is seeing many changes. This is mainly due to:
  o added costs involved in travel and accommodation to get to the metropolitan area where most training is organised and delivered.
  o time involved in travel
  o time involved in researching and communicating via internet forums, chat rooms and email – down load time in most rural and remote areas varies from slow to very slow and this can cause frustration and wasted time.
  o reflection is a very important aspect of research and learning. Time spent in this area is rarely acknowledged and so reflection time is simply absorbed into other duties associated with assessment and delivery.
difficulties in finding suitable relief staff to cover lecturers’ roles in their absence from their organisations. This is especially so now with the AQTF standards in place. Often it is near impossible to find relief staff who are qualified in the relevant courses offered through Training Packages and who have a Certificate IV Assessment and Workplace Training qualification. The passion and commitment by individuals in their field allow them to take on the additional workloads associated with training and research.

My visit to the Adelaide Institute of TAFE in South Australia and Kate Fannon’s (2002 Flexible Learning Leader) presentation on Collaborative Learning has inspired me to look at implementing a similar approach to learning here at the Gascoyne Campuses, the main college and hopefully link to other colleges in the state. A task oriented approach to learning will have a great impact in VET especially in rural and remote regions. Learners involved in this action based approach to learning will be able to form a link with other learners in regional and metropolitan centres. This will overcome a number of issues such as:

- isolation in study and the effects of small student numbers. Students often do not have other learners to associate with in discussing and sharing ideas. This is especially so in using on line materials. Interactive tools of learning such as e-mail, discussion boards and chat are not effectively incorporated into the learning when there is often not a group of learners enrolled at the same time to study. With multiple entry and exit points in enrolment, often learners work individually with their facilitator.
- ability to share knowledge, resources and get a broader picture of skills required in industry
- raise self esteem and confidence in sharing their own knowledge with their peers in regional and metropolitan colleges. (there is often a perception that those in the regional or metropolitan areas are more knowledgeable or skilled then those from the ‘bush’)
- encourage problem solving skills
- open up future job prospects

My abilities as a leader have been developed through this project both professionally and personally. I have undertaken some professional development and training in “Professional development” and “Situational Leadership”. These training opportunities have reinforced the skills I already possess and built on them. Confidence in myself as an effective speaker and presenter have grown from taking part in state and national presentations and networking with many people in varying levels of management across the nation. These skills I have gained will assist me in making an impact on VET in the Flexible Learning arena in the future.
My experience and interactions with others across the state as a Flexible Learning Leader now leave me with the challenge of making an impact on Flexible Learning not only at our own main organisation but at state and national level. Can leaders lead from the “bush?” There is a general impression or consciousness that the wealth of knowledge and skill is found in major organisations in large metropolitan areas. Cutting edge procedures and processes are born in these large areas and that rural and remote regions need to “catch up” or learn from their city colleagues. That to make a difference as an individual on how we do things, those living in remote and rural regions are limited and may need to move on to bigger things and bigger places. In other words move to a larger organisation to make yourself recognised as a valuable contributor to your field and then you may be able to bring about changes to make a difference.

I believe differently. I believe strongly that we need the “voices from the wilderness” as importantly as we need those from the city and regional areas. How else do we really know about the issues facing rural and remote learners? One of the greatest examples here is the big move to e learning. While it is without doubt a wonderful medium for learning and will no doubt be the main medium for the X and Y generations. (some 4 year olds in preschools are now displaying their drawings on power point) Accessing this technology today in outlying regions is still not as effective as it could be. Issues such as:

- internet connections vary – downloading material requires a lot of wait time
- learners not always having the necessary equipment to use certain features of software programs necessary for learning such as audio and/or video streaming
- lecturers/facilitators not having the technological knowledge to give adequate support
- availability of technician
- different software packages require different skills by lecturers and learners to be successful. On line can often be complex for users with different standards involved – CD Rom, Web CT.
- on line material that is not clear
- constant breakdowns
- because of bandwidth limitations a number of classroom environments cannot be replicated by an on line learning system
- motivation is a big issue

