Abstract

Practicing teachers have a repertoire of tried-and-tested teaching activities and pedagogical ideas, usually gathered over several years’ experience. Often these activities and ideas are known only to the teacher and the participating students. While some universities hold events where teachers can talk to their peers about their novel classroom activities, these are timetabled and are often perceived as only for those members of staff with a particular interest in pedagogy. GUSTTO is an online system that allows for all members of staff to share teaching ideas and to browse those contributed by their peers - at a time and location convenient to them. The online searchable database of ‘Teaching Tips’ constitutes an institutional repository of teaching practices, fosters the development of a community of practice, and provides a platform for teachers to showcase ideas. The use of social media features (likes, comments) enhances the interface, making it engaging and interactive.

Keywords: learning communities; best practice; learning technology.

1 INTRODUCTION

There is a wealth of good pedagogy being practiced in universities. Teachers are continually trying out new ideas to improve teaching and learning, using novel technologies, creating innovative exercises or assessments, devising new interactive classroom activities, leading unusual field trips, etc. Many of these ideas are never publicised: they are simply developed over time by practicing teachers who have experimented with various activities and found some of them useful. Activities may be shared with colleagues informally, and some may be selected for presentation at local institutional teaching and learning conferences or in local newsletters. However, few are conducted according to the rigorous research-focused approach required by peer-reviewed journals in education, and so few are published widely. In most cases only the instructor and the participating students are aware of these activities; knowledge of them does not extend beyond the class in which they are taught. Many lecturers are not interested in undertaking the effort required to write formal articles for publication, are unaware of how their activities do (or do not) relate to current educational literature, and yet, if given a chance, are glad to tell others about what they do in their classes that is ‘different’ from the usual model of teaching – especially if it was their own idea.

There is therefore a vast institutional resource of teaching ideas that are seldom shared. Not only does this mean there is potentially much duplication of effort and that novel ideas are not being showcased, but also (and more importantly) individual experiences about what works (and does not work) are not being communicated between people trying out similar activities.

In addition, staff are increasingly required to provide succinct and concrete examples of their innovative practices when they need to demonstrate their commitment to quality teaching (for example, in promotion applications) – this requires an element of reflection on their own teaching practice that many staff may not typically engage in.

This paper describes the design, development and evaluation of a system that attempts to address these issues. GUSTTO (Glasgow University’S Teaching Tips Online) has three aims:

- to provide a platform for teachers to showcase their ideas;
- to create a university-wide repository of good practice in the form of a searchable online database, enabling members of our teaching community to showcase their teaching practices, and to explore, discuss, and make use of those of others;
- to encourage pedagogical discussion between teachers, thus building a collegial academic community based on the sharing of teaching ideas.
In GUSTTO, instructors represent their teaching practice in the form of a ‘teaching tip’ (called here a ‘TT’) created using a structured template – an idea based on the concept of ‘bundles’ used for representing good practice in Computing Science teaching (Fincher (1999); Falconer et al., (2011)).

GUSTTO provides a university-wide resource that encourages both the sharing and subsequent use of examples of good practice. By including interaction concepts taken from social media and gaming, the outcome is a highly interactive and engaging system that supports the spread of good ideas across the university. As a result, we are building an active in-house teaching community at our research-intensive Russell Group university, and making it easier for teaching staff (especially new staff) to share, discover and implement new ideas.

2 RELATED WORK

The theoretical basis for the GUSTTO project relates to the concept of ‘communities of practice’: “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger (1998)). University educational provision fulfils the three criteria for a Community of Practice – a domain (teaching in Higher Education), a community (interaction between academic members of staff), and practice (the activity of teaching). Such communities encourage organisational growth through the sharing of knowledge, intentionally or incidentally.

While ‘contributing student pedagogies’ (Collis & Moonen (2001); Hamer, (2006)) focus on approaches used for encouraging students to contribute to the learning of others, they are also relevant here, where the learners are academic staff (rather than students) who create materials to support the learning of their peers. The success of such approaches is demonstrated in, for example, popular systems like PeerWise (Denny (2008)), peer-assisted learning (Topping & Ely (1998)), and student-created learning materials (Etlinger (2013)). GUSTTO extends this model to include the ongoing learning of university teachers.

