



LearnHigher evaluation

Year 1 report

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Thanks also to Michelle Verity, who ensured that documents were with me in good time.

Summary

This report precedes the September reports from the twenty local area co-ordinators to the LearnHigher programme as a whole.

It is based largely on partners' self-reports of their work, complemented by participation in four research & evaluation days since June 2005, search of LearnHigher web sites, correspondence with partners, discussions with the Centre director and manager, and perusal of other documents.

LearnHigher has made a great deal of progress and the level of activity is impressive – there is good value for money here. All involved are to be congratulated on the undoubted achievements. The tender to run LearnHigher set out eighteen objectives and there is no doubt that these are being seriously addressed and that Year 1 progress has been good. Judged against its year 1 priorities (page 00), LearnHigher is exceeding plans.

These achievements are summarised in this document, which also invites attention to matters for reflection as year 2 plans are firmed up. It is argued that LearnHigher's potential is related to its success in brokering an agreed operational account of 'learning development'. It is a complicated operation and there will always be centrifugal forces at work because there are so many partners working on diverse topics in different settings and with reference to several scholarly traditions. While LearnHigher can make a considerable contribution to the quality of teaching and learning in England simply by delivering on the twenty projects currently in train, it has the potential to do a great deal more if:

- A robust description of learning development can be adopted
- Projects collaborate so that developments and enquiries cluster to each one's benefit
- Projects become seen as locally-valuable activities that directly contribute to a coherent vision of LearnHigher.

The LearnHigher CETL

Organisation

LearnHigher is a constellation of partners, each led by a local area co-ordinator (LAC). Each partner has a specialty within the area of student learning development.

Areas or specialties are¹:

1. Academic Writing;
2. Assessment ;
3. Critical Thinking and Reflection ;
4. Doing Research ;
5. Group Work;
6. Independent Learning;
7. Information Literacy;
8. Learning for all (Inclusivity);
9. Listening and Interpersonal skills
10. Maths, Numeracy & Statistics;
11. Mobile learning
12. Oral Communication;
13. Personal Development Planning;
14. Problem Solving & Creative Thinking;
15. Reading and Note Making;
16. Referencing;
17. Report Writing;
18. Time Management;
19. Understanding Organisations;
20. Visual Practices

Partner universities, co-ordinated by Liverpool Hope, are:

- a. Bournemouth (With Exeter)
- b. Brighton
- c. Brunel
- d. Bradford
- e. Kent
- f. Lincoln
- g. Liverpool
- h. London Metropolitan
- i. Leeds
- j. Manchester
- k. Manchester Metropolitan
- l. Nottingham
- m. Plymouth
- n. Reading
- o. Worcester

A strength of LearnHigher is that it has precipitated out of an established group, the One Stop Swap Shop, initiated by the University of Liverpool and funded by the LTSN Generic Centre. The group was self-selected from the wider Learning Development in Higher Education Network (LDHEN) which was formed at the same time. This has made the development of working practices easier than it would otherwise have been; indeed, it might otherwise have been unrealistic to expect an operation with sixteen partners to cohere in its first year.

Central operations are based at Liverpool Hope University. Once central service costs have been met funds are distributed amongst partner organisations, each of which has received capital funds through LearnHigher and recurrent 'reward funding' to support work in the nineteen areas or specialties.

¹ The website says that there are twenty areas but lists nineteen. The missing area is 'Listening and Interpersonal Skills', which submitted a report.

Purposes

LearnHigher describes itself as:

... the country's biggest collaborative HEFCE funded Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), we are a partnership of 16 Universities and the Higher Education Academy. We are committed to improving student learning through practice led enquiry, building a research base to inform the effective use of Learning Development resources.

We are a network of expertise seeking to enhance professional practice and student learning, and build capacity both within the network and across the wider sector ...

The LearnHigher partnership has a large amount of diverse expertise. Each of the 16 partner institutions is engaged in enquiry led practice which aims to build a sound evidence base in learning development across a broad spectrum of learning areas that underpin activity across all academic subjects.

Throughout our five-year programme we will be undertaking a strategic approach to research to build and disseminate a sound evidence base in learning development. We will enable practitioners across the sector to share in and contribute to current pedagogic understanding.

LearnHigher will also be a gateway to tried and tested resources in a broad range of learning areas. Each of our 16 partner institutions contributes research driven, peer reviewed and evaluated resources in twenty learning areas. In conjunction with the Higher Education Academy, LearnHigher will create a portal service to provide resources and materials to the whole of the sector. Staff in both support roles and/ or teaching roles will be able to use these resources in their course delivery, and in time, resources will be available for students to support their studies.

(<http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/index.htm>, accessed 8 August 2006)

Its first year plan had the following priorities (described as objectives on the website):

- Identify, quality assure and share existing materials & resources across the network
 - Establish baseline in practices / outputs
 - Develop the CETL, dissemination and portal service infrastructures
- (<http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/pages/developmentplan.htm>, accessed 8 August 2006).

More credence should be given to the set of eighteen objectives in the tender document. They are set out in appendices 2 and 3 on pages 22-25, below. Two of them (numbers 9 and 13) are not objectives for the first year.

The evaluation approach

LearnHigher is taking a distinctive approach to evaluation, which increasingly integrates evaluation with its normal work of enquiring, developing, learning and disseminating.

Rather than being an add-on, evaluation increasingly looks integral to the LearnHigher's intellectual life and purposes.

An approach to evaluation

LearnHigher is a complicated operation, involving twenty local area co-ordinators, from partner Universities, and a central operation based at Liverpool Hope University. Evaluation research needs to consider the achievements and capacity of each local operation, as well as the heft of the CETL as a whole. Two broad approaches can be envisaged. One is to fund an evaluation research team to work its way through the CETL, collecting and synthesising data. The second is to have a distributed evaluation, which becomes everyone's responsibility.

The second was preferred, largely on the grounds that involving everyone is more appropriate to a partnership operation, such as LearnHigher and that it makes good management sense for the people who have to respond to problems and opportunities to be charged with identifying them. It was also seen that this approach could build shared capacity and contribute to LearnHigher's achievements.

The LearnHigher team considered that they did not have quite as much evaluation research expertise as would be needed and recognised that there would be value in having an external evaluation research adviser. Peter Knight, one of the principals in the Open University's practice-based professional learning CETL, was appointed.