People choose to live and work where they do because often the lifestyle suits them to do so. The ultimate aim of the Flexible Leader strategy is to offer anything, anywhere, anytime. Surely we need experts in Flexible Learning “anywhere” so that they can at first hand address the issues that impact on learning for their individual areas.
Outputs and outcomes of the program

The main objectives of the Flexible learning Leaders project for me was to research and develop best practice in the provision of flexible learning in the regional and remote campuses of Central West College of TAFE in compliance with the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). My main goals were to investigate and develop administration procedures, student management, staff development processes. As well as this investigated learning opportunities available to all clients that support the use of flexible learning. Another of my aims was to develop my own leadership capability in contributing to flexible delivery concepts.

In order to reach these goals I undertook a number of strategies. I initially conducted internet research into best practice in flexible learning. I then organised a number of site visits to network and learn from others in Western Australian and inter state who were experts in this field. I also attended a number of conferences, presentations and forums that investigated issues dealing with flexible learning. Some of these were through taking part in on line forums and chat sessions. I enhanced my own skills as a leader by taking part in professional development and training sessions.

There are a number of outcomes as a result of my research and investigations into flexible learning. I have worked closely with the Acting Program Director and other key staff members involved in flexible learning at the Gascoyne Campuses. Some of the outcomes include:

- moving to a six month enrolment plan with multiple entry and exit points.
- offering whole courses under a flexible learning model that supports on line/ text based materials, class facilitation, workplace assessing, workshops and skills recognition.
- improving our procedures to monitor and manage clients more effectively through
  - being more client focused in organising interviews with all students prior to enrolment to determine their individual needs
  - putting in place procedures to record all contact with the client during their study
  - providing ‘easy to read’ information to the client on how flexible learning is undertaken at the college
  - updating the design of the flexible rolls created previously to assist lecturers and administration in the recording, reporting and monitoring of clients.
- sharing information and knowledge gained in the program with lecturers in other areas and assisting them in identifying new programs or materials that may assist them in their area of work

One of the greatest outcomes of the program has been the creation of networks and links with other practitioners, managers and co-ordinators working in the area of flexible learning. This allows us to pool our knowledge and share our skills in developing processes that support the implementation of quality flexible learning.
Most significant benefit to self, organisation and the state

The most significant benefit from the Flexible Learning Leader’s year for myself has been the great opportunity to form networks with other leaders in the field of Flexible Learning. The ability to share ideas, discuss concerns, classify concepts and learn from others has been tremendous. Talking to and meeting other experts in the field of Flexible Learning across the nation boosts my own enthusiasm and motivation in what I do. Being able to visit many organisations and past leaders on site has stimulated my thinking in how we approach Flexible Learning at the college and how we can improve on our processes.

Added to this, the willingness of others to share their achievements, discuss openly the obstacles they have encountered and listen attentively to my own experiences and concerns has further fostered a sense of belonging to the world of Flexible Learning.

From a professional perspective my own confidence in my self and my ability as a leader has grown. Along with this, my organisation skills that I believe are well developed have been further enhanced. I have had to find new ways of doing things and be more assertive in delegating duties to achieve the goals of my project.

From the organisational point of view we are leading the way from the Gascoyne Campus in offering whole courses in a flexible mode of delivery. This has meant introducing a learner centred approach with a mixed mode of delivery. This includes facilitated sessions, workshops, workplace assessment and chat sessions and on line forums. Resources incorporate on line and text based where students can get assistance with their self directed learning. We have fine tuned our processes in student management and administration and the model we use will be a pilot that can be used in other areas of the college. Our achievements here will link the Gascoyne Campus to the main regional college. The college is moving towards a Federated Model in 2003 and my achievements in the Flexible Learning Leaders project will support this by creating more opportunities for me to work with Programs Directors and staff across the college.