In bringing these two ideas of community and learning from peers together, we also consider the concept of ‘organisational proximity’ (Marrocu et al. (2013)): people are more likely to engage in trying out or discussing someone else’s idea if that person is known to be working within the same organisational context - it is much easier to phone or email someone for advice if they are clearly part of the same organisational culture. While this approach might be seen as supporting the ‘not invented here’ syndrome (Burchartha & Fosfurib (2014)), the GUSTTO model does not prevent academics using examples from elsewhere; it simply makes it easier for them to be shared and discussed internally.

Many other examples of sharing good practice exist. Our own institution showcases examples of good teaching practices on a publicly accessible web page, and an online discussion forum (Yammer) for Learning and Teaching technology supports discussion between members. Edinburgh University’s publically available web pages include a static ‘repository of case studies’ written by staff members based on a template; there is no search facility for these pages. A similar repository at Queen Mary University of London provides access to several case studies, some of which are accompanied by a video of the member of staff talking about their teaching methods: these are lengthy, and written in a style similar to the type of reports required for assessment for qualifications like a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice. More typically, though, most institutions’ resources on good pedagogy are created by members of an internal service unit (e.g. Institute for Teaching and Learning Innovation, University of Queensland; Learning and Teaching Commons, UC San Diego). In all these cases, however, there is no structured ongoing way for any academic in the institution to share or search for tried-and-tested practical and useful ideas at a time that suits them.

GUSTTO is based on the concept of ‘bundles’ (Fincher (1999); Falconer et al. (2011)), which is in turn based on the notion of ‘patterns’ in architecture (Alexander et al. (1977)) – structured natural language representations that ‘describe an effective solution to a recurrent problem’ (Finlay (2012)). These structured templates can be used to describe an educational activity which has been devised in an attempt to solve a particular educational/pedagogical/classroom/teaching problem. The prior work on ‘bundles’ (as part of a the CETL ALiC “Active Learning in Computing” project) resulted in a ‘Book of Bundles’ (Finlay (2012)), which contains 25 examples of successful teaching practices gathered and refined by Finlay and Fincher through a series of workshops with Computing Science academic staff.

The basic template form of a bundle is based on (a) stating a problem; (b) describing what the author did to address this problem; and (c) indicating contexts where the practice works best, or does not work well. While Finlay and Fincher collected a set of useful bundles for teaching within Computing
Science, their focus was on the process of creation rather than the use of the bundles, knowing that the reflective process of writing of a bundle is as important to its creators as its use by others. Informal conversation with Fincher revealed that once the bundles were collected, they were unsure what to do with them to make them easily accessible. Their participants were from a range of different higher education organisations and the bundle-writing workshops were part of a time-limited project.

Laurillard’s ‘Learning Designer’ system (http://learningdesigner.org/) has some similarities to the GUSTTO ideal. It allows users to submit ‘learning designs’ according to a specified pattern with some clearly specified parameters. These lesson designs are in the form of instructions for students, rather than suggestions for teachers, and are primarily in the form of specific teaching resources. Users may browse (but not search) for designs by topic or by pedagogy. Designs can be reviewed by other users.

In creating their ‘Teaching Practices Inventory’, Weiman & Gilbert (2014) focused on the usefulness of a collection of teaching practices, and, in particular, the use of this inventory for the purposes of comparison. They focused on STEM courses, distributed a survey to 175 instructors from five mathematics and science departments, and analysed the survey responses. The survey comprised primarily of specific quantitative questions, for example ‘What is the average number of times, per class, that you show demonstrations, simulations or video clips?’