It was understood that evaluation research can be valuable and that the LearnHigher evaluation could distinctively add value because:

- It recognises that evaluation is research, in the sense that it is an enquiry into the state of play in a domain, which meshes with research-informed deliberation about future actions.
- It is formative, in that it creates feedback to help the CETL team to consider possibilities and areas for further attention.
- It is long-term, in that it runs alongside the CETL for its whole life.
- It is summative, in that annual, public reports on achievement will be produced, the first in August 2006, which is the end of the first operational year.
- It is collaborative, in two senses. First, evaluation directions, practices and indicators have been agreed over three meetings involving all LearnHigher colleagues. Secondly, the evaluation is designed to capture evaluation data that are created in good operational practices in all sites of activity. A consequence of adopting this approach is that LearnHigher colleagues are evaluating in the normal course of their work.
- It builds capacity in two ways. First by involving LearnHigher colleagues in modern, research-informed evaluation practices. Second, by sustained activities to enhance the capacity of LearnHigher for rigorous and relevant educational enquiry.
- It is externally directed.

It was agreed to have three evaluation research meetings a year involving the whole CETL. Each of the meetings to date has seen almost-full attendance. Follow-up documents have been placed on the evaluation or research meetings page http://fronter.com/learnhigher/main.phtml?content_page=%2Flearnhigher%2Fmain.phtml%3Fcs%3D61600.

Clarifying evaluation research purposes

Professor Murray Saunders, past president of the UK Evaluation Society, has an established record of evaluations related to teaching quality enhancement. He has evaluated the LTSN network (2002-05), the Scottish quality enhancement framework (2003-2006) and contributes to national and individual CETL evaluation activities.

The LearnHigher evaluation began by taking his RUFDATA template, which identifies issues that need clarification in the early stages of evaluation research, and applying it to LearnHigher's needs and activities. It was recognised that if the RUFDATA template could be applied to the LearnHigher programme, then it could contribute to the cohesion of the CETL by establishing shared understandings and a shared language.

Meetings of all partners in June and September 2005 considered RUFDATA templates developed in another CETL. Local partners drafted versions that described their thinking about evaluating their own local activities. From them emerged an agreed version of RUFDATA that described the overall LearnHigher evaluation and which was also applicable to local evaluations. It is at Appendix 1 on pages 20 and 21.

Identifying early evaluation research purposes

The RUFDATA description shows that the LearnHigher team wished to have an extensive evaluation, which is to say an evaluation that adds to thinking about learning development and its advancement, and which is sensitive to unexpected outcomes, as well as those anticipated in the team's bid to HEFCE.

However, it was clearly appreciated that the evaluation should also keep watch on LearnHigher's progress against its declared objectives. An early task was to consider indicators of achievement against these objectives. Appendix 2, pages 22 and 23, shows indicators arising from the September 2005 meeting and confirmed by the January 2006 one. Indicators for the whole CETL are expressed in terms of goals for the end of July 2006. Local partners developed their own indicators to cover areas not described by the central indicators.

It was recognised that collecting data and monitoring achievement against these indicators could be a substantial and expensive task, since the activities of sixteen partners would need to be monitored. It was also understood that local partners might see any central monitoring as intrusive, as well as insensitive to their particular aims and situations. However, discussion of project management practices in September 2005 and January 2006 led to agreement that good practices naturally involve creating data and using them to watch one's own progress against central and local targets. It was agreed, then, that each local partner would take responsibility for monitoring its own progress against targets and, as part of good project management practices, create evaluation data in the process. The central LearnHigher team would collect all of these data by the end of July each year and produce a composite for comparison against the central indicators.

Some objectives, though, need to be addressed centrally. The table at appendix 3, pages 24 and 25, shows the distribution of data collection responsibility between the central team and local partners. It was agreed at the January 2006 evaluation research meeting.

Baselining

Baselining is important for two reasons: to establish gaps in current thinking and practice that might need to be addressed; and to give a point of comparison when judging LearnHigher progress in 2007 and 2010.

Three forms of baselining were discussed at the January 2006 meeting:

- Describing the state of play in a university or college in relation to that partner's LearnHigher Learning Area.

- Describing the state of play nationally in relation to each LearnHigher Learning Area
- Describing the evidence and understandings contained in the national (and, perhaps, international) literature in relation to each LearnHigher Learning Area.

The first baseline allows Learning Area Coordinators (LACs) to describe progress in their learning area in their institution; the second allows them to describe any impact on other UK institutions; and the third allows a description of any changes in research knowledge and understandings in each project area.

Discussions of baselining showed some diversity of understandings of the CETL's core business. It was agreed that it was not 'learner development' although learner development was certainly expected to be an outcome of its work. However, agreement that its business was 'learning development' was compromised by a lack of agreement, mirrored in the educational literature, as to the meaning of 'learning development'. Although evaluation and development work are not dependent, at this stage, on shared understandings of the term, it was appreciated that LearnHigher could be more cohesive if there were greater agreement on the term. At the April 2006 evaluation research meeting it was proposed that

1. LearnHigher is a collective of people who want and, to an extent, have the means to enhance learning development practices
2. 'Learning development' is a concern that programmes of study, especially at undergraduate level, contain the opportunities and entitlements that help all students to become skilled in a set of academic practices.
3. 'Learning development' is concerned to provide opportunities and entitlements that accustom students to trying to transfer learning to fresh contexts.

Attempts to clarify the meaning of the central concept of learning development were taken further at the June 2006 operations meeting in Lincoln and sustained through on-line exchanges. Agreement had not emerged by August 2006, which leaves LearnHigher without a point of reference for use in designing and coalescing its activities.

Evaluation research plans

Sixteen local evaluation plans for the period to the end of July 2006 were produced and may be viewed at the password-protected site <http://fronter.com/learnhigher/main.phtml?cs=61600>². Evaluation reporting responsibilities are described in appendix 3.

Year 2 evaluation will continue the direction of year 1 work but variations will arise from:

- Year 1 evaluation findings and their discussion
- Opportunities that arise, including new lines of enquiry or development that stem from local or national work.
- The completion of baselining work.
- The HEFCE evaluation of the whole CETL project.

There will also be variation because the focus of evaluation should change as LearnHigher matures. Saunders argues that there are three sets of evaluation indicators; enabling (are the necessary tools, resources and expertise in place?) process (is the project doing the sorts of things that are likely to lead to the desired outcomes) and outcome (what effects is the project having or has the project had?).

While it is appropriate in the early stages of an evaluation to concentrate on enabling and process outcomes, as projects mature, attention needs to shift to outcome indicators. This is far from simple and needs to be understood as a CETL programme lifetime task. Even so, year 2 should see serious consideration of ways of identifying LearnHigher effects and of describing them convincingly. It is suggested that the January 2007 meeting might take this

² The LearnHigher public website does not have a section on evaluation and research

as its theme, beginning by examining models of the different sorts of effects that innovations typically have and considering ways of evaluating LearnHigher effects against a preferred model of innovation impact.

Research

Evaluation has been taken to be a form of research that contributes to LearnHigher's commitment to creation and enquiry in the field of learning development.

