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HELF Research Report: Roles, remits and structures

May 2024

The Heads of e-Learning Forum (HeLF) conducted a survey of its members to gather insights on the roles, remits, and structures of digital education support teams at higher education institutions. The survey received 52 responses and covered topics such as institutional demographics, the backgrounds of heads of e-learning, the composition and responsibilities of digital education teams, and the organizational structures supporting digital education.



This document presents a summary of the findings. A full report is available on request to HeLF members.

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HeLF Committee, HeLF members.

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Summary of findings

About the Head of e-learning

- Heads of e-learning members reported a range of job titles, with the majority (48%) being "Head of". Most had extensive experience in digital education, with 63% having 16+ years in the field.
- The majority of respondents are on professional services contracts (88%).
- Salaries ranged from £31,000-£40,000 to over £100,000, with the majority (44%) earning £61,000-£70,000. Higher salaries tended to correlate with managing larger teams.
- In most cases (60%), respondents are 3 levels of management from the Vice-Chancellor/President, with 44% of respondents reporting to a Director.

About the team and its place in the institution

- The most common team names included "Digital Education" and "Digital Learning". Team remits covered a wide range of areas, with the most common responsibilities being TEL end-user support and pedagogic advice.
- The most common roles within digital education teams were learning/educational technologists, technical administrators, digital production specialists and learning designers. Fewer teams had learning analytics specialists or technical developers.
- 65% of respondents anticipated changes to their team's roles and responsibilities in the next 3-5 years.
- Team sizes varied, with 25% having 11-15 staff. Larger teams tended to be found at larger institutions with more academic staff and higher student FTE.
- The majority of institutions (56%) reported a centralized support structure for digital education, while 34% had a central team with satellite teams.
- In terms of location within the institution, the majority of teams (46%) are located in a Learning and Teaching/Educational Development unit. The next most common areas are Library (19%), IT (15%) and Academic/Student Services (10%).

Satisfaction and benchmarking

- Most respondents are satisfied with the understanding of their role, the location within the organisational structure and visibility within the organisation. The main areas of dissatisfaction included finances/budget (56% somewhat dissatisfied), resourcing (35%) and workload (39%).
- The most useful areas for benchmarking were reported to be remit (92%), roles (75%), and team size (75%).

There are many similarities between institutions, but also many outliers in terms of team size, roles and responsibilities. This survey captures a certain level of evidence regarding the way institutions are prioritising, organising and resourcing digital learning in UK higher education.

Recommendations and Actionable Insights:

- **Addressing resource and workload challenges:** Many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with finances, resourcing, and workload. Supporting organisations, institutions, and individual teams should explore ways to secure adequate funding, staffing, and support for digital education teams to enable them to effectively fulfil their responsibilities and manage workloads.
- **Planning for future skills and capabilities:** With most respondents anticipating changes to their team's roles and responsibilities in the coming years, supporting organisations, institutions and individual teams should proactively identify the skills and capabilities needed to support evolving digital education needs. This could inform professional development, recruitment, and organisational planning.
- **Leveraging benchmarking insights:** The report identifies key areas of interest for benchmarking, such as team remits, roles, and sizes. Institutions and individual teams can use these insights to compare their own arrangements with sector norms and identify opportunities for improvement or alignment. Collaborating with peer institutions and participating in communities like HeLF can support ongoing benchmarking and sharing of good practices.