In the humanities, HumBox (Millard et al. (2013)) is an online ‘learning resource repository’, where educators UK-wide can share both materials and ideas. Spanning eleven different institutions, it focuses on the collection and sharing of teaching materials, although Millard et al.’s research shows that users also valued the sense of community that the system created. For the sciences, the Europe-wide SCIENTIX project (http://www.scientix.eu) provides access to learning resources, which can be searched for by topic, as well as by age range and language. While a registered user can submit their own resources, most of those in the repository have been created as part of specific school projects, and many resources are targeted towards school (rather than university) education.

3 AIMS

GUSTTO shares the same general aim of these systems in enabling the sharing of good practice teaching ideas. What makes it different from these publicly available repositories is the commitment to the further aim of building a university-wide active and collaborative teaching community. The GUSTTO project thus both extends the work of Finlay and Fincher (by extending its scope outside of Computing Science) and narrows it (by focusing on building a community of scholars within one organisation).

GUSTTO can be distinguished from other systems is by its three (arguably contentious) principles:

- TTs are descriptions of actual practice. They are not proposals for possible classroom activities, summaries of findings from the literature, the results of research studies, or theoretical expositions – they describe what people actually do. This keeps the contributions focused, and ensures that TTs can be of practical use to those who access them. There is no requirement for the TTs to be supported by pedagogical research (although this is not excluded); if it is what an instructor actually does, we want to know about it!

- There is no gate-keeper; that is, there is no one person (or team) with pedagogical expertise charged with determining whether an instructor’s TT can be showcased in the system or not – contributions are unmoderated. We do not want instructors to be reluctant to post their TTs for fear of being told that their practice is somehow not ‘good enough’ – if they currently use a practice in their class and it works for them, then being told that it is deficient in some way will not be useful, and is likely to be discouraging. In addition, if GUSTTO is to be an institutional repository of our university-wide teaching practices, then it ought to be inclusive: if this is what actually happens at the university, then it should be showcased. Contributions should always be welcomed, in particular since Finlay (2012) found that the activity of writing a TT is valuable in itself as a means of self-reflection on teaching practices.

- Contributions and search access is confined to our university only. Again, our motivation is to encourage instructors to contribute their TTs without feeling that they are being judged. Knowing that their contributions will go no further than their institutional colleagues is reassuring in this regard. In addition, the in-house repository forms a good basis for developing discussion and collaboration within a community with a common institutional culture.
4 THE GUSTTO PROJECT

The project was funded for two years by the University of Glasgow Learning and Teaching Development Fund, and followed iterative design and evaluation cycles for the two most important aspects of the project: the design of the TT template, and the design of the system itself.

Designing the TT template was arguably the most important aspect of the system, since it needed to be concise and easy to complete, and allow instructors to represent their own practice. We wished it to be clear that TTs are not intended for expounding abstract educational theories, or giving suggestions, but are for describing actual practice. We started with the original ‘bundle’ template of Finlay et al. (2012), and adapted it after interviewing four academic members of staff who we asked to articulate a TT of their own using the initial template.

Since it is easier to create a TT if you have examples to look at, we gathered TTs (n=19) from academics through four college-based workshops, written on paper, using the revised template.

In parallel with collecting TTs on paper, prototypes of the online system were developed and evaluated with potential users in short iterative cycles. Once the system was in a deployable “beta” version state, we ran a further four college workshops, where participants were encouraged to create their TTs online (n=28). The 23 TTs that had been previously been collected on paper were stored in the GUSTTO database prior to these workshops, so that participants could see examples of TTs before inputting their own.

5 THE GUSTTO SYSTEM

The GUSTTO home page is shown in Fig. 1. The system supports three main user tasks:

- Browsing. Users can browse existing TTs through the home page, where they can be ordered according to recency, number of likes, number of comments, randomly, or by authors according to the number of TTs they have created.

- Searching. Quick search allows for TTs to be identified based on keywords, or author name. A more advanced search enables filtering by college, school, or category (e.g. size of class, lecture/lab/field environment, suitability for online learning etc.)