It is recognised that LearnHigher partners have a range of understanding of research processes and possible outcomes. It was therefore decided that there would be considerable value, for evaluation and wider LearnHigher purposes, in taking a systematic approach to the development of research capacity.

Although formal work to enhance research capacity has only just begun, taking second place to the need to secure a robust and participative evaluation design, progress has been made. There has been development of shared understandings of evaluation designs and practices, which have been complemented by greater understandings of some of the more common research methods. These understandings will be extended in the October evaluation research meeting.

Accompanying greater awareness of enquiry methods has been increased attention to themes and concepts that are influential in the literatures on higher education. The beginnings of enquiry interest groupings can be seen – consolidation is planned for Autumn 2006, along with early consideration of publication possibilities.

Appendix 4, pages 26 and 27, outlines a way of beginning to map the territory of learning development. It is clearly understood that LearnHigher, even over five years, will not chart all areas – some will still be labelled *hic dragones sunt*. LearnHigher can reduce the amount of uncharted territory, though.

The first column is for recording the LearnHigher studies into students' academic practices: partners' interests are converging to identify a number of academic practices to be studied. Research groups are invited to nominate their three main enquiry methods in the second column, assuring themselves that the methods will give good purchase on one or more of the LearnHigher research questions, shown in column 3. Column 4 is intended to sensitise enquirers to the possible range of explanations for the academic practices they find, which will also have implications for the design of the enquiry and selection of research methods. The final column is an invitation to note, while the research is in progress, ideas for future enquiries. The October 2006 meeting will take this schema and concentrate on firming up enquiries and methods, revising the provisional explanations, and contemplating publication and dissemination possibilities.

Greater expertise in formal research methods contributes to the evaluation work by empowering colleagues to ask better questions about the effects of their work and to envisage better ways of creating data to address them. It also contributes to the LearnHigher enterprise as a whole and promises well for its intention (objectives 12 and 13) of attaining research standing.

Fit with LearnHigher's five-year plan

It is a year 2 objective to begin the research and evaluation programme. LearnHigher is a year ahead of plan in this respect.

Baselining

Partners were encouraged to keep the baseline documents short. In the event, none was less than a page long and three were around ten pages long. Variation can be explained in terms of the use to which local area co-ordinators intended to put them, so shorter documents could be as insightful as longer documents but without the detail and the references.

As was said earlier, the baseline reports have two main functions. The first is to provide the partners and LearnHigher as a whole with a point of reference for the 2007 HEFCE two-year evaluation and for the end-of-project evaluation in 2010.

The second function is to help in the identification of gaps, leading to identification of development priorities and enquiry possibilities. As partners lay plans for their second and third years and as the Centre, as a whole, prepares to meet HEFCE calls for more detailed operational plans for year 3 onwards, this gap-and-opportunity analysis should be useful.

Incidentally, sharing these documents will help local area co-ordinators to see fresh collaborative opportunities.

Institutional baselines.

Reference was made in the baselines to many sources of information, including: email enquiries of university colleagues; specially-mounted student surveys; national Student Survey data; QAA institutional audit; deliberations of university working groups and committees; institutional strategies, policies and codes; intranet and internet sites; analyses of relevant resources; mapping of take-up of provision; descriptions of relevant provision; and internal reviews, including programme reviews.

There was relatively little by way of analysis of the student experience and where there was analysis it was not clear that it was based in recent enquiries in the university. Comments on provision were sometimes also rather generalised. An exception is the groupwork document:

The University currently has 3581 undergraduate and postgraduate modules listed in the module catalogue. Analysis of this shows that 232 (6.5%) contain an element of assessed groupwork. Of these identified modules, 75.4% assess the groupwork element with coursework, 19.8% with presentations and 14.2% are assessed solely using groupwork. 51% of assessed groupwork modules are delivered within two academic schools, Management and Informatics. A further 860 modules use groupwork in their teaching strategy. From this we can ascertain that groupwork is used in at least 30% of modules. The evidence we have of the success of the use of groupwork is anecdotal rather than empirical.

Less detailed but still useful for baselining purposes are these comments on information literacy learning:

A search of the MMU internal document database (available from the home page) revealed that MMU did not have an overall policy document relating to Info Lit ... Academic departments and LSU made no specific mention of Information Literacy, though documents existed in relation to "Study Skills", Citations, Referencing, Academic Writing, Avoiding Plagiarism and the like ... [However] a number of departments had produced WebCT modules/ tutorials and printed materials relating to Study Skills, Citations, Referencing, Academic Writing and Avoiding Plagiarism. Aspects of the learning area elements were also embedded in a number of units. Active departments included the Department of Information & Communications (my own department) and the Philosophy Department (Humanities Faculty) and assorted departments within the MMU Business School. All staff email requests and a scan of the Teaching and Learning Unit site failed to reveal any further evidence of activities.

And on time management:

Time Management is rarely taught to students at the University of Reading as an embedded part of their modules. Only one degree programme handbook out of 31 mentions it although 3 other references to time management were found on “Blackboard” and in course handouts. The Study Advisers ran workshops on this topic at the request of module convenors in Land Management and Foundation Science and there was a generic workshop early in the Autumn term for new undergraduates which was attended by 45 individuals. A study guide for organisation and time management is available on the website <http://www.rdg.ac.uk/studyskills/study%20guides/time.htm> which was accessed by 169 individuals during the year. Approximately 400 paper copies of the guide were taken from leaflet stands in the library.

It must be appreciated that establishing local baselines can be time-consuming and, whatever the long-term benefits, could seem to be a marginal activity to partners coping with capital projects and establishing a presence at the same time as working out their own pattern of working. This comment from the independent and self-directed learning area captures some of those difficulties:

There is an emphasis at Manchester on independent study underlying all learning. As Learning Development is generally expected to take place at course level, however, it has been difficult to gauge the full extent of activities aimed at developing self-directed learning ... Given the size of the institution it is difficult to maintain an overview of activities. The Teaching Research Development Network within the institution promotes sharing of good practice. In addition faculty Teaching and Learning networks organise workshops for sharing of ideas and resources. However, while these are well attended by staff who support learning it is difficult to gauge the commitment of academic staff. Evidence of student engagement with resources is limited to small scale studies of course based provision.

One or two baselines reports seemed to be complicated by too-extensive or ill-defined views of the topic area in question. The danger is that colleagues working in these areas might find themselves spread too thin to make the impact they might make if they took a narrower view of their territory.

Overall, these institutional baselines do provide a serviceable point of reference for future evaluation, spotlight gaps and opportunities and will help others in LearnHigher to see possibilities for collaboration.

And, to state the obvious, they remind us that all partners are clearly in the business of change management, a theme which is developed in the final section of this report.

