Teaching for Learning Network

Communication and Impact Strategy

Introduction

TfLN is working at the interfaces of research and practice. It is also multi-method and multi-layered, and involves a range of participants drawn from different disciplines and institutions. These features make it especially important that we establish, understand and adhere to a strategy which can guide the engagement of others in and with our work, and which integrates with communication and publication plans.

This strategy will help:

- to define the scope, nature and direction of our engagement and dissemination efforts;
- to set priorities, sequences and time scales;
- to decide roles, responsibilities and a division of labour.

In other words, it will provide a set of principles or ground rules for the way we generate outputs, engage with participants and communicate with different audiences.

Audiences and outputs

The project has multiple audiences, and the information demands of each of these groups are often quite different, especially in terms of timescales and the form in which the information is presented. These audiences include:

- teachers;
- students;
- policymakers and administrators (at departmental, university, national and international level);
- public more generally, especially media audiences, parents and alumni;
- peers (other researchers);
- programmers, instructional designers and other interested in the TEL implications of our work.

While we do not want to be rushed into making public our findings (see 'Balance and Priorities' below) it is important that we validate our conceptual frameworks and emerging findings by sharing these with participants and 'users' of research, either by sharing outputs or more formally by 'mirroring' data and interpretations in the course of focus groups, discussions and focussed interviews.

A further dimension is the close association between Cambridge and MIT, which means that the reporting of our findings and the context in which they have developed will need to be carefully 'mediated'. We may have to consider carefully the degree of contextualisation necessary to make Cambridge-specific practice meaningful to US readers, and the degree of abstraction necessary to allow valid comparisons to be made between UK and US educational settings.

Audience	Examples	Key Outputs and Events
Teachers	Cambridge Staff MIT Staff Staff elsewhere	TFLN Website Staff Development Programme (PHEP etc) HEA Events ('Training the Trainers') HEA Resources Practitioner Book Research Briefings ('two pagers')
Students	Cambridge Students MIT Students Students elsewhere (UK/US)	TFLN Website Induction Sessions Feedback via DOS Research Briefings ('two pagers')
Policymakers	University Systems	Formal Reports Committee Representation (e.g. TQEF) Contribution to CLLP
Public	Media Alumni Parents	TFLN Website Cambridge University Website CMI Website Alumni Networks and Publications
Peers	Educational Researchers Staff Development	HEA networks and events Academic Publications Academic Conferences (BERA, AERA, ISSOTL, SRHE) TLRP
Programmers	Content Developers Instructional Designers VCE Developers e.g. Sakai	Academic Publications Academic Conferences (e.g. ALT-C) TFLN Website CARET Networks (e.g. Lab Group, Sakai) JISC Events esp. Pedagogy Projects TEL Networks

Balance and priorities

There is a risk that the pressures exerted by practitioners, funders and the press will encourage us to report findings or make recommendations before we are confident that we know what they are, and whether they are defensible and warranted.

We are expected to do 'good science' and while the project may differ from one which is 'in the disciplines' and contributing to the forthcoming Research Assessement Exercise (for example), we recognise that this is the standard against which our work may be judged by participants, practitioners and others.

Within the natural sciences it is generally the case that findings are not publicised before peer review. We should aspire to this and use our refereed outputs as the basis for developing other outputs, as far as possible. This need not prevent us from publishing general accounts of the project, methodological accounts and contributions to policy discussions earlier, but we should be cautious of claiming that these are based on firm research 'findings'. Moreover, individuals should not act idiosyncratically without the agreement of the team because this is a collaborative project for which we have collective responsibility (see the Authorship guide for further details).

At the same time we cannot afford to delay too long with making our findings available to wider audiences as this could reduce their impact. This suggests that we should prepare our more user-focused outputs alongside our academic ones. In considering our potential outputs, we need to ask of each whether it should be a priority or whether we should direct our energies elsewhere. Achieving an overall balance, to convey adequately the different levels and dimensions of our work, will also be an ongoing concern.

Roles and responsibilities within the project

This is a large project in comparison to many in the area of professional development, with rich data sets and multiple dimensions to explore, in addition to the core questions set out in the research design. There is scope for every member of the team to pursue special interests as well as contribute to the whole. Thus, there are opportunities for everyone to take a lead role in some analysis, writing and presentation, if they wish, and to work in a more equal or supportive capacity in others.

It should be remembered, however, that no one individual or sub-group 'owns' any particular data set. All data are owned by the project as a whole and the use of the data needs to be agreed by the team, or by the Management Group as a proxy group, when the project ends and the team no longer meets. On all outputs, the project needs to be attributed in the way previously agreed (i.e. with a CMI-TfLN badged statement of acknowledgement to the whole team, participants and funders).

Conference and seminar attendence by project participants is to be encouraged, with the following provisos:

- Conference presentations and papers are subject to the processes set out in this document and the Authorship guide;
- Conference presentations and papers are peer-reviewed (at least at abstract level) and ideally present data which have been fully reviewed and published. If this is not the case they should not be presented as authoritative 'findings';
- Conference attendees report back on their activities to appropriate meetings of the project and include details of their activities to the online research diary.

Collective responsibility also implies that analysis, interpretation and conclusions (findings) need to be subjected to team appraisal before being sent for external review or publication. For major articles and books this should involve discussion at a full team meeting, although conference handouts, PowerPoint presentations etc. can be dealt with by e-mail circulation, at least to the Management Group. Informing the Management Group is also important for keeping records of communication and impact activities for final reporting back to funders. A 'collective' researchers' diary has been created on CamTools for the ongoing recording of events and outputs.

Full team discussion of final drafts of major outputs is also essential because every member of the team needs to feel confident that they can fully understand the basis of findings and defend them in public fora. Defensibility is crucial and if the consensus of the team is that certain aspects of work are not defensible then they should not be published. In some circumstances, the team might agree that an individual should be allowed to publish independently but with no reference to the project or, if some reference is unavoidable, there should be some statement to say that the work is not endorsed as representing the position or findings of the project.

In impact work of other kinds e.g. work with other partners, or proposals for extension work, which could, hopefully, continue for some years, it will not always be possible or necessary to consult the team for permissions. However, the project should be acknowledged, orally or in writing, when it has been a key source of the ideas, and every attempt should be made to ensure fidelity to agreed findings.