- Creating a TT. The template is provided in an online form (see Fig. 2), and the user can specify keywords and set the values of categories that support advanced search. They can also indicate whether the TT is co-authored (thus giving permission for the co-author to edit the TT).

![Figure 1: The GUSTTO home page](image)
These features are sufficient for a basic implementation of the GUSTTO concept. However, to encourage engagement, we included features similar to those used in common social media systems (the ‘social buttons’ (Gerlitz and Helmond (2013)) of likes, comments, shares and follows), and in games (the ‘gamification features’ (Paisley (2013)) of league tables, points and awards). Viewers can register that they like a TT, share a TT with a colleague, or contribute a comment. They can follow a colleague (and be informed whenever that colleague posts a TT), and elect to receive emails summarising activity (for example, being told when one of your own TTs has been commented on). Points are awarded to a user for Esteem (based on the number of views, likes, comments, shares of their own TTs, and the number of followers) and Engagement (similar points allocation, but for users’ engagement with other people and their TTs). These points do not have any formal currency outside of the system (for example, in university promotion applications), although this possibility could be explored.

![Figure 2. The GUSTTO Teaching Tip template.](image)

6 FORMATIVE EVALUATION

We sought regular input from potential (non-Computing Science) academic members of staff. Particular implementation challenges included allowing for a series of comments to be input as part of an ongoing discussion, enabling TTs to be co-authored, including web links in the body of the TT, and allowing university employees to log in with their institutional credentials, with the system extracting information on school, college and email for each new user. We enhanced the search facility to enable searching by keyword as well as by school, by author, or by category (e.g. size of class, extent of IT knowledge required). Improvements included adapting the home screen to show how many new TTs have been added since the user’s last login, and presenting a league table of authors (sorted by number of TTs). We also included a ‘What is a Teaching Tip?’ page to clarify the purpose of the system, since the idea was new to most users.
Throughout the process of evaluating the system, we also collected information on instructors’ views of the overall GUSTTO concept, which was well received:

- “I love the idea that something I do in my teaching could be communicated amongst the Glasgow University teaching community, and vice versa!”
- “The thought that a TT could be adopted by others is motivating. But even if my TT is not used by others, the idea behind this project is excellent, and I am looking forward to read (sic) everyone else’s contributions.”
- “Completing the ‘teaching tips’ questions was straightforward and made me think about the practice of teaching and how small innovations can make big differences.”

7 SUMMATIVE EVALUATION OF THE SYSTEM

7.1 Methodology

We interviewed 17 academics who had made extensive use of GUSTTO (based on system logs); all had viewed TTs, and 11 had created at least one. They spanned all colleges (four in Arts, three in Social Science, four in Science and Engineering, three in Life Sciences), and three were non-academic members of staff.

We conducted structured in-depth interviews focused on participants’ experiences with and opinions of GUSTTO, using an interview schedule designed collaboratively between members of the project team and conducted by one interviewer to ensure standardisation. There were three sections: general user access; user experience of the GUSTTO system; and user engagement with TT content and the impact of GUSTTO on teaching practice. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes, was audio recorded and transcribed, and then analysed to identify key issues, quotations and the salient themes which emerged from the whole data set (Braun & Clarke (2006)).

7.2 Overall usability

All 17 participants reported that the system was easy and straightforward to use, with the technology being so intuitive that participants “didn’t have any trouble logging in and getting started”. The interface was noted as “quite clean and simple”. Participants commented on the ease with which the template allowed users to frame TTs, both in terms of reading others’ tips and writing their own. They liked the fact that the TT content is organised in sections with clear descriptors, and above all, clear instructions on how to write them (“user friendly”).

7.3 Creating Teaching Tips

7.3.1 Process

The process of submitting a TT was considered “very straightforward” and not time-consuming. Time is an important factor in contributing a TT because staff “are very, very busy… finding little bits of time is difficult”: clear unequivocal instructions and an uncomplicated TT structure was therefore crucial. Particularly useful was being able to save a draft of the TT and review it before publishing, and the ability to co-author tips. Comments about TT creation included:

- Writing a short TT was really easy, thanks to a simple form with guiding prompts.”
- “Easy to complete, potentially very useful and I’ve recommended that others in our School enter their teaching tips.”

