

Executive Summary

1 The Survey

This survey was carried out by the two Scottish Regional Support Centres to investigate training needs in the area of information and communication technology (ICT) in Scotland's Further Education Colleges. As such it was designed to build on the original survey carried out in 2001¹ and to provide the RSCs and other support agencies with a solid evidential base on which to plan training development for the sector in the short to medium term. The survey was designed to be completed entirely online and was carried out from 1st – 23rd May 2003, though provision was also made for hard copy versions of the survey forms to be added to the data later.

The survey, which can be found at <http://www.rsc-ne-scotland.ac.uk/etna>, was divided into five sections and designed to cover the training needs of all staff within the Colleges:

- Academic
- Administrative & Support
- Learning Resources
- Managers
- Technical & Networking

Extensive consultation with support agencies was carried out during the design phase of the survey and while there are common elements with the 2001 version to allow for comparison, new elements have been introduced to reflect the change agenda which has faced the sector over the intervening period.

2 The Sample

2,516 responses were received in total representing a significant proportion of the 12,500 full-time equivalent staff in Scotland's Colleges² – a 20% return – and though to a lesser extent than in 2001, there will still be a bias in the survey towards those most comfortable with the technology and with the easiest access to it.

3 Findings

Access to technology has improved though there are still areas – particularly among academic staff – where continuing investment is required to meet target ratios. The skills base has increased significantly since 2001, partly driven by the acceptance of ECDL as a de facto standard for IT applications training. The need to further develop these skills directly into the core business of teaching and learning is still very evident and there is still little evidence that any significant proportion of learning is taking place online.

VLEs have been adopted by the vast majority of Colleges but are still seen to be at the 'pilot' stage with relatively few staff in the Colleges having knowledge of them and very few, so far, being trained in their use. Intranets were used in nearly all Colleges but lack any overall standards. Video conferencing technology, though widely available, continues to be underused. However, new technology may have the potential to increase use.

There is a greater awareness of assistive technologies but still a pressing need to turn awareness into practical knowledge of how to apply the technologies.

¹ Scottish Further Education Training Needs Analysis 2001

² Association of Scottish Colleges – Key Facts 2003

Barriers to training exist – the most significant, as in 2001, being time – but there is a widespread desire to take part in training and an acceptance that the changing culture of the Colleges makes a different skill set a necessity. The traditional pattern of face-to-face delivery found most favour across the survey though there is an increasing acceptance of a 'blended' model.

There is also a need at all levels for a steady flow of reliable information. Managers require this to inform the strategic planning process, while staff require information on new materials becoming available, techniques and training. There is also a need for College managements to more clearly communicate their ICT strategies to all staff.

4 Key Recommendations

4.1 Access to Technology

Continued investment is required to provide academic staff with access to computers at the target ratio set by the funding council.

4.2 Training Needs

- Awareness raising of College ICT strategies and the potential of online learning
- VLE Training
- Creating online learning materials
- Sourcing and evaluating online learning materials
- ECDL
- An applications qualification to bring staff up to the level of ECDL entry
- Assistive technologies

More detailed recommendations appear at the close of each section and are aggregated at the end of this report.

4.3 Training Delivery

Significant barriers to training uptake need to be overcome and incentives need to be found to encourage staff. A blend of the traditional and online support has the greatest chance of meeting the needs of the population even if time remains at a premium.

4.4 Training Perception

Most staff value training and would welcome the chance to take part in new developments and develop skills in online learning. The successful model of ECDL should be examined closely with a view to using the elements which have made its uptake so high and transferring these to a new recognised qualification in online learning – elements from recent developments such as the Ferl Practitioners' Programme and the SQA PDA Awards should be incorporated into any such programme which is needed as a matter of urgency.

4.5 Information

There is a continuing demand reflected at all levels and in all sections of the survey for a supply of good quality information. The Regional Support Centres and other agencies must remain sensitive to those needs and ensure that information is targeted accurately and disseminated efficiently.