Responding to learners' needs and preferences:

Resources for managers

Aims

- To allow managers to explore what actions their institutions can take in response to learners' needs and preferences
- To encourage managers to think about how learners' changing needs might impact on institutional practice and provision

Set-up

Print out the activity sheet(s) that follow.

You may like to reformat these to allow room for individuals to respond, or you could just use them as starting points for discussion in pairs or small groups. If the latter, make sure there are materials available to support discussion, e.g. post-it notes, paper, pens, laptops

Also have materials available for feeding back into a plenary discussion, if appropriate, e.g. flip-chart, pens, laptops, overhead projector

1. Exploring the institutional implications of what learners have said about learning with technology

Here are some messages from learners about how they experience learning with technology. Consider:
1. What actions could my institution take in response to the messages?
2. How might current institutional policy and practice have to change?

What some learners have said	Message for institutions	1. actions	2. changes to policy/practice
I had to leave early last week because my child minder was off …so I went onto the message board and asked for information about what I'd missed. People were kind enough to log on … and they let me know what groups I was in and what the presentation was about. It was difficult enough to attend sessions on campus, what with me working full time, so I took some time off to work on my assignment. Then I found I could only use the computer for 2 hours a day - what use is that?	Learners pursue their studies at all hours of night and day, and from diverse locations including home, college, library, workplace, community centre. Most now fit their learning around part-time work or other commitments		
If we are required to be networked for a computer workshop, for example, there generally aren't places you can plug in a laptop with assistive technology in. So, then you are reliant on whatever assistive technologies are available on the network generally This was during the first year – trying to find a way of working that was good for me – the organising of it, and using folders, colour-coding and using icons for the folders. I can take it (laptop) where I like. I can bring it to university as well as take it home, so I don't have to rely on the university's computers which can be a headache because you can't get hold of one.	Learners expect to be able to personalise institutional technologies and to use personal technologies in the institutional environment. This is especially true of disabled learners, who may be excluded if they cannot use personal tools.		

Probably the announcements and the course documents which are on there. At College and school we used to carry round planners, so we had to keep on getting them out of our bags, having a look when our lessons were, whereas here you can just check it the night before, just quickly log on when you're on-line, and that's why I'd also link in MSN Messenger.	Learners expect consistency across modules with respect to the use of the VLE and other technologies e.g. lecture notes and podcasts; most see the VLE as administrative rather than educational technology		
… even the professor doesn't even know how to use Blackboard, so he puts everything in the same place, because this is the only thing he knows how to do' Because [the VLE]'s our main on-line learning site associated with the course that I'm on. [Our tutor] records each lesson and on to the website so that we can back-track it. We've got an on-line forum there so we can ask questions. We have French members that have signed up to the forum so they will even correct what we've written and it's just where we get most of our learning from, most of our resources from.	Learners are finding it difficult to accommodate the variety of approaches to e-learning. Some staff make minimal or no use of technology, while others integrate it whole-heartedly into their courses.		
there is a definite gap between what we need and what we are given, where we have to find out how to use the technology for ourselves, which is for most of us a case of trial and error. Online learning has been through trial and error Only some of the newer software that has come out which I'm not familiar with using. If I come to a point when I just can't find out a way to use it I'll just leave it and won't bother with it. I just don't go back to it after that.	Even after induction, learners are often unclear about what technologies they will be using for learning and why. An institution cannot assume that new learners can use technology effectively for academic purposes.		

I just don't want books to be on the computer, I don't like that idea at all. Everything else, films and things like that, OK, but books, no, it creeps me out. It is very useful to have one's own laptop for work and social purposes but it can also be very distracting I would advise [new students] to not get too one dimensional in their study habits and only use IT but use other forms of learning as well.	Not all students are enthusiastic users of ICT for learning, even if they have the relevant access and skills.		
well firstly if I want to look anything up… I will usually Google it... Then I would fire up MSN… Finally [the VLE]' [The internet] is a world of information. You don't have to go anywhere, it is all on one database You can Google it and you've got what you need in a second.' and they're saying use books, but books cost money so the internet is the main thing that we end up using...	The Internet is the first port of call for information: sites such as google and wikipedia are referred to before academically approved resources. However, many if not most learners struggle to distinguish academically credible information online.		
Yes, I use the discussion boards for one of the English modules because that's where we have to post assignments, on the discussion board. You have to talk about these pictures, about how they relate to a poem and then post your response on the discussion board. I really hate using Forums… it's really awkward, because you have to constantly refresh the page. By the time you've typed in the text that you want to say, someone else has typed in exactly the same thing… and then you have to try and argue points saying: "I wrote it first!"... We have a facebook group from a course… I think it works a lot better than [the VLE] which can be difficult to find things on sometimes.	Learners do not seem to make extensive use of institutionally provided discussion facilities except where participation forms part of course assessment. Some learners are using social technologies to discuss their work (see below).		

Especially Facebook… I keep in touch with friends who are studying Law at other universities and we have been able to compare notes sometimes. [We] set up our own Facebook group to provide support to each other, share resources and organize social activities Well Facebook and MySpace, I'll be honest with you, I don't use them for learning whatsoever, I just use them for fun. They're just means of chatting to friends… about total rubbish that's irrelevant to anybody.	Many students make extensive use of social software such as Facebook, including for informal discussions about their learning, but rarely for formal collaboration.		
So if you're visual the computer potentially can be great if you've just got the right material, but a lot of the time there isn't that. Yes. I don't use podcasts at the moment. If it was in a podcast for me it would be a lot more helpful because I'm more of a visual person. I'd rather watch something than read. [If I had a 'dream program'] it would be a program where I could get quite tactile … as big as a whiteboard…. Like the Nintendo wii. Because it is tactile and you are interacting with the program, it's good.	Some learners, especially younger learners, prefer to engage with sound, images, video, and animation as well as text.		
Awaiting final choice of quotes	When working online, learners of all ages show low time on individual tasks, short bursts of attention, multi-tasking between different applications and parts of the screen, rather than trying to digest large volumes of information.		

Awaiting final choice of quotes	Even in contexts or courses where ICT is widely used, learners still require support to use ICT effectively for learning		
Awaiting final choice of quotes	Individual characteristics and motivation to learn varies hugely between learners and appears to have a real influence on the technological strategies used. There is wide variation in ICT use and relevant experience.		
Awaiting final choice of quotes	Equity of access to computer equipment and technologies is an issue for some learners.		
Awaiting final choice of quotes	Learners appreciate the value of 'just in time' learning and deskside coaching.		
Awaiting final choice of quotes	Prospective learners require prior access to technologies and support to prepare them for academic life.		