It was unclear to one participant whether GUSTTO was a space “to put finely crafted guidelines or… for sharing ideas, discussion… it’s either quick and dirty… or you have to sit and think about it”. The participant suggested that GUSTTO might better communicate what type of TTs would be the best to share, or make it clear that the scope is deliberately broad and flexible. Being able to view others’ TTs before creating your own was perceived to be helpful in shaping the creation of a new tip, in addition to the clear and structured template.

Despite our efforts to make the template as simple as possible, one participant felt that some of the questions were not entirely relevant, instead suggesting a “what's good, what's bad, what you'd do different” (sic) – rather than the two (optional) conditionals (“tends to work better if” and “doesn't work
unless”). It was noted that any template design needs to have “a balance between being efficient and economical” while ensuring enough detail, because “at some point in time it has to be replicated”. Including images in TTs was requested (e.g. using an image of what “a classroom set up looks like”); the existing facility for uploading images into a TT is clearly not sufficiently intuitive for regular use.

7.3.2 Motivation

The participants agreed that the most compelling reason for submitting a TT was grounded in altruism. The more experienced members of staff felt that they possessed useful, tried and tested ideas which could help others (“we do a lot of good stuff here”). They were motivated to submit a TT because they believed it was “a nice idea” and wanted to “see what other people think about it”. Submitting a TT created “a warmth of feeling that you get from helping others”, which led one participant to assert that sharing teaching advice is “quintessentially a pleasant thing to do, a nice thing to do”. Another participant agreed, saying “I found the tips being shared by other colleagues were very altruistic and in a good spirit… I thought that’s really nice”.

7.3.3 Community building

As in any altruistic act, there is often an opportunity for reciprocity. It was a generally held view among the participants that GUSTTO was a fundamentally useful tool and because of this, they wanted to support it (“it’s there to help each other so I need to do my part”). GUSTTO thus enables a collegiate and reciprocal facility (“I have an interest in developing my own teaching and the teaching of others”). Clearly, GUSTTO offers respite from an academic culture that can sometimes be competitive and in doing so, creates the opportunity for the development, or strengthening, of a teaching community. Participants who had submitted TTs believed it was important to be active in creating and maintaining this virtual community.

Adding ‘likes’ and comments to others’ TTs facilitates staff in broadening their networks and connecting with each other across the University, perhaps from subject disciplines they would not otherwise be in contact with. Participants remarked on GUSTTO being a useful and unique channel to meet colleagues involved in similar teaching and for the forming of new collaborations and new networks (e.g. “what might be useful in the future is if anyone wants to come to me and talk about it, meet people who are doing similar things”). Several participants agreed that they might contact a GUSTTO colleague to seek further clarification on certain points of their TT before implementing it themselves, although some were wary of encroaching on another staff member’s time (“putting the tip up is one thing. I wouldn’t really be wanting people to come back to me and ask more questions about it”).

7.3.4 Professional development

Some staff identified an extrinsic motivation for using GUSTTO in helping staff to provide concrete evidence of sharing teaching practices, which is useful for their professional development (e.g. in the annual Performance and Development Review, completion of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice, and for career progression). The ‘gamification’ and ‘social buttons’ aspects of the system result in virtual awards for Esteem and Engagement (in the form of ‘stars’ and ‘badges’) – while these have no counterpart in the real world, they still represent extrinsic reward for GUSTTO use.

More importantly, though, participants recognised the role of GUSTTO in professional development in encouraging practitioners to reflect on their teaching (“I was thinking more about why I was doing certain things and also trying to think about… how to articulate the benefit for the students as well, almost like trying things out for me”). Most participants admitted that being actively involved with GUSTTO had positively affected them by encouraging improvements and developments in their own teaching practice. Summarising an aspect of teaching requires an element of reflection, so staff become critical and reflective practitioners as they may question the rationale for implementing a specific teaching activity (“it’s useful for the process of… to carve out time in my day to reflect on my motivation to wanting to share practice… to think about practice”). This finding supports that of Finlay (2012), whose main focus of their use of ‘bundles’ was to encourage academics to reflect on their own practice.

