

F I N A L W O R D

From “Competence” to “Confidence”

During the process of compiling and editing this collection of articles from across Europe (and South Africa), we have learned much about the common difficulties those of us working in both academic staff development and learning technologies experience. Issues of providing basic training in technical skills before we can even explore the more complex areas of pedagogical strategy; the relative merits of formal versus informal training; the ways of capturing and measuring individual and institutional progress; recognition for professional development activities; resourcing and infrastructure; straddling the gap between teaching and research; leadership and strategic planning – all of these topics appear across the case study examples and contributions to our effective practice database. This sharing of experience and swapping of narratives, building on our face-to-face symposia and other events, is helping to nurture a *community of practice* at the European level and ensures that eCompetence and other areas of pedagogical development and organisational management will feature significantly in plans for further research and knowledge exchange.

In addition to the commonalities, however, it is also clear that there are cultural specificities and all of us ask the question “What strategy is most appropriate for the staff in our particular institution and in our particular national context?” Translating, if you will, best practice in Finland to the situation in Spain, or using a teaching model from Greece in Irish universities, for example, is no easy feat. However, it is certainly more possible now that we have developed a strong, shared view of what constitutes eCompetence and a clearer picture of the international situation. Local developments can only be assured in the long term if they pay close attention to emerging international practices. The need to operate on a European-wide basis will increasingly be a feature of higher education as we move through the 21st Century. The Bologna process, for all the complex legal and organisational implications for each national system, will help to foster collaboration and knowledge transfer. Further, perhaps we can look to a future where the understanding of what constitutes *academic practice* and academic staff development is shared in at least an informal network of professional peers in international fora.

We hope that this publication in some way helps to shape this collaborative future and the success of the European eCompetence Initiative highlights for others the practicability of operating at such a level in a complex area of professional practice and academic management. Certainly, our achievements are limited to a collation of case studies, analysis of key factors and wider dissemination of “best” practices. However, these are essential first steps and through the process we have fine tuned our research questions as well as illuminated potential pathways for future work. In addition, the emergence of a network of partners willing to continue the endeavour through subsequent research applications, joint publications and a further video-seminar series is testimony to a sense of common purpose and mutual support.