Rationale for research focus

The advent of new and innovative technologies in the past decade has had enormous implications for higher education (Altbach et al, 2009), with significant increases in distance and blended learning provision (Cavanagh, 2013). Web-enabled networked technologies and systems (have) an impact on post-compulsory education's core objective of teaching and learning (Boys & Ford, 2008), giving the student 'more flexibility to focus on areas they have difficulty with […] and to take learning when and where it is most convenient'. The university is still investigating how to provide what the new student customer wants (Boys & Ford 2008), and at the same time not to compromise what the university has always stood for in the past (Lynch, 2008). Many staff may continue to feel alienated by the pressure to adapt to new ways of teaching (Zellweger Moser, 2007), and consequently do not engage with the drive to become technologically literate. Some e-learning practice may not always result in enhanced learning experiences, as 'the actual effects of new technologies in recent decades have not always measured up to the 'sweeping expectations' that have characterised their arrival on the scene' (Guri-Rosenblit, 2009, in Altbach et al, 2009). This all contributes to a murky and unclear picture of how universities are managing to progress into the digital age.

Drawing on technology adoption models, interpretivist critical realism (looking at grounded theory critical realism through Oliver, 2012) as a paradigm, and using 'Integrative Logic' (Mason, 2006), this research seeks to contribute to this dialogue, and has attempted to find some way of prioritising a hierarchy of influencing factors, which may in turn help to formulate policy and professional development for learning and teaching practice. A literature review and a pilot study involving key stakeholders (students and staff) were carried out, the pilot study to provide raw data to contrast with literature review findings. In order to construct meaningful data, an analysis approach consisting of the compilation, correlation and categorisation of themes and sub-themes, recognised for frequency, significance and level of problem or benefit was used. These were then allocated a score in five contextual rankings forming a proposed new hierarchical system, the Problems and Benefits Hierarchy, these rankings were proposed to be Real, Imagined, Intermittent, Persistent and Legacy.

(NB this section has been added after the assessment process at the request of assessors, in order to make more clear to online readers the research rationale of the project. The section is a copy of that included in the submitted 'Critical Commentary', which is available in full from the Downloads page.)

Areas of Investigation

The project will attempt to establish promoting and hindering factors on the uptake of technology enhanced learning in higher education, and note any relevance to metropolitan universities in particular.

A proposed Problems and Benefits Hierarchy will be used to analyse the most common themes appearing from a literature review concerning technology amongst academics, and technology enhanced learning which predominantly uses online technologies, noting themes and whether they are problems, benefits, or both. Along with this core placing a system of context factors will be used: real, imagined, intermittent, persistent and legacy, to attempt to place themes into the hierarchy effectively.

Stakeholder research (for primary data) will be developed from themes in the literature, to contrast with the initial literature findings, and to see any differences between staff and students in relation to how they perceive problems and benefits of TEL, and what might be more important to them in connection with those. The project will be limited to a top level analysis of most common themes.

The diagram below is a visual interpretation of topic areas and how they might relate to each other within

research groups 1 and 2 (staff), with an overview evaluation with research group 3, the students.

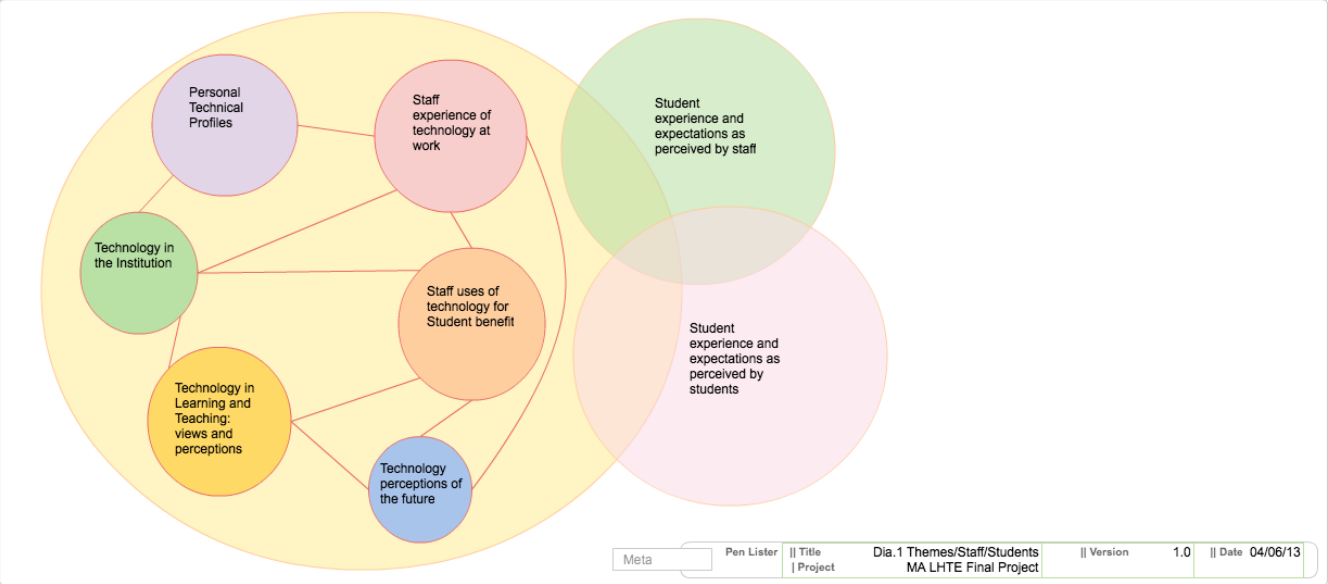

Fig 1. showing Theme Relationship Areas

Further Details

For further details of respondent groups and more on how the project worked, please also refer to The Aims, Focus and Methods page.