7.3.5 Moderation

Having no reviewer, moderator, or other gatekeeper involved in publishing a TT means the process is straightforward and can be completed relatively quickly, with no delay between saving a TT and its publication. While the lack of a moderator was a controversial issue for some, most participants believed that it was a beneficial aspect of GUSTTO. It was an assurance that their TTs would be displayed and this in itself brought a sense of responsibility to publish only authentic and useful tips. The
idea that anyone might publish a piece that was inappropriate or irrelevant was dismissed as out of the question because contributors were self-policing in maintaining professional identity and integrity ("there has to be a level of trust among colleagues... it's a professional forum"); "contents of GUSTTO are based on people's genuine engagement with teaching"). Indeed, having a moderator was considered possibly detrimental because it "could well deter people" from using GUSTTO, as it would increase the workload ("having to write an application to put up a teaching tip is just too much bother"). Moreover, the nature of GUSTTO is based on collegiality and adding a moderator would change this to a more formal peer review system and perhaps stifle efforts to share innovative and creative teaching ideas. One interviewee did say that it might be helpful for "someone to have a quick look over it before it's submitted, just to say 'yeah, this is the type of thing or you shouldn't really put that up'... more for advice rather than a gatekeeper that stops you from submitting it". We have since encouraged our institution's Best Practice Advisor to look at each new TT, and comment on it as appropriate.

7.4 Browsing

Although there is a search facility within GUSTTO, not all participants were fully aware of it; ("[the TTs on the home page] ...feels like a long list you just have to click through"). The options provided to list home page TTs by number of likes or comments, or by authors, and to restrict the list to time periods (within the last month or week), had not been noticed. The search feature offers searching by keyword and author, and filtering by School, class size, environment (lecture/lab/tutorial etc.), online learning, and IT competency – some participants were not fully aware of this facility. Participants highlighted that different disciplines might use different vocabulary, so a glossary of common search terms might be a useful addition to the system.

7.5 Using others’ TTs

All the participants had read others’ TTs, saying how useful it had been to do this ("this is brilliant! I’ll do that tomorrow"). Surprisingly, however, the majority of participants said that they had not actually incorporated any TTs into their own practice. There were various reasons for this:

- Timing: Timing is crucial to the implementation of a TT: it is hard to adopt a TT at short notice. Participants planned to view GUSTTO when preparing their teaching for the next academic year: "for this lecture I’m planning for next semester it has been helpful... I think I will certainly look through some of the things suggested here"; "I've been... thinking about how I would plan my lectures or sessions so it's kind of like an ongoing thing... will it incorporate it as I plan (sic)". The participants also stated that they did not use GUSTTO frequently or regularly, having only logged in once or twice, and that logging on was typically in response to a reminder to do so. Once logged on, participants commonly browsed first and then began to search for specific TTs as "very often people don't know what they're looking for" when they log onto the system.

- Novelty: Some participants claimed that the nature of the submissions prevented them from adopting the TT. One participant believed that "the quality of the tips is not amazing... some of them are not particularly ground breaking or new or some of them are like two lines that you can't do very much with". This is, of course, a consequence of the principle that anyone can upload a TT that describes their current practice – this egalitarian ideal necessarily means a possible compromise in overall quality or usefulness.

- Relevance: Some of the TTs appeared to be subject discipline specific so to be able to use them, staff would necessarily have to adapt them to suit their own teaching situations. ("possibly more discipline specific than intended", "didn't seem all that relevant to me"). So, even if a TT was interesting, some participants felt that they did not "know how to operationalise" it.

