

Embedding and Communicating BCE

The challenge

Awareness and Education

Business and Community Engagement activities within institutions rely on the support of central services and policies such as HR, finance or IT to ensure the services the institution offers to external partners are efficient and sustainable.

However, it is common that such central services may not be designed with engagement activities in mind but focus primarily on other core priorities such as learning and teaching or research.

As a result, the interaction between departments and functions supporting BCE may not be very efficient or effective, and BCE practitioners often seek ad hoc solutions on the periphery or even outside of institutional systems and processes to achieve their goals.

There may be examples where boundaries between the institution and BCE activities are deliberate, for example to distinguish separate commercial entities resulting from research exploitation.

However, effective sharing and management of data is no less important, for example on accounting for time and resources, reporting to management and funders, or the management of relationships with partners and customers.

Such activities also contribute significantly to the institution’s ability to meet strategic goals.

Key challenges then exist in how central services effectively support BCE activities – are they even aware of the nature of these activities, their importance to institutional strategy, or the implications on the services provided?

A Jisc study on publicly-funded infrastructure, services and intellectual property¹ found that barriers were more preceptive than actual.

Supporting external engagement by IT services can be a bit of a challenge not least because universities are very different in the way they support IT generally.

Anna Matthews, UCISA
Assistant Executive Secretary

It’s often the individual initiative that brings those particular links with community and business, but as they develop beyond a certain point then the institution wants to become more involved ... there are issues about the sharing data, disclosure of data, and understanding of what’s going on and how best the university can use its resources to develop the institution’s relationship and at the same time encourage the development of individual relationships.

Alun Tlusty-Sheen,
Director of Research and Enterprise Services, University of Westminster

Expected benefits

- Enhanced knowledge and capability in Jisc and the wider Jisc community to support institutions and respond to their evolving needs and, indirectly, those of their partners and clients.
- Enhanced understanding and awareness of BCE activities, benefits and opportunities and how Jisc supports and enables them across the range of Jisc audiences.

1 <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/themes/bce/pubfundinfra.pdf>

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Addressing the challenge

The role of the BCE Awareness and Education project was to raise awareness, amongst the wider Jisc community, of the importance of BCE to their institutions, the potential impact on their own roles of increasingly strategic approaches towards external engagement and the support and resources emerging from the Jisc BCE programme itself.

During its lifetime, the project established key audience stakeholder relationships, particularly with Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA), Association of University Administrators (AUA), Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) and JANET.

Although many of the audience groups and their representatives already had well established links with Jisc at various levels, the BCE programme was typically viewed as a new area for which the direct relevance to existing activity had yet to be established.

The engagement with this project proved to be very timely in all cases.



Inevitably, an uptake in BCE activities within a university will have an impact on an IT department. This could range from responding to ad hoc requests from academics who need to set up shared working spaces with commercial partners, to implementing CRM (customer relationship management) systems for departments who want to formalise records of their relationship with external contacts. If companies or the wider community need to log in to resources or use IT facilities if they are visiting the campus, three obvious areas for consideration are licensing, wireless provision and network security.

Anna Mathews, UCISA Assistant Executive Secretary, writing in UCISA Update

Project-led events

A number of successful events were organised to engage with one of the most significant Jisc audience groups – those providing IT support to HE and FE institutions.

Extending IT Support for External Engagement in London drew an audience of around 20 IT Directors, Managers and senior staff and acted as a model for future events.

In addition to general information about the BCE Programme and national agenda the workshop was a combination of presentation and discussion from BCE Practitioners and case studies of integration of IT services support and institutional BCE activity.

Presentations were delivered by staff from a range of different institutions and highlighted several key

topics. These included CRM implementation, strategy communication to support services and the role of emergent online tools for external collaboration.

A series of audience-specific events were then planned with focus on the following groups:

- Library and Information service staff
- Administrative and management staff
- Jisc Advance services and RSCs
- IT services staff

The audience grouping allowed for information to be presented in a common context, along with relevant examples and project highlights. These events brought together people across 75 UK HE and FE institutions.



The approach – 3 strands

The awareness programme was formed from three strands, to which all the project activities contributed.

These helped to give structure so activities could be better mapped to the aims and objectives. The strands are also reflected in the project outputs.

