

CATS Project Community of Practice – Submission 1, 19 October 2012

Achievements to date

- Rapid establishment of a small and effective steering group.
- Appointment of external evaluator with background of CATS/HE/FE interface.
- Draft progression agreement produced.
- Capture of some initial indicators as to barriers/successes/issues.

Problems/Challenges of developing CATS

- Key difficulty encountered to date is the concept of matching learning outcomes between awards. Some partners take a more liberal approach to 'equivalence' than others. This is likely to lead to a potentially confusing array of credit transfer offers and certainly not a transparent and fixed offer.
- CMI and ILM awards offer considerable scope for 'optional units' thereby meeting the need of businesses/individual learners. This flexibility however creates a major barrier to providing concrete credit transfer offers – each case will need to be viewed individually. This prevents clarity of credit transfer offer and increases the cost of progression for the receiving partner who will need to consider each applicant separately.
- Due to re-validation of awards in FE partners, likely that mapping of awards now will not equate to awards being offered from September 2013. Although this is a specific example it also provides an indication as to the ongoing currency of any agreement and the need for regular updating as specifications change.
- A number of major reorganisations and strategic priority changes occurring resulting in tensions in relation to the project and its place in terms of personnel/departments and strategy.

Working across the FE/HE interface

- Due to our partnership being a mixture of HEIs and FECs working across has been cordial and relatively smooth.

Working with other agencies

- CMI/ILM had pre-existing relationships with a number of the partners involved and this has assisted in development of the project.
- HEARTs relationship with CMI and ILM had to be established rapidly in order to meet the project bidding deadline. The relationship is still developing and needs to do so further in order to maximise the impact of eventual outcomes. The reach of ILM/CMI, not least in connection with the similar Linking London project, is proving beneficial.

'Eureka' moments/Key learning outcomes for the project

- Development of a mapping matrix by University of Leeds Lifelong Learning Centre shared with other partners to support their work led to greater engagement from partners.

Emerging themes?

- Difficulties with 'capacity' within partners to carry out the mapping amongst already crowded work schedules and emerging aspects related to changing strategic directions and priorities.
- Potential difficulty of relationships with validating/awarding partners for HEQF awards at partners without degree awarding powers (i.e. FE College partners).
- Complexity of eventual range of offers for progression and credit transfer and how best to present this in a format that individual learners and/or CMI/ILM centres can access and navigate.
- Concern over credit transfer and the potential to set learners up to 'fail/struggle' if support systems are not rigorously applied. For example, potential to credit 'study skills modules' but this may not be in the long term interest of the individual learner as they make the adjustment from awards with considerable practical application to awards requiring considerable academic application.
- Recognition at the second steering group meeting of the need to explore, on a localised geographic basis a set of 'credit transfer principles & values' to support local part-time learners.