Nevertheless, participants affirmed that the TTs were sufficiently comprehensive to incorporate easily into their own teaching practice ("they're all described quite well and the methods that they've used and how it's been implemented. I find that really helpful – people write exactly what they did and spell it out"; "I think it’s nice to have it really short and concise"). TTs that could be brought into the classroom easily were more likely to be used, especially if they were not "something that required much preparation". This depended on how they were described as some "were not explicit enough or... just a little bit general". GUSTTO's open access means that a plethora of diverse tips can be added to benefit a host of different teaching styles, contexts and disciplines. The implication is that "anyone can put anything on" which allows the reader to judge for themselves whether it is useful. One participant reflected that it allowed many ideas to be shared and while they may work for some, the tips may be less relevant for others ("you can just make your own call yourself").
7.6 Visibility

Being aware of GUSTTO and how to access it are essential conditions for its success. Most participants discovered the system through email or the University’s e-newsletter, or through word of mouth either during scheduled formal University meetings or informally in talking with colleagues. As a suggestion for improvement, the participants believed that GUSTTO should be made easier to find on the University’s website. It should be “made a bit more visible” and “connected with other systems in the University”. Reminding staff of GUSTTO was seen to be paramount to its success so it was suggested that wider links could be made to it on Moodle (the University’s VLE), through the University’s e-newsletter and through regular communications featuring popular or new TTs.

7.7 Reflections on GUSTTO

Overall, participants felt that GUSTTO was a valuable resource for sharing TTs and encouraging good practice, as a means to improving the quality of teaching across the University and more specifically enhancing the students’ experience by improving learning activities. They noted that GUSTTO facilitated reflective practice as staff would consider not merely how they implemented teaching activities, but also their rationale. GUSTTO was seen to be of “real value” as it can enable sharing of “new practice” which can inspire staff with confidence to experiment with different ideas and techniques (“it’s nice to see things people are doing in some unrelated department (which) might be applicable to your own students”).

8 CONCLUSIONS

Our interview participants clearly recognise the value of GUSTTO with respect to its three aims: allowing teachers to showcase their ideas, creating a repository of good practice, and the development of a learning and teaching community. In addition, we believe that GUSTTO provides further unforeseen benefits:

- It enables lecturers to engage in collegiate teaching and learning activities quickly and conveniently – at their own computer, in their own office – with no need for attending workshops, time-tabled meetings or arranging venues with colleagues. As one participant said: “it was easy… it wasn’t like trying to get time in someone’s diary or explain it in person”.

- It raises the profile of teaching and learning activities as being important to all members of staff, even those who would consider themselves more focused on research. By not confining activity to those with expertise in teaching and learning scholarship, and not requiring that TTs be supported by scholarly references, the system makes it clear that all teaching activity across the university is important and valued – regardless of who does it.

- It allows those with learning and teaching expertise to provide feedback and advice on teaching activities that may in some way be considered inappropriate or contrary to accepted good practice. The inclusion of ‘inappropriate’ TTs in GUSTTO is not a bad thing per se; if it were the case that poor practice were ever revealed in a GUSTTO TT, then at least it would be known about (having hitherto only been known to lecturer and students) and discussions with the TT creator could take place as appropriate.

- It supports comparative studies; that is, a set of TTs relating to a particular type of activity (for example, small group teaching) can be extracted and the various approaches compared. This provides an ideal opportunity for the authors of these TTs to be engaged in the preparation of a scholarly article that addresses the topic.

We are not surprised that there is has been some resistance to our three principles (no moderation, internal access only, describing actual practice) – although this resistance is far exceeded by support for the system. Colleagues with learning and teaching expertise have expressed concern about the lack of moderation and there being no requirement for TTs to refer to the scholarly literature; some members of staff with outward-facing roles would like GUSTTO to be used to showcase our teaching achievements externally. We have, however, stayed firm to these principles, since abandoning them will naturally affect the success of our primary aim of building an active and engaged institutional learning and teaching community.

The continued success of the system within our institution depends on two things: an institutional champion who will actively promote it, and IT support for development. We would also be interested to explore the potential for the model to be transferred to other institutions.

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