1 Supporting BCE activity in your institution

- What BCE means for me and my institution?
- BCE as an opportunity – not a threat
- Supporting community focused practice
- Supporting research focused practice
- Supporting business focused practice

2 Jisc support for BCE activity

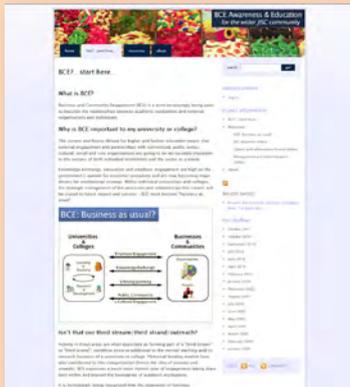
- What does Jisc offer via:
 - Jisc Advance services and wider services
 - Development and programme-level output
- Improving BCE integration and visibility across Jisc Advance services and programmes

3 Integrating BCE support across your institution

- Staff and skills development for BCE
- Collaboration for BCE
- Cross-institutional support for BCE

The blog

The project blog acted as the main source of project information, event resources, media assets, the quick primer and links to the wider BCE programme.



All the project outputs, including videos and the magazine, can be accessed through the project blog, which had nearly 2000 recorded page views by the end of the project.

<http://bceawareness.jiscinvolve.org>

The videos

The project team produced a number of video interviews of early adopters and representatives of Jisc Advance services talking about their experiences in supporting BCE.

The videos proved to be effective in disseminating information when direct face to face engagement wasn't possible. The impact was increased by making them downloadable and embeddable for the audience to use and repurpose.



The brochure

Business as Usual? Supporting and enabling external engagement

The project team produced a rich print media resource that showcases the success of strategic approaches to BCE.

The publication provided a quick and easy way for audience groups that weren't able to engage directly with the project to share the benefits.

The resource follows a programme of interviews and evaluative consultations in higher and further education. A magazine type style was used to tell stories of the endeavours of different institutions in implementing support for external engagement.



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Benefits and impact

The issues of resource licensing, access for external partners and the extension of federated access management systems for BCE activities were identified as key areas for Jisc support by the Library and Information Management audience(s).

For the IT service audience, key issues focused around access to networks (including wireless) and PCs, security and identity management as well as system support and implementation. Emphasis here was on discovering best practice and policy guidance as the skill (and often the will) was often already in place.

A desire for early engagement to avoid the creation of short-term ad hoc systems and enable resources to be deployed more effectively was repeatedly expressed.

It therefore emerged that the best way for institutions to engage their IT services in their BCE agenda might be to take a more strategic approach and value the expertise available, rather than simply “extending the service”.

UCISA in particular has taken steps to reflect the work of this project and the wider BCE programme in communications to its membership, and successful project-led workshop sessions at the UCISA Staff Development Conferences have contributed to the achievement of this objective.

As well as taking an active role in the development, promotion of and participation at, relevant project events, an important outcome was the inclusion of BCE issues in the 2011 “UCISA Top Concerns Survey” in recognition of the potential impact and opportunities they present to academic IT services.



[The project] has raised the profile of [BCE] and sent a message that this is for us... and not just those people in business development... It has made us aware that it's much broader than knowledge exchange and knowledge transfer but actually engagement with the community which is not necessarily business community.

Mark Toole Director of Information Services, University of Stirling

Key Findings

1. Access to online resources and management of identity

The recent switch by many to the UK Access Management Federation has made access to online resources easier for members of the institution, however extending that access to external partners is not as straightforward.

2. Engagement with strategy

Institutions that run successful BCE activities are typically also better at clearly identifying, communicating and embedding BCE within their institutional and organisational strategies.

3. Use of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems and Processes

Often seen as a potential panacea for struggling engagement activities, the implementation of any CRM process represents a big change to working practice in most institutions.

Understanding the specific requirements for an individual institution is essential but overcoming the negative perceptions amongst staff and focusing on the benefits to both individuals and the institution is also vital for a successful implementation.

4. Network access and deployment and support of IT resources

The availability of high-quality, fast and reliable IT resources is a major advantage for the UK academic sector. However extending the use of these facilities to include external partners, visitors and organisations involves crossing boundaries, which are traditionally given a wide berth by many.

A combination of revised policy, open practice and improvements in the communication of strategy is now helping to resolve the difficulties that can arise here.

5. CPD, reward and recognition

If supporting and enabling BCE activity to take place isn't always identified as part of the regular role for an individual, then allocating time and resource to developing their capacity to do it can be difficult!