

Sharing Best Practice on New Ways of Learning

3rd September 2008

Bradford College played host to the eTechnologies Supporting Foundation Degrees conference on 10th and 11th July, 2008. Held by the Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing, including Food Manufacturing and related Industrial Chemistry (AEMFC), Sector of WYLLN, the conference aimed to share and promote the best practice findings from Bradford College's SPaCE-FD Project.

Working in partnership with local employers, SPaCE-FD developed a work-based foundation degree in Metallurgy and Materials. The use of eTechnologies like Moodle, a virtual learning environment, and eLGG, a web based product for mentoring, supported the distance learning framework of the degree. "There are many similarities between our objectives at AEMFC and the SPaCE-FD project. The conference provided us with a valuable insight into which elements worked best and how eTechnologies can be used effectively to enhance distance learning," said Paul Denton, AEMFC sector officer. Delegates, who included students, employees and tutors from the SPaCE-FD project, members of WYLLN, local employers and other work-based students, were treated to a variety of presentations, workshops and films that illustrated the project's achievements.

Adam Mannis and Hugh Tollyfield, who launched the conference, gave presentations on key findings, which were incorporated into a UK Centre for Materials Education (UKCME) case study publication. They concluded that the approach widened participation and promoted progression into higher education. It also led to career development and resulted in enhanced skills within the workplace. It was acknowledged that for the project to be a success, however, several components must be in place. Active and sustained employer engagement is deemed vital and must be achieved through college staff taking the time to visit, listen to and learn from employers in order to reach an understanding of the needs of learners and of industry. Other key elements include an appropriate level of experience and expertise is necessary to devise a course with industry relevant content. Also, several modes of delivery, for example eTechnology, are needed to provide the required flexibility for work-based learning.

"The conference was extremely useful and enlightening for AEMFC. Best practice procedures, successfully used by Bradford College, will be fed back and the learnings used for developing the planned foundation courses in casting, applied science, powders and packaging," said Richard Brown, Programme Manager within Bradford College's Engineering Department.