National baselines

National baselines were usually much less well developed than institutional baselines because it is far, far harder to get information about practice in some 150 institutions. Although there was some use of mail lists and subject groups to ask about practice in other universities, it was more common to refer to others working in the area, including other CETLs, Higher Education Academy projects; subject centres, and the Quality Assurance Agency. UK research literature was sometimes mentioned in this section.

By and large these documents said enough, albeit in outline, about UK provision and practice to be a useful point of comparison in future evaluations. It was not clear whether any of the partners had used their analysis of national provision to identify gaps that they might try and fill.

A typical example of a national baseline is:

The national picture appears to reflect the one at Liverpool Hope University. The Higher Education Academy’s ‘Imaginative Curriculum Network’ has done a

considerable amount of work nationally to encourage HE to give greater attention to its role in developing students' creativity.

... My own mapping activity of the subject benchmarking statements looked to see where problem solving was explicitly referred to (usually in the generic skills section) and where a descriptor was given to indicate the attainment of a level of problem solving skills. Of the 72 subject statements, I found that only 7 did not mention problem solving either as a generic skill developed by students of the subject or identify a threshold or modal standard. Where subjects are directly related to professions such as Medicine and Engineering, Problem Based Learning is widely used as a teaching method and students have much opportunity to develop and practise problem solving skills. Enquiry-based learning (in which students develop amongst others enquiry skills, research skills and information retrieval skills) is also becoming more widely used in disciplines such as Veterinary Science, Architecture and Information Technology as well as many more non-vocational subjects.

A search of HEI study/student support web pages found that creative thinking and problem solving were not widely resourced though some interesting examples were found.

I regard it as typical because of the statement that national provision rather mirrors local provision; reference to HEA and QAA sources; the use of web searches. Notice, although it was not common in baselines, the mention of opportunities for further work.

Similar is this extract from the report writing area:

A survey at Reading shows that for about half of the students taking modules in which Report Writing is required, information on this topic is not included in course material. Nationally, less than half of all students have useful LDI [Learning Development Information] available on their own university web pages and information on Report writing is comparatively rare.

The resources available to students in HEIs in England are very variable. A survey of the 141 HEIs in England found that 35% (46) had Learning Development Information (LDI) (e.g. information on essay writing) accessible on their HEI website. Students are likely to find that LDI from their own HEI is more closely linked to the jargon and aims of their coursework. Universities with larger student populations were more likely to have LDI websites, however, HEFCE figures show that only 47% of students have LDI on their own HEI website.

The availability of information on Report Writing was limited to 11% of HEIs (15).

A distinctive feature of this baseline is its overt reference to 'learning development'. It would be interesting to know how the university web pages that did refer to LD defined it.

Absent from these baseline statements was any judgement of how the partner was seen nationally – as a fledgling, a pioneer in a particular area or a leader overall. And, absent because it was not asked for, is a judgement of the position of LearnHigher in the UK learning development terrain. These baseline documents may be useful resources as LearnHigher constructs a baseline statement that it can draw on when considering, in 2010, how much of a difference it has made to the UK learning development world.

Conceptual baselines

In some respects this was the most challenging baseline to do because it meant getting to grips with boundaries, essences, connections, assumptions and epistemologies.

One good approach was to summarise the literature:

A review of literature [on groupwork] suggests very limited development of new models and theories in groupwork in recent years. The main focus is on theory and models that may be out of date and there is little evidence to validate their use with modern student groups. In addition, the literature seems to limit groupwork to relatively small groups where members are assumed to be relative strangers. Recent changes in student demographics suggest that cohorts are generally larger and students form friendship groups early in the year. In some cases existing friendship groups apply to do the same course at university and arrive together. There is a lack of evidence relating to the current education climate covering such things as online and blended learning, access to materials, students who work part-time, technological changes and strategic learners who study just what they need to get through an assessment or complete a course. There has been extensive work undertaken on online collaboration, however this is focussed on the needs of distance learners rather than students working in groups. The literature contains a number of general theories that lack empirical evidence.

This neatly lays out some interesting research possibilities and offers a direction for developmental work. There is, on this analysis, territory to be staked out. The following comment on problem-solving shows quite clearly where future work should be directed, although it is not nearly as clear whether the analysis suggests any original enquiries:

It is also recognised now that problem solving is more than a series of cognitive processes directed at devising solutions to well-defined problems. The broader view recognises that we are more likely to encounter problems that are neither well-defined nor entirely problematic. Creative thinking as a problem solving tool is a popular topic in the business management and pop- psychology literature but texts looking at the concepts in the context of education are emerging. Problem solving is one of the top 10 skills required by organisations in their employees. Higher Education is recognising this though it is largely only being addressed by the more vocational disciplines using PBL methodologies. Recent research concludes that it is possible to enhance creativity in students by teaching them to seek new ideas, recognise novel approaches and assess the effectiveness of novel solutions. What is growing in recognition is that creativity can not be developed by students through a bolt-on lesson once or twice a week, but is a general principle that should be a part of the pedagogy underpinning the whole curriculum.

A rather nice analysis in the oral communication document focused on four key concepts or, perhaps more accurately, disputed areas:

- Embedding opportunity to develop oral communication skills in the curriculum.
- Reliability of teacher assessment of oral presentations
- Encouraging and improving student assessment of peers' oral presentations
- Making the oral communication aspects of the curriculum more inclusive

In some cases this section turned into musings on the development and enquiry agenda for the coming years:

The main elements of our thinking here are:

- The need to identify missing mathematical skills, competencies and understanding that are needed to underpin students' learning, build their confidence and get them to a position from which their regular taught modules with mathematical content become accessible ...
- The need to promote awareness of the existing (excellent) cal resources beyond the confines of the maths support centre setting so that they become embedded within students' and staff members' normal activities and thinking.
- The need to understand more fully, in a conceptual and practical way, why it is that students find the mathematical components challenging and worrying ... we are developing, and reporting on, a taxonomy of errors that we hope will give a useful framework for interpreting a student's errors and difficulties, possibly across a range of topics, in terms of a mapping to his/her underlying problem(s) and as a

predictive tool for estimating what the student may not know or find difficult. It is possible that this taxonomy will be able to inform curriculum design and teaching methodology.

- The need to understand more fully what makes a particular topic more difficult than another. In the highly-structured area of elementary mathematics we have been able to identify assumed and tested skills in a fairly explicit way and identify a possible difficulty measure (the robustness and utility of this measure is unknown at present). Again such concepts may be able to inform curriculum design and teaching methodology.

These analyses should help partners to identify issues, assumptions and ideas they have in common – or about which they trenchantly disagree. They also help to disclose enquiries that might be supported in the medium term.

The most significant shortcoming of this analysis is that there is no LearnHigher account of the concepts, assumptions, research and epistemologies underpinning learning development research and practices. Not only will such a view be necessary as LearnHigher develops its research presence but producing it will also be a way in which the partners can re-view their own statements and beliefs and, in doing so, bring their views of learning development into greater alignment.