The implications at a state level are also great. Fostering a willingness to share and be seen as leaders in the state has significant benefits to all practices and organisations involved in Flexible Learning. This is already starting to happen. There is a lot more communication from members and sharing of resources and ideas. Participation by past and present leaders in ANTA funded forums such as Learnscope, Flexible Learning Research projects managed by NCVER, ‘Hot Topics’ by the Department of Training and the annual Best Practice Forum in Perth are examples. At the recent Learnscope meeting held in Perth in November, Margaret O’Connell, 2002 Flexible Learning Leader from Geraldton Regional Communication Education Centre and my self were asked to co-facilitate a session on ‘Conversations of the Future’. We were able to do this successfully with background material we had obtained through some of the networks we had made with other leaders at the Sharing Conference in Adelaide earlier this year. This opportunity to share some of our knowledge with others at state level promotes Flexible Learning Leaders and will open up more opportunities for future sharing.

The 2002 leaders in Western Australia are together planning a media release on Flexible Learning in the State to share some of their project goals and achievements as Flexible Learning Leaders. Links with current and past leaders will strengthen.
Sharing learning with others
I have shared my learning with my colleagues at the campus at regular team meetings. Special meetings have been held with those people especially involved in the flexible learning process to discuss issues related to flexible learning in more detail. These meetings have looked at what information I have gathered, how we could incorporate some of these ideas and overcome any barriers that present themselves. We have set
up action plans that are being continuously worked on to improve what we already do.

Throughout my project I have communicated frequently with the Acting Program Director of the Gascoyne Campuses, Director of Academic Training Services, Co-ordinators of Flexible and Online Learning and the Program Director of Business Studies who has also acted as my mentor. This has been through video conferencing, meetings at the main college and informal get togethers. I have also put together a written report on all my travels interstate that I have forwarded to the Managing Director and above parties. This has included my interim report. Earlier in the program I was asked to address Corporate Executive to outline my project goals and the strategies I would use for learning. I have recently corresponded with the Managing Director requesting the opportunity to address the Committee again to discuss my learning and suggest some ideas and ways that I could benefit the college in the future. A time is being scheduled for this early next year.

Midway through the project I was asked by the Director of Academic Services and the college Board of Studies to put together a display featuring my goals, journey and achievements to date as a Flexible Learning Leader. This has been displayed in the main college’s library and virtual campus foyer and more recently moved to the staff common room.

Conversations with other senior staff involved in Quality Assurance have opened up opportunities for me to address the college on Quality Day. (a whole college staff development opportunity) in 2003. In the last few days I have been communicating with the Director of Organisational Effectiveness in relation to input into the college’s Draft Strategic Plan.

Outline of future sharing at State and National level

My involvement in the Flexible Learning Leader’s project is just the beginning of gaining knowledge in this area and sharing it with others. It is the beginning of looking at what we do as practitioners, how and what we do to assist our clients achieve lifelong learning. Some of the ways that I will be actively involved in the future is by:

- being a regular participant on online forums and chat rooms such as NetWorking 2002, Learnscope.
• contributing to Wollemi Ringleaders forum as a member of the Flexible Learning Leaders’ Alumni.
• keeping the lines of communication open to fellow leaders through email and telephone conversations
• playing a mentor or support role to future leaders in 2003 and 2004
• taking part as a guest speaker, presenter or facilitator at Flexible Learning Forums such as Learnscope and the annual Best Practice forum in Perth. I would also nominate to present a practical session on implementing flexible learning at a ‘Hot Topics’ forum organised by the Department Training in 2003.
• attending the Sharing Workshop scheduled for November 2003 in Sydney.
• continuing to contribute to curriculum material to support on line learning through acting as content expert, quality assurance and instructional designer.

I am committed to learning and improving my skills in order to support and develop best practice in Flexible Learning to optimise access to learning by all learners regardless of where they are situated geographically. This is especially so for learners in remote and rural parts of Australia who need extra support to accommodate a range of learning styles and situations. My own experiences as a mature student and lifelong learner using text based and on line material have given me a first hand knowledge of ‘what works’ and ‘what doesn’t’ in education and training.

I also strongly believe in the ‘Law of Small Effects’ – that small events can result in large impacts. As a 2002 Flexible Learning Leader from a remote campus I intend to have a positive impact on the future of flexible learning.

