

**TITLE OF PAPER:**

The effect on staff perceptions to online learning of using a non-traditional approach to staff development

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- e-learning, e-tutoring, the e-university

**SUB THEMES:**

- student and tutor experiences of networked learning
- staff development issues
- case studies of networked learning : models and approaches

## PROPOSAL

### The effect on staff perceptions to online learning of using a non-traditional approach to staff development

#### Abstract:

Although there is a shift within HEIs to embrace and encourage learning technologies, there is often not sufficient emphasis placed on appropriate staff development. The focus tends to be on technical skills, rather than pedagogical aspects and implications. "It is common for educational technologists to adopt a skills-only approach to training – leaving teachers to make their own connections between teaching, learning and the Internet" (Murphy and Vermeer, 1998). This was an aspect that the Centre for Learning Developments was keen to address by designing more relevant staff development opportunities.

General 'awareness raising' through a one-day course was felt not to provide sufficient opportunity to explore the pedagogical implications; instead, an 8-week online course was designed, the subject of which was online tutoring or 'e-moderating' (Salmon, 2000). As many staff have never been online learners, it was important to place them in that role while also giving access to materials, discussion and activities on an aspect of using learning technology.

The aims of the course were (i) to change staff perceptions towards online learning and (ii) to increase staff's belief in the potential of online learning. The course methodology was based on Kolb's Learning Cycle. As an online learner, staff could *experience* and *reflect* on the online learning experience (giving them a more realistic insight into the learner perspective). As the course progressed, staff would be encouraged to *interpret* that experience and *plan* accordingly in their role as online teacher. Therefore, the course design had to provide a balanced and realistic experience, while taking into account the "special requirements of professional development" (Milligan, 1999).

The course was run for the third time between September and November 2001, with 12 self-selecting academic staff from different Schools across the university. Data was gathered at various stages in the course, using methods such as questionnaires, 'reaction graphs' (graphical tool for gathering feedback) and a post-course group session.

In evaluating the effectiveness and success of the course, the following aspects were considered:

- Previous experience of the individual
- Comparison between the individual's online learning experience and their final perception as a teacher of the potential of online learning.

- The lecturer's approach to teaching, regardless of online teaching (Toohey, 1999, notes that a technology-based skills approach does not work if it does not take the teacher's concept of teaching and learning into account.)
- Perceptions of online learning, before and after the course, and as an online learner and as a lecturer.

Overall, evaluation has shown that the course has been effective in its aims, although the degree of success was variable and affected by a range of factors. These included amount of study time spent on the course, experiences in group working and collaboration, and personal learning styles, and the presentation will look at the impact of these influences on final perceptions. The use of learning contracts allowed each staff member to pursue an individual learning experience within the collaborative environment, requiring evaluation to focus on individual progression rather than comparison between participants.