This clarification process would also bring to the fore topics about which there appear to be a variety of assumptions made by LACs. Topics that might be addressed include:

1. Relationship with equal opportunities, diversity and accessibility research and development.
2. Rejection of the deficit model of learners, especially of those learners who benefit most from learning development provision.
3. Are there student entitlements and, if so, what are they?
4. Mainstreaming learning development. What is the unit of curriculum action? The course (module or unit) or the programme (award)? Different answers have radically different implications for action.
5. The integrity of the learning development territory. A single territory or a set of baronies?
6. Change processes (with respect to curriculum and pedagogy)
7. Model of students. Eager consumers? Inertia-bound bodies? Individualistic people coping with too many demands³?

³ Nathan, R. (2005) *The Freshman Year: What a professor learned by becoming a student*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Partner evaluation reports

Central⁴ evaluation criteria were agreed with the Centre Director and Manager between December 2005 and January 2006 and are shown in appendix 2, referenced against the 18 objectives contained in the LearnHigher tender. Appendix 5, on page 28 shows the objectives that fall primarily to partners and offers an opinion, based on the reports available at the time of writing, on the degree to which they have been attained, using the central evaluation criteria as the point of reference.

Empty cells indicate that the evidence to hand did not allow me to make a judgement. Empty columns indicate that no report had been received from the local area co-ordinator in question.

Some objectives seem to be somewhat problematic, including:

6. Building capacity across the network. This was often – and reasonably at this stage – interpreted as building the LAC's own capacity. Responses do invite thought on ways of sharing expertise amongst LACs and their associated teaching fellows, assistants and networks.

7. Establishing a reward mechanism. It is not surprising that this is proving difficult when the funds allocated to each partner are not sufficient to fund its basic activities, let alone support any system of rewards. In some cases the 'reward' objective is being interpreted as rewarding the LAC for work over and above the job description, which is understandable. LearnHigher might wish to re-visit the issue of how it, as a centre, can approach the business of rewarding engagements in teaching and learning excellence, which was one of the basic intentions of the HEFCE CETL scheme.

9. Further institutional embedding strategies. This is only a pointer to a year 2 priority. It might be useful, when considering how to take this forward, to share knowledge of the ways in which different partners have already insinuated LearnHigher into their institution's systems.

12. Building a research community. There is a high level of commitment to this objective. A concern is that there are few hints that there is anything collective – shared amongst the sixteen partners – about it. Earlier comments about LearnHigher coherence apply.

13. Becoming an international centre of excellence. This is a year 3 priority. However, groundwork needs to be done soon, especially as there were few indications that current research and development are being shaped by knowledge of evidence, conceptualisation and developments outside the UK.

14 & 15. Dissemination. Patchy evidence of raising LearnHigher's profile outside individual universities.

On the basis of the available evidence, there is a great deal to celebrate at the end of the first full year.

⁴ That is to say those being applied in this report. Local area co-ordinators will apply more particular criteria to judging their own performance in their institutional and specialist contexts.

The central operation

Operational co-ordination

Co-ordinating LearnHigher is a complicated business. I have noticed the extraordinary level of attendance at meetings and commitment in general and conclude that co-ordination is working. On the other hand, evaluation and baseline reports that were due at the end of July 2006 were not received from all nineteen areas, which means that they are missed from this report⁵. Some data that it had been hoped the central operation at Liverpool Hope University would produce were not available at the time of writing this report.

Appendix 6, page 30, reports my judgement, on the basis of the evidence I have, of the central operation's performance in terms of agreed criteria against objectives in the tender document that we agreed to be central responsibilities. Lack of data at some points should not cast serious doubt on the operation's effectiveness.

Electronic co-ordination

Fundamental to the co-ordination work are two electronic resources:

- A JISC mail list, which can be very busy
- A web site, which is based on the Fronter service. It has a public side, which under-represents the amount of LearnHigher activity, and a password protected area.

It is not clear when it is best to use the password-protected site for conversations and when to use the JISC list. It is arguable that email is used more than is comfortable for some partners and that the web site is under-used for this purpose.

LearnHigher faces the endemic problem of keeping the web site up-to-date and comprehensive. This is all the more complicated when twenty projects are all pursuing agendas that may not have given priority to maintaining the LearnHigher web site.

Intellectual steer

A major challenge is to stop LearnHigher from becoming an arrangement to fund a score of local projects. Such projects might be worthwhile on their own terms but there are half-a-dozen missed opportunities if localism prevails:

1. *Conceptual incoherence*: in the absence of shared understandings of key concepts research and development activities operate on diverse assumptions and therefore lack cumulative impact
2. *Incommensurability of research outcomes*: individual projects produce data that cannot be cumulated to allow a bigger story to be told about learning development
3. *Indigestibility*: if learning development is practically defined as the sum of the outputs of twenty projects, then there is scant chance of academic staff in general making sense of the area if the Centre declines to do so.
4. *Loss of quality enhancement*: less experienced partners do not raise their game as a result of developing plans with other partners.
5. *Missed opportunities to represent the area nationally and internationally*: wider impact depends on bringing local activities together to make strong claims about the area (the sum of the twenty specialties) in general (based on conclusions drawn from a set of related studies).
6. *Waste*: caused by duplication of enquiries and activities.

By default it falls to the Director and Manager to provide a steer around these pitfalls. There has been action here: the Director has been pressing towards a shared account of learning development; there are shared discussions of research intentions and methods; the evaluation process involves clarifying and sharing; the web site, LearnHigher meetings and

⁵ The date for completion of this report, 15 August, was common knowledge since January and mentioned twice in the June 2006 evaluation report to the LearnHigher steering committee.

conferences all add to a sense of shared purpose. However, it is debatable whether there is sufficient agreement on:

- A useful⁶ description of learning development
- Alignment of research plans

Some progress has been made with describing learning development, not least by agreeing that LearnHigher's focus is on learning development and not on learner development, academic literacies or academic practices. However, there remains ambiguity, seen in the summer 2006 discussions about what learning development isn't, what it is and its relationship to competing accounts of similar territory.

It is fair to say that other CETLs are as vague, or even vaguer, about their intellectual foundations – what, exactly, is meant by 'work-based learning', 'enquiry-led learning', 'active learning', 'interdisciplinary learning' or 'professional learning'? The point is that ambiguity that might be tolerable, albeit at a price, in a single-institution centre with few aims beyond affecting that institution's practice, is punitive when there are twenty projects spread across sixteen universities. Complexity turns uncertainties into handicaps.

Planning

Although there is a great deal of planning by partners and no shortage of ideas about the directions that LearnHigher should take, it falls to the project director and manager to think about strategy for LearnHigher as a whole. I have observed discussions with partners about future directions and have agreed with LearnHigher a detailed evaluation and research plan for the coming year.