Input into future organisation’s strategic plan and new leadership opportunities

The college is currently in the process of drafting a new Strategic Plan. Early next year the Gascoyne campuses will be getting together to plan and organise our organisational plan that will reflect the strategic directions of the college as a whole. The draft strategic plan focuses on increasing flexible learning options for the region. These include an emphasis on on line products. Promoting a culture of innovation in VET through accessing funds for research, product development and innovative delivery and assessment are other directions identified. The college will continue to
invest in the professional development of staff to ensure skill levels are appropriate to support high quality flexible delivery and assessment.

I will continue to provide input into the college’s strategic plan and the Gascoyne Campuses organisational plan by:

- assessing funds for innovative learning, research and product development through Learnscope and/or Flexible Learning Innovations.
- playing a leadership role in co-ordinating Flex Ways, Series 11 to determine individual training needs as well as identifying skills required as a team to support quality training.
- improving delivery to remote and rural areas and indigenous Australians by providing effective literacy support and alternative flexible methods of learning and assessment. For example video taping sessions that can be distributed on CD Rom to outlying areas. Another option I would like to investigate is the possibility of acquiring a Mobile Classroom. A Mobile Classroom is equipped with laptops, a server, printer and internet access with a wireless network. This equipment would be an invaluable tool for delivery in the area of the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA) as well as other VET courses. This would support the college’s direction in servicing the needs of the most remotest regions of the Mid West and the Gascoyne.
- creating a flexible learning environment or virtual campus at the Gascoyne campus. This will include an area for learners to meet and share new ideas, study with access to facilitator, and equipment to support e-learning as well as text based materials. The introduction early next year of the Flexible Delivery System (FDS) a computerised student management system will also be in place.

I will continue to be an active Flexible Learning Leader by:

- maintaining and expanding the networks I have created across the nation
- investing in lifelong learning by upgrading my own skills through training and researching new trends.
- sharing my knowledge through the colleges Board of Studies committees.
- working closely with the Program Directors in all areas of the college. with the Federated Model in place this will be a smoother process.
- mentoring other staff and assisting them to embrace innovative and new ways in education and training.
- strengthening my links with industry to ensure that training is consistent with and meets the changing needs of industry.
- working with other key players in flexible learning at the college to create a college Flexible learning Newsletter and Web-CT shell to, promote training opportunities and hold regular discussions with others interested in the topic.

I am currently in the process of conducting a mapping exercise with the processes we have in place to administer and manage clients with the requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework. This will be implemented at the Gascoyne Campuses in 2003 and presented to the main college as a model in best practice.
Another area of leadership that I am currently contributing towards is the NCVER Research document that will discuss new approaches and frameworks for addressing equity and diversity issues in VET. A discussion paper titled ‘Built In or Bolted On’ looks at managing equity and diversity in VET delivery.

Key directions for Flexible Learning in VET

From my experience into researching and investigating best practice in Flexible Learning the key issues that I believe need to be addressed in the next two years are:

- with the emergence of the Digital Generation there will be an increase in online learning. This will see the need for a greater understanding in the technology by practitioners and other learners. Technology support must be in place to support this. Quality of materials for easy use is also important.
- changes in infrastructure is imperative in order to truly offer flexible learning.
- aging of the VET workforce and population could see an increase in demand for recreational learning. That is non-compliant learning where people do not necessarily want a qualification but just want the skills.
- meeting the challenges of a competitive training market on a global level.
a move away from content driven learning towards action learning which is more task oriented or question based.

with the great move to e-learning, strategies need to be in place to build relationships. We are social beings and if interacting with others is limited it paves the way for other problems. I believe that a person with emotional intelligence is generally more successful both in their personal and professional lives. Skills alone will not make us successful in what we do. Opportunities for building relationships must be considered and put in place for quality learning to occur.

access and equity issues related to the isolation of VET practitioners in rural and remote regions of Australia must be addressed so that they are given as many opportunities as their colleagues in the cities for professional development.

coping with change – changes in the role of the VET practitioner, the nature of work, industry trends, changes to assessments methods and changes in the use of technology can lead to added stress and ill health.

Industrial relations – the changing role of the VET practitioner in Flexible Learning.
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