Strand 3

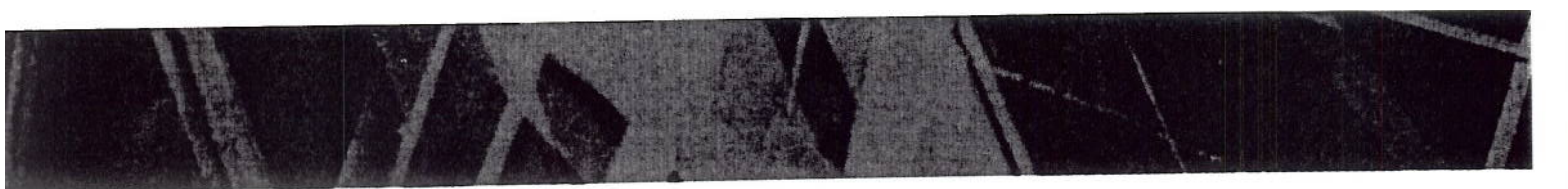# Networked Learning For Professional Development

Introduction

•The papers in Strand 3 look at the range of opportunities Information and Communication Technologies provide for continuing professional development. The papers suggest that "professional development" can be viewed from at least two perspectives: -the use of networked learning in the provision of continuing professional development courses - the professional development of teachers, lecturers and others in the paradigm shift towards the use of networked learning. Many of the papers offer views on both these perspectives.

Involving professional people in networked learning begs some questions about what we are trying to do. One question that has to be answered is "what do we mean by networks?" and how do participants on our networked learning courses understand

what this means and what is expected of them in these environments? With the increasing possibility of attracting global audiences to our professional development courses, we have to ask what the term "networking" suggests for people of different cultures, people of different educational and political systems? Might there be different cultural (or even regional) perspectives on this ? If so, how should we go about incorporating these differences in perception into our networked learning professional development courses?

Another theme concerns gender differences in networked learning contexts. When we work with professional people in learning environments that are based largely on electronic communications, we have to be aware of the impact of dialogue online,

and gender differences in this. Do these environments produce new arenas for new forms of dialogue between the sexes ? Do they support women in ways that are not possible in face to face environments? Can the Internet become a feminist space for learning ?

A final theme is the professional development of teachers for running their own courses via networked learning. What new skills and ways of working are required in networked environments, and how do we best prepare staff for them ? Several papers consider this from both a macro, institutional perspective and from a micro, staff development perspective. Experiments in preparing staff for the changes required for networked learning are carried out and examined, and staff and student views of teaching and learning in this way are explored. Issues around formal assessment procedures are investigated, and the benefits of viewing assessment as a learning event carried out by self/peer/tutor processes are examined.

There is still much to understand about networked professional development. This is a new, emerging field of interest and expertise, and one that will surely require considerable reflective analysis, investigation and research in the coming years.