However, the current Year 2 plan (<http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/pages/developmentplan.htm>, accessed 7 August 2006) now needs attention. It says that the priorities are:

- Identify gaps and develop new resources
- Begin research and evaluation programme
- Work with other CETLs for mutual benefit

Notably absent in this plan is attention to the intellectual leadership of LearnHigher. There is also scope for up-dating the plan in the light of year 1 achievements.

Outward-facing

A great deal of outward-facing work is done by the individual partners as they raise LearnHigher's profile in their universities and through their regular networks of contacts in other universities, associations and groups. The existence of a strong logo helps to tag these contacts with LearnHigher.

As a whole, it positioned itself well with its successful launch event of 4 April and by means of contacts with the Higher Education Academy and other national bodies.

However, there comes a point at which impact will be limited by ambiguities. The name 'LearnHigher' doesn't say what it is *for* and a sub-title on the lines of 'developing learning development' would add little because, to echo an earlier section, there is deep ambiguity about the operational meaning of 'learning development'.

The research programme has an aim of encouraging partners to align their enquiries and publish their conclusions but it will probably be three years before papers appear in the education journals. LearnHigher may wish to consider how it can establish its distinctive contribution to higher education in the more immediate future.

⁶ A useful definition makes it clear what is not included (avoids academic megalomania) and describes precisely what is included (avoids empty rhetoric). Useful definitions can be operationalised.

The effects of LearnHigher

Local effects

Evidence in appendix 5 implies considerable local effects. In terms of the three-fold classification of evaluation indicators⁷,

- All reporting projects do well as regards the *enabling* indicators – the wherewithal is in place for local project success
- The *processes* necessary for success seem to be generally in place. This is particularly so where LAC reports describe ways in which they have secured increased influence in their universities.
- *Outcomes* data do not tend to be robust. There is a great deal of evidence of activity but little by way of good evidence of effects. This is exactly what should be expected at the end of the first year.

In a year's time, the evaluation report should comment on robust evidence from each local area co-ordinator on the effects of their developments and enquiries. Creating this archive of evidence will be raised at the 20 October 2006 research and evaluation meeting and addressed in depth at the 11 January 2007 meeting.

National effects

Defining the territory of learning development

The importance of this issue has been recognised and discussions have begun.

Representing learning development interests

While local partners participate in many networks, especially those directly related to their own themes and areas, LearnHigher's power to represent the interests of learning development are circumscribed by uncertainties about how to describe the territory.

There is no doubt that learning development interests are being represented but this work may not be publicly recognised as learning development work but taken as work on information literacy, oral communication or personal development planning. At the moment it is not clear that LearnHigher is able to position itself as *the* centre of expertise and authority in learning development. It is able to position itself as a portal to a gallimaufry of projects that could be huddled under the umbrella of learning development but they could equally be seen as free-standing enquiries.

This is a distinctive challenge for LearnHigher; managing a federal system with a fair balance between the diverse and local, on the one hand, and forming consensus brokered by the Director and Manager, on the other; between letting twenty flowers bloom and making a flowerbed.

Advancing knowledge of learning development

The successful bid that led to the creation of LearnHigher said that a number of projects would be supported, out of which would come knowledge of possibilities, practices and potential. This has happened and the energy of LearnHigher's partners is a great testimony to the wisdom of this strategy.

Whether this advances knowledge of learning development as an area is moot. The intention of the evaluation and research plan is to take a programmatic approach to enquiries, such that distinctive local enquiries converge on shared questions (which have been identified and agreed), draw from a set of shared methods (work has begun to raise colleagues' awareness of methods of enquiry) and refer to a set of shared concepts and themes (work has begun on

⁷ Enabling (are the necessary tools, resources and expertise in place?) process (is the project doing the sorts of things that are likely to lead to the desired outcomes) and outcome (what effects is the project having or has the project had?)

this too). The hope is that this will allow small-scale enquiries to have greater-than-expected heft because any one enquiry can be located with others in the research programme.

Threats to this approach come from LearnHigher's federal structure and the fissiparous tendencies that arise when partners spot opportunities and needs and respond quickly to them. The two days a year spent discussing research matters is necessary but it may not be sufficient for LearnHigher to be in a position to advance knowledge of learning development.

The value of LearnHigher, one year on

Unlike some CETLs, LearnHigher works; more than many, it is prodigiously active, as the baseline documents and year 1 evaluations show⁸.

It is good value for money because distributing relatively modest sums of recurrent funding to sixteen universities levers commitment of time, resources and reputation to the LearnHigher venture. There is no evidence that money allocated to any project partner has been wasted and there is significant evidence that it has stimulated disproportionate levels of excitement and activity. At the end of year 2 it should be possible to begin a commentary on the effects of those activities.

It is too soon to judge whether the capital spend is good value for money.

Change management

LearnHigher sponsors change in learning development thinking, knowledge and practice. Particularly in the participating universities⁹, the project is a change agent and local area co-ordinators are in the business of change management.

They may not all be sufficiently prepared for this role. While a sketch of change management thinking can be given in a research & evaluation meeting, or can be had by reading introductory works¹⁰, more intensive preparation may be needed. LearnHigher may wish to consider commissioning the Higher Education Academy¹¹ or the Leadership Foundation to provide customised support for this work.

⁸ On the other hand, we should not forget those areas for which no reports were available.

⁹ It is, of course, in the business of sponsoring change on a national scale. However, at this stage, attention will be focused on achieving specific changes in particular universities.

¹⁰ For example *Change thinking, change practices*, at http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/embedded_object.asp?id=18740&filename=CHA005

¹¹ A version of its 'Change academy' programme might be appropriate.

Appendix 1. The RUFDATA description of LearnHigher evaluation research

What are our Reasons and Purposes for evaluation?
To ensure that we make appropriate use of allocated funds (capital and recurrent spend).
To help keep us on track against objectives and schedule, especially regarding dissemination.
To appraise the effects of LearnHigher activities on student learning and institutions generally.
To identify directions for further development.
To help us make sense of what partners and LearnHigher as a whole are doing.
To inform small-scale inquiries and other research activities.
What will be the Uses of our evaluation?
Symbolic: showing that we manage responsibly.
Regulative: keeping LearnHigher on track
Informative: identifying effective practices that can be celebrated and disseminated.
Cautionary: identifying areas of potential or actual difficulty; refining priorities.
Illuminative: helping Learn Higher to make sense of its work and environment and to shape its plans accordingly.
Supportive: providing data and interpretations that will lead to publications.
Cohesive: to keep us together.
What will be the Foci for our evaluations?
Monitoring of activities against plans and success indicators, as shown in the tender document and as revised from time to time.
Investigation of effects of activities on participants (teachers, students and others directly involved) through telephone and e-interviews; questionnaires; focus groups.
Establishing the extent of involvement with national and international groups with a stake in these areas.
Reflecting on data and other evidence in order to create understandings of effective actions to support good student learning practices that can be disseminated in research and practice outlets.
What will be our Data and Evidence for our evaluations?
Annual reports and other public documents
User views <i>via</i> telephone and e-interviews; questionnaires; focus group; Delphi studies.
Effects on users <i>via</i> performance data (where valid): telephone and e-interviews; questionnaires; focus group; Delphi studies.
Number of briefing papers and other resources + reviews where available.
Number of projects funded and completed.
Awareness amongst national and international groups with a stake in these areas. (Telephone and e-interviews).
Developmental and educational capacity of partners and their host institutions.
Number of contacts and collaborators within the university.
Number of conferences and refereed publications.
Comparisons over time with baseline accounts.

