DeHub: Examples of some projects and models for future collaboration

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DEHub was established in 2009 at the University of New England (UNE) and, with the support of an Australian Commonwealth grant, has initiated a number of projects in the field of distance education. It is an academic unit for promoting knowledge transfer about best practice in distance education and supporting national and global collaborations on evidence-based approaches to effectively and efficiently employing new technologies in distance education. CQUniversity (CQU), the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), Charles Sturt University (CSU) and Massey University partner with UNE's DEHub in selected research activities, forming a consortium of Australia and New Zealand's largest and leading distance education providers. The Commonwealth grant supporting a range of projects emerging out of UNE's DeHub is drawing to a close in December 2012.

This presentation will firstly provide an overview of UNE DEHub's networking initiatives and other sector activity, including research conducted or supported by DEHub over the past three years. An update on outcomes from some of the DEHub research projects externally funded by the Council on Australia Latin America Relations (COALAR), the International Council of Distance and Online Education (ICDE) and the Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) will be highlighted.

Secondly, this presentation also gives an opportunity to disseminate the findings of some of the large DEHub-funded research projects undertaken by partner institutions:

- *In their own words: Experiences of first-time distance learners*. (Massey University & Charles Sturt University)

This Massey University-led project in collaboration with Charles Sturt University was set against the backdrop of significant challenges facing distance education. The research objective was to help enhance services and resources available for distance learners. It undertook an audit of current support services and investigated the experiences of first-time distance learners in their own words through weekly video diaries. The research reports a number of key takeaways and lessons for institutions as well as for distance learners in terms of student success and engagement.

- *Learning leadership in Higher Education – the big and small actions of many people* (Charles Sturt University & Massey University)

This Charles Sturt University-led project in collaboration with Massey University found that learning leadership was enabled by the large and small actions of many people working individually and collectively in relationship to change. In addition, innovation in the case studies were fostered through – delegated leadership, distributive leadership model, faculty scholarship model, networked learning model and diffusion of innovation model.

- *Interacting E-learners: Analysing learner-learner, learner-teacher and learner-content interactions in five online courses in two Australian distance education universities* (Central Queensland University & University of Southern Queensland)

This Central Queensland University-led project crafted and trialled a forward-looking research approach in its use of learning analytics and qualitative methods to harvest and interrogate learning interactions in LMS courses. Five case studies were constructed, and a model for learning interactions produced. It is clear that learning analytics promise data-driven decision-making for the macro-level institutionalised strategic management of human and physical resourcing in universities. Yet it is equally clear that qualitatively rich data collection and analysis contributes significantly to understanding curriculum design and pedagogical practices that stimulate human interaction within virtual environments, corresponds with heightened student engagement with course content. It is the focus on human interaction and less so on content that results in more rounded interactivity and engagement in the course itself.

Finally, the presentation will discuss some of the lessons learnt about how to better foster collaboration in distance education academic activities. These will be shared with the delegates for discussion, with an agenda for further research and capacity development for the field highlighted.