Teaching in linked lecture theatres

The purpose of this sheet is to provide some hints and tips for teaching in linked lecture theatres.

Information in this sheet is based on feedback from students who were taught in linked lecture theatres in 2006/07, observations of teaching sessions in linked lecture theatres and available good practice guides in the sector.

1. Familiarise yourself with the technology

Sounds obvious, but it is worth spending some time familiarising yourself with the technology before your first session. Although you may be teaching in a lecture theatre you know well, the extra technology to link the rooms will probably be new to you. To give students in the second lecture theatre as good an experience as possible, you will need to make use of the extra capabilities available to you.

2. Involve both sets of students

Despite what we might sometimes think, students really would rather be in the same lecture theatre as their lecturer! Students commonly describe their experience in the linked lecture theatre as ‘distracting’ and ‘isolating’ but with some forethought and planning students can be engaged and made to feel involved. Interactivity is the key.

By far the best way to support interactivity is to have a member of staff who is actively engaged in the teaching session in the linked lecture theatre. This does not have to be an academic member of staff, a post-graduate or post-doc who knows the subject area and has been briefed on the teaching sessions would work very well. A supporting member of staff can be used to:

- Ensure that any questions from the linked student group are answered
- Assist students to engage in participative exercises and feeding back the results to the main theatre, e.g. pair discussion, class survey and so on.

3. Practicalities

Don’t overlook the basic practicalities, they are common sense, but can be easily forgotten when the focus shifts to the technology and once term starts and you’re in the throes of teaching.

Allow more time to cover material; the period at the beginning of the lecture is likely to be much more disruptive for those in the linked room with late comers drifting in (usually after they have tried to find space in the main lecture theatre).
Quick tip sheet

Practicalities
- Handouts – ensure that there is an adequate supply of handouts in the linked theatre
- In rooms with a camera link, face the front and stay in camera shot as much as you can
- Whiteboards can not be seen by students in the second lecture theatre, so the visualisers should be used instead, or, where appropriate, include material in handouts
- Record your lectures and make them available within Blackboard
- Avoid making important announcements at the beginning of the lecture when students in the linked theatre may not be settled, or ensure they are repeated at the end or provided in another format.

Technical
- Arrange a hands-on, one-to-one tutorial in the lecture theatre you will be teaching in (see contacts below).

Interactivity
- Use your supporting staff member to feed back an answer or input from the linked lecture theatre
- Use your supporting staff member to run a parallel activity in the linked theatre
- Can you use the division to your advantage, pitting one set of students against the other? Getting each group to consider different sides of an argument (though bear in mind that there are likely to be significantly fewer students in the second lecture theatre)
- Consider switching rooms for part of the lecture – this won’t work for the delivery of materials using PowerPoint, but could be incredibly useful for encouraging interaction with the students.

Contacts

For technical assistance and one-to-one tutorials contact Steve Gough in ITS
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For further advice on teaching in linked lecture theatres contact Julia Phelps in CDoTL
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