Who will be the Audience for our evaluations?
LearnHigher colleagues
Local L&T development committee, officials and colleagues
HEFCE and HEA, as contribution to overall CETL evaluation
External evaluator
What will be the Timing for our evaluations?
Continuous at the local level, with twice-yearly reports to LearnHigher project as a whole.
Annual public LearnHigher report
Contributions to HEFCE's scheduled evaluation
Who should be the Agency conducting the evaluations?
Local LearnHigher partners with various reporting lines additional to reports to central LearnHigher team
Central LearnHigher team
External evaluator

Appendix 2 LearnHigher objectives and indicators of achievement

Objective	Central evaluation indicators as at 31/07/06
<i>Building mechanisms for sharing excellent materials and resources</i>	
1. Working with the HE Academy to create a LearnHigher portal (Connect) service that can be embedded in all HEI sites	<p>a. Local Area Co-ordinators (LACs) have agreed to put the free-text search function on their university site. Some will have completed by 31/7.</p> <p>b. Where appropriate, a thin-slice of Connect will be embedded in LearnHigher area pages.</p>
2. Building a technical framework and support to enable the distributed sharing of materials and resources to be effectively and reliably handled.	<p>As above, <i>plus</i></p> <p>a. Fronter in use.</p> <p>b. Central strategy developed for hosting these functions if it proves to be difficult top do locally.</p>
3. Sharing existing good materials, identifying or developing new learner development materials and resources for learners and staff.	<p>This will predominantly be a local activity.</p> <p>Central indicator is whether monitoring shows that the local activity is being done.</p>
4. Developing a more robust quality assurance process for materials and resources.	<p>a. Monitoring of Fronter activity, which enables electronic quality assurance.</p> <p>b. Completion of agreed quality assurance strategy for materials and resources.</p>
<i>Building capacity in the LearnHigher Network</i>	
5. Strengthening the current network of practitioners.	Evaluate May and June data on Fronter usage.
6. Building practitioner capacity across the LearnHigher network in terms of broadening expertise and staff skills.	<p>a. Levels of participation in project, evaluation and research meetings (e.g. Fronter induction)..</p> <p>b. Completion rates for shared tasks and evaluation activity (e.g. recent production of local evaluation activities).</p> <p>c. Level of CETL director and manager activity in visiting, contacting and networking the LACs.</p> <p>d. Evidence of project management effectiveness.</p> <p>e. Levels of engagement with 4 April launch.</p>
<i>Creating Institutional impact</i>	
7. Establishing a reward mechanism in each HEI	Data from central monitoring that suitable local arrangements are being made.
8. Raising the profile of LearnHigher work across the HEI partners for greater institutional impact.	
9. Having opportunity to create further institutional embedding strategies.	
<i>Evaluation</i>	

Objective	Central evaluation indicators as at 31/07/06
10. Creating baseline data and develop effective monitoring strategies for use of the resources.	Evidence that baseline data exist. [Effective monitoring strategies to establish patterns of resource use = year 2.]
11. Enhancing current evaluation work.	a. Central organisation of evaluation workshops and activities. b. Enquire of LACs about any differences in local evaluation thinking and practices as a result of LearnHigher.
<i>Research</i>	
12. Building a research community and portfolio of evidence-based research that helps develop our understanding of effective strategies for supporting learners into new areas of higher education study.	For year 1, evidence of a. An outline research plan for years 1-5. b. Beginnings of research clusters c. Enquiries in progress or in planning.
13. Becoming an internationally recognised centre of excellence for learner development.	Year 3 onwards. International conference Year 5.
<i>Dissemination</i>	
14. Providing an opportunity for all HEIs to access materials and resources.	Evidence of existence and use of: a. Fronter b. Full-text search
15. Engaging others in LearnHigher sub-networks that are creating excellent materials, undertaking research or involved in embedding in their own institutions.	a. Existence of local advisory groups. b. Evidence of local events and other dissemination activities. c. Evidence of materials and resource production.
<i>Programme management</i>	
16. Building an administrative structure to support the LearnHigher activity.	Survey LACs to establish the degree to which they see such a structure in place, to establish satisfaction and suggestions for enhancement.
17. Managing a centrally coordinated approach to operationalise and develop the programme.	As with objectives 2, 3 and 6.
18. Branding, marketing and launching the LearnHigher CETL	Evaluation of 4 April launch: a. Delegate evaluation forms b. Press and on-line coverage.

Appendix 3. Central and local valuation research responsibilities

Objective	Distribution of responsibility for providing evaluation research data, 2005-06
<i>Building mechanisms for sharing excellent materials and resources</i>	
1. Working with the HE Academy to create a LearnHigher portal (Connect) service that can be embedded in all HEI sites	[NB Objective affected by change in HEA policy] Central team
2. Building a technical framework and support to enable the distributed sharing of materials and resources to be effectively and reliably handled.	Central team
3. Sharing existing good materials, identifying or developing new learner development materials and resources for learners and staff.	This will predominantly be a local activity. Central indicator is whether monitoring shows that the local activity is being done.
4. Developing a more robust quality assurance process for materials and resources.	Central team to organise, local teams to provide evidence of operation of the policy
<i>Building capacity in the LearnHigher Network</i>	
5. Strengthening the current network of practitioners.	Central team, plus local evidence, where available
6. Building practitioner capacity across the LearnHigher network in terms of broadening expertise and staff skills.	Central team and external evaluator, plus local evidence, where available
<i>Creating Institutional impact</i>	
7. Establishing a reward mechanism in each HEI	
8. Raising the profile of LearnHigher work across the HEI partners for greater institutional impact.	Local teams
9. Having opportunity to create further institutional embedding strategies.	Local teams, year 2 onwards
<i>Evaluation</i>	
10. Creating baseline data and develop effective monitoring strategies for use of the resources.	Local teams
11. Enhancing current evaluation work.	Local teams. Central team provides data on LearnHigher evaluation research workshops and activities.
<i>Research</i>	
12. Building a research community and portfolio of evidence-based research that helps develop our understanding of effective strategies for supporting learners into new areas of higher education study.	Local teams provide evidence of enquiries in progress or in planning. Central team provides data on LearnHigher evaluation research workshops and activities.
13. Becoming an internationally recognised centre of excellence for learner development.	Although mainly year 3 onwards Central team and external evaluator provide data on enhancement of LearnHigher evaluation research capacity.

