

WEBBED FOOT

Two new databases in learning and teaching

SNAS online database: resources to support new academic staff

The Supporting New Academic Staff (SNAS) Online Database stems from a project initiated by the Higher Education Academy. The majority of UK institutions now offer PGCert (HE) courses to support new academic staff. The SNAS project arose from an expressed need amongst Course Tutors and Academy Subject Centres to share information about subject specific resources to support both new academic staff and PGCert (HE) Course Providers.

The SNAS database provides “short and snappy resource lists” of discipline-specific and generic resources to provide a starting point for new academic staff: all resources listed have been chosen and annotated by Academy Subject Centres and Course Tutors. The database can be searched by subject, learning and teaching topic or by author and/or title of a resource. In addition to the database proper, a number of case studies on how the SNAS database could be used by Course Providers and Academy Subject Centres have also been made available to users.

The SNAS project meetings themselves, held over the last few years, have provided much lively debate and discussion on the ways of blending generic and disciplinary approaches to supporting new staff. The ideas coming from these discussions, and background reading used by the project group are available for perusal. A self-audit questionnaire has also been included, providing an opportunity for Course Providers to reflect on the balance between ‘generic’ and ‘the discipline’ in their own work.

The SNAS database, attendant material and further information on the SNAS project can be found at:

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/snas/>

Connect

Connect is the first phase of the Learning and Teaching Portal project, jointly funded by the Higher Education Academy and the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). The aim of the Learning and Teaching Portal is “to provide a web-based gateway to information on many aspects of learning and teaching”.

So how does Connect differ from any of the other learning and teaching portals that are around at the moment? Connect allows users to search a number of different databases, namely:

- **A funding opportunities database** that allows users to search for information on funding for projects and services related to learning and teaching.
- **An organisations database** which lists UK agencies involved in the quality enhancement of learning and teaching in further and higher education.
- **A resources search facility** which allows users to search for learning and teaching support materials and resources based on website URLs.
- **A projects database** which lists details of more than 1000 learning and teaching related national projects.

The material held in these databases includes both subject-specific and generic information and resources, aiming to provide a comprehensive coverage across the HE and FE sector. It is this wide coverage and access to project and organisational information that makes Connect worth a visit by academics, support staff and senior managers in the sector. In addition, the Connect website is host to a discussion forum, a facility which aims to provide a platform from which members can host online events and join discussion groups. Access to the forum requires free registration with Connect.

Access to the above databases and forum, further information on the Learning and Teaching Portal project and information on how to embed any of Connect's discrete services into your own portal or web site can be found at: <http://www.connect.ac.uk/>

Tactile graphics for blind students: new database for the visually impaired

The National Centre for Tactile Diagrams (NCTD) can help to provide full access to educational materials for blind students and to improve universities' expertise in supporting blind and visually impaired students.

Blind or visually impaired students miss out on much information presented in graphical form – textbooks, lecturers' overheads, maps, photographs, graphs and charts, etc.

The NCTD is a non-profit organisation, sited by HEFCE at the University of Hertfordshire in 1999 and is headed by Dr Sarah Morley Wilkins and Dave Gunn both highly regarded in the field. With current Strand Two HEFCE/DELNI funding, the NCTD designs and produces tactile diagrams, maps and pictures and provides a variety of training and consultancy services to improve university expertise in supporting blind and visually impaired students. With other funding, the NCTD provides similar services for blind individuals, businesses and organisations.

Tactile graphics are a translation of visual graphical information into a ‘feelable’ format, which blind people explore

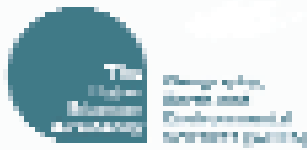
with their fingers. Most images need considerable re-design to be effective in tactile form, and the NCTD has a skilled team of staff who specialise in this process.

To help HEIs and Subject Centres understand how tactile graphics can be used effectively, the NCTD have compiled and sent out a Handbook Pack to every university disability office in England and Northern Ireland and to every Subject Centre.

This Handbook Pack includes sample tactile diagrams, guidelines for students on how to use these diagrams, guidelines for HE staff on how to select images for tactile production and how to support the student, and a selection of case studies. It also explains why graphics cannot always be produced in a tactile format.

If you need further assistance, the NCTD can help you choose which graphics to produce in tactile version and undertake the production. They also run a range of courses and presentations for HE staff. For further details, contact:

National Centre for Tactile Diagrams, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, Herts, AL10 9AB.
Tel: 01707 286 348 Fax: 01707 285 059
Email: info@nctd.org.uk Web: www.nctd.org.uk



The GEES Subject Centre Resource Database

call for case studies on interesting teaching, learning and assessment practices in higher education

The GEES Subject Centre is currently funding the expansion of our collection of case studies of interesting teaching, learning and assessment practices in Higher Education. All case studies are catalogued as records in the GEES Subject Centre Resource Database. At present, the Resource Database contains records cataloguing over 200 case study summaries, mainly from the UK, North America and Australasia.

This new call for case studies aims:

- to include further examples from the Earth and Environmental Sciences
- to build on the collection of case studies in Geography
- to expand on current examples of practice

How can you contribute?

If you have an example of a teaching, learning or assessment practice which may be of interest to staff in other Geography, Earth and Environmental Science departments, then please consider submitting it as a case study to the GEES Subject Centre.



Further information on submission and examples of case studies can be found on the GEES Subject Centre website at:
<http://www.tellus.ac.uk/contribute.html>