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AUTHOR   Schofield, Kaye; Dryen, Robyn; Walsh, Anne; Melville,
                Bernice
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ABSTRACT
        A research project was conducted in Australia to assess the
use of and attitudes toward online learning by vocational and technical
education (VET) researchers. Information was gathered from 18 (13 women and 5
men, aged between 30 and 58) participant-researchers through a workshop in
Adelaide, completion of a participant profile, a structured e-mail survey, a
structured telephone interview, four online focus group events, and a second
workshop to discuss the working paper. The research study found that, on
average, the team had 3.4 years involvement in online learning and were
involved in a variety of ways. Twelve of the team were involved in the
professional development or mentoring of other staff in online technologies;
9 were involved in the development of online modules and training packages; 8
were involved in online delivery; and 3 were involved in LearnScope projects.
Multiple roles in online learning were the norm. Most of the subjects learned
about online learning matters through colleagues with online learning
expertise or discipline expertise, while a significant number learned through
formal professional development programs. Six of the respondents thought all
teachers could become effective facilitators of online learning, 8 did not
think so, and 4 were unsure. Only 3 respondents thought that all students
could learn effectively through online activities, 10 respondents did not,
and 4 were unsure. Having computer skills was the most common attribute
mentioned for students to learn online. Benefits of online learning were
considered to be meeting the individual needs of students and promoting
access to VET for disadvantaged learners. (Contains 10 tables.) (KC)

Online learning and the new VET practitioner: project data and methodology

Kaye Schofield, Robyn Dryen, Anne Walsh & Bernice Melville

UTS Research Centre for Vocational Education & Training
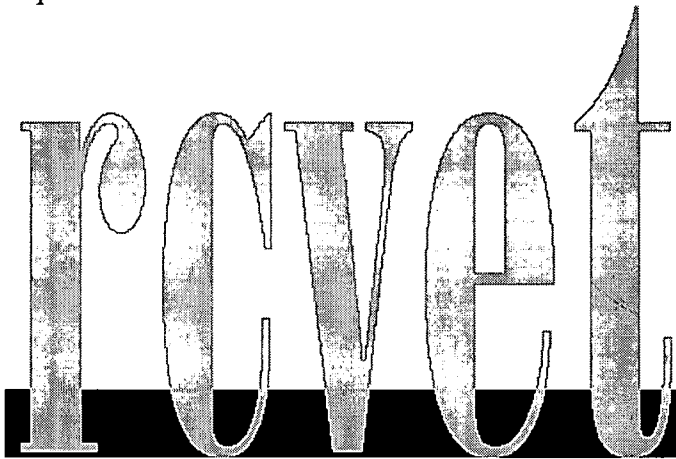
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Online learning and the new VET practitioner: project data and methodology

Kaye Schofield, Robyn Dryen, Anne Walsh & Bernice Melville

INTRODUCTION

This Working Paper describes the project methodology and records some of the data collected in the research project *Online learning and the new VET practitioner*.
The project, conducted during 2000, was a collaborative research effort between the Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training (RCVET), Adelaide TAFE and TAFE SA Online.

The paper supports the discussion in other working papers and conference papers arising from the project. It does not include a summary of the interviews conducted as this data has been used extensively in other Working Papers rising from this project All papers associated with the research are available for download from the RCVET website at <http://www.rcvet.uts.edu.au/>

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was designed and conducted in accordance with the requirements of the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this project, online learning was defined as a form of flexible learning which is facilitated by the use of the Web-based technologies and resources.

The project began with two sets of research questions.

Set 1:   VET practitioners' experience and knowledge

- What factors influence the adoption of ICT by VET practitioners?

- How do practitioners engaged in the design, development and/or facilitation of on-line learning experiences understand their changing roles and their professional practice?

- To what extent and in what ways do VET practitioners engaged in the design, development and facilitation of on-line learning experiences share their practice?

- What are the assumptions about learning and learners underpinning their professional practice?

- What are the assumptions about teaching and training underpinning their professional practice?

- How has involvement with online learning activities changed practitioner assumptions about learning, learners and teaching / training?

Set 2:   Using ICT to enhance the conduct of research and professional development

- What are practitioners' views on the state and influence of research in the area of online VET learning

- To what extent and in what ways have practitioners been involved in research activities related to the use of ICT for flexible learning?

- What (if any) has been practitioner experience of VET or other research projects/activities that use the web as a primary communication or research tool?

- To what extent and in what ways have practitioners been involved in professional development activities related to the use of ICT for flexible learning?

- What (if any) has been practitioner experience of using the web for professional development activities?

- How may Internet -based technologies be employed to foster research-based practice and develop a flexible learning research community amongst VET practitioners?

The project methodology was designed around two assumptions.

- That the relevance and quality of research is enhanced when VET practitioners undertake research in partnership with research institutions.

- That enabling VET practitioners to be part of a research project develops their own professional practice and that of VET professionals more broadly. In this way, the research offered development opportunities to participants as well as receiving and reporting on their experiences and insights.

The term "participant researcher" as used in this project refers to two interconnected roles. The first is the role of research subjects in the traditional academic meaning of the term, in which participants each provided individual data relevant to the research questions through survey and interview and collectively provided data through online focus groups and workshops.

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The second role is that of active researchers. One of the key factors leading TAFE SA Online, Adelaide Institute and individual participants themselves to join with RCVET in this project was that their role would not be confined to that of passive subjects of research but would be as active and collaborative researchers in their own right. Therefore the first principle of the methodology was the recognition and involvement of the SA team members in all phases of the research.

While UTS staff physically gathered the data, the research process was iterative. The participants worked collaboratively with the RCVET researchers to scope and design the project, to analyse and interpret data, prepare a working paper, project reports and conference papers from the project. The research involved the participants in a range of events over a period of approximately six months:

- start-up workshop in Adelaide (group)
- completion of a participant profile (individual)
- a structured e-mail survey (individual)
- a structured telephone interview (individual)
- four on-line focus group events (group)
- a second workshop in Adelaide to discuss the working paper (group)

Workshop No 1

After being identified by TAFE SA, those most actively involved in TAFE SA Online were invited to participate in the start-up workshop. The workshop developed rapport within the group, provided project information, established parameters for the project, and refined the project design and agreed on the research questions.

Participant Profile

A Participant Profile (biographical and work history form) was sent to each prospective participant by e-mail. Participants were invited to self-select into the project and all chose to do so.

Structured Survey

The 18 participant researchers were invited to complete an e-mail survey designed to explore their experiences and beliefs about online learning. All returned the survey.

Individual semi-Structured Interviews

Each participant then took part in an individual semi-structured telephone interview lasting 45 minutes – 60 minutes. The interview questions allowed opportunity to pursue in more depth the research questions focused on attitudes and values of both students and staff to online learning processes, and also the perceptions that practitioners have of their online role. The interviews used an interview protocol that provided opportunities for prompts and expansion of individual responses. Detailed notes were kept and collated for analysis of

key themes and issues identified by the participants. Exhibit 1 below documents the questions posed.

Exhibit 1: Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview questions
What factors influence the adoption of ICT by VET practitioners	What trigger led you to work in the area of online delivery?
	How has your initial experience of online learning shaped your subsequent involvement?
How do practitioners engaged in the design, development and/or facilitation of on-line learning experiences understand their changing roles and their professional practice?	Thinking back over the last five years, describe the ways in which the role of a TAFE teacher has changed?
	Do these changes make you feel different about yourself as a facilitator of learning?
	Have your ideas about education or your educational values changed as a result of your experience in online delivery?
	Do you think online delivery is a priority for your organisation? Why?
	In your current work context, what do you see as the main educational or organisational limitations of online learning
To what extent and in what ways do VET practitioners engaged in the design, development and facilitation of online learning experience share their experience?	To what extent and in what ways are your immediate work colleagues involved with your online delivery activities?
	Have you tried to encourage your work colleagues to become involved in online delivery? What happened?
	To what extent do you feel you are part of a community of online delivery practitioners?
To what extent and in what ways have practitioners been involved in professional development activities related to the use of ICT for flexible learning?	How do you personally prefer to learn about online learning?
	Can you describe the most useful professional development activity for online learning you have experienced?
	What do you see as the main challenges facing you in your work in online learning over the next 2-3 years?
	If someone asked you how best to prepare themselves for participating in online learning activities, what would you tell them?

Online Research Events

Four facilitated online events were scheduled, each being 'live' over a period of 1-2 weeks. Each of these events allowed participants to contribute to debate on aspects of the adoption of online learning. The format of each was dependent on the theme but included the opportunity for online discussion and debate. The specific theme for each event arose from the structured survey and semi-structured interview responses. These themes were as follows.

- Online Event 1: How the role of teacher/ educator has changed over the past 5 years.

- Online Event 2: Incident/s (either a 'moment' or a longer term situation) in the use of online technology which resulted in an experience which brought a new understanding about the role of a teacher, relationships with students or sense of identity as a VET practitioner.

- Online Event 3: Discussion of the statement: "While emerging online technologies enable different methods of delivery, the teaching strategy is more or less the same as in a face-to-face context".

- Online Event 4: What makes professional development effective for teachers moving to online learning?

Workshop No 2

In the second and final workshop participants discussed and revised a draft working paper and commented on the overall impact and value of the project.

National Issues Forum

An RCVET National Issues Forum, *Online learning and the New VET practitioner,* was conducted by the RCVET researchers in Sydney in November 2000 and feedback from that was incorporated into this final report.

Conference Presentations

A representative of the TAFE SA Online participants joined with the RCVET team to make two conference presentations and the RCVET team made one further conference presentation. Feedback from these were incorporated in the analysis.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Demographics

The TAFE SA participants comprised 13 women and 5 men aged between 30 and 58. The average age was 44.8 years. The longest serving TAFE employee joined in 1971 and the most recent joined in 1997. Altogether, the group represented 204 years of TAFE experience, and the average number of years working in VET was 11.3 years.

Job and work characteristics

14 were contract employees, 7 indicated that they were full-time, 1 indicated part-time and 6 did not indicate. 4 of the group were full-time continuing employees.
11 of the 18 included lecturer or instructor in their job title, but