Objective	Distribution of responsibility for providing evaluation research data, 2005-06
<i>Dissemination</i>	
14. Providing an opportunity for all HEIs to access LearnHigher materials and resources.	Local teams
15. Engaging others in LearnHigher sub-networks that are creating excellent materials, undertaking research or involved in embedding in their own institutions.	Local teams
<i>Programme management</i>	
16. Building an administrative structure to support the LearnHigher activity.	Central team
17. Managing a centrally coordinated approach to operationalise and develop the programme.	Central team
18. Branding, marketing and launching the LearnHigher CETL	Central team

Appendix 4. Enquiries in the territory of learning development

Academic practices for investigation	Enquiry methods (It's useful to show them here so that colleagues who want help with a method know who else is trying it.) ¹²	Common questions, in addition to enquiry-specific ones ¹³	Provisional explanations (You should design your specific enquiries to clarify which explanations are the most valid)	Looking ahead: tentative ideas for further enquiry or action
1.	Method a Method b Method c	What is happening (description of current student practice in the marker area)?	Broadly, these might include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Student learning histories ii. Students' wider cultural capital – assumptions and beliefs about learning, higher education that do come from schooling. iii. Students' lack of social capital – networks and other sources of advice. iv. Intellectual shortfalls. v. Competing demands on student time – hedonism and paid work, for instance vi. Curriculum design – the planned curriculum is defective vii. Curriculum practices – the enacted curriculum is defective 	Each provisional explanation has different implications for remedial action. At some point, LH might wish to spend time carefully examining alternative learning development strategies.
2.	Method a Method b Method c	Why is it happening? What would we like to be happening, based on our values, research literature, practice observed elsewhere, etc.?		
3.	Method a Method b Method c	How might we reduce the 'is-should' gap?		

¹² I suggest each enquiry identifies its two or three major enquiry methods.

¹³ Any or all of these questions might be asked in any enquiry.

Appendix 5: LearnHigher objectives evaluated by area reports at the end of the first year (July 2006)

Objective	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
<i>Building mechanisms for sharing excellent materials and resources</i>																				
3. Sharing existing good materials, identifying or developing new learner development materials and resources for learners and staff.	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	
<i>Building capacity in the LearnHigher network</i>																				
6. Building practitioner capacity <u>across the LearnHigher network</u> ¹⁴ in terms of broadening expertise and staff skills.	?	√	X	?		√	√	√	√	?	X	?			X	?	√	√	√	
<i>Creating institutional impact</i>																				
7. Establishing a reward mechanism in each HEI	?	√	X	X		?		X	?	?	X	X			√	?	X	?	X	
8. Raising the profile of LearnHigher work across the HEI partners for greater institutional impact.	√	√	√	√		√		√	√	√	√	√		√	√	?	√	√	√	
9. Having opportunity to create further institutional embedding strategies (Year 2 onwards).										√								?		
<i>Evaluation</i>																				
10. Creating baseline data and develop effective monitoring strategies for use of the resources.	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√			√	√	√	√	√	
<i>Research</i>																				
12. Building a research community and portfolio of evidence-based research that helps develop our understanding of effective strategies for supporting learners into new areas of higher education study.	?	?	√	√		√		√	√	√	√	√		√	?	√	√	√	√	
13. Becoming an internationally recognised centre of excellence for learner development (Year 3 onwards)														?				?		
<i>Dissemination</i>																				
14 & 15. Raise awareness of LearnHigher through branding and marketing, as well as use of materials ¹⁵	?	√	X	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	?	√	√	

Numbers refer to the twenty areas. √ indicates good evidence of meeting central evaluation criteria (appendix 2, above). ? indicates some evidence. X indicates lack of success. A blank cell only signifies that I did not have evidence to make judgements – the evidence may exist.

¹⁴ Emphasis added

¹⁵ For this year, this has been interpreted as 'raise awareness in your HEI or beyond'.

Appendix 6: LearnHigher central management objectives evaluated at the end of the first year (July 2006)

Objective	
<i>Building mechanisms for sharing excellent materials and resources</i>	
1. Working with the HE Academy to create a LearnHigher portal (Connect) service that can be embedded in all HEI sites	Higher Education Academy policy yet to be crystallised and operationalised.
2. Building a technical framework and support to enable the distributed sharing of materials and resources to be effectively and reliably handled.	a. Fronter in use.
3. Sharing existing good materials, identifying or developing new learner development materials and resources for learners and staff.	This is predominantly a local activity (see appendix 5). Central team supports it.
4. Developing a more robust quality assurance process for materials and resources.	Quality assurance strategy for materials and resources under development.
<i>Building capacity in the LearnHigher Network</i>	
5. Strengthening the current network of practitioners.	a. attendance at meetings and events very high b. data on May and June Fronter usage awaited as further evidence.
6. Building practitioner capacity across the LearnHigher network in terms of broadening expertise and staff skills.	a. Mail list and website show discussion and learning amongst partners. b. LearnHigher director and manager visit, contact and network with LACs, spreading ideas and expertise c. High levels of engagement at LearnHigher business and research & evaluation meetings: follow up activities completed by most LACs fully and on time.
<i>Evaluation</i>	
11. Enhancing current evaluation work.	a. Central organisation of evaluation workshops and activities has led to this report and associated activities. b. Enquiries will be made in 2006/07 of LACs to see whether their thinking about evaluation has changed as a result of LearnHigher.
<i>Research</i>	
12. Building a research community and portfolio of evidence-based research that helps develop our understanding of effective strategies for supporting learners into new areas of higher education study.	Progress in each of the three target areas: a. An outline research plan for years 1-5 exists in the form of a phased set of research questions and schedule of meetings to October 2007. b. Local area co-ordinators now have enquiries in progress or in planning. c. However, little sign of the emergence of research clusters'

Objective	
<i>Programme management</i>	
16. Building an administrative structure to support the LearnHigher activity.	Done
17. Managing a centrally coordinated approach to operationalise and develop the programme.	Done, subject to earlier remarks about the fissiparous tendencies inherent in a multi-partner project.
18. Branding, marketing and launching the LearnHigher CETL	4 April launch reckoned to be a success. Independent judgement not possible without: a. Delegate evaluation forms b. Summary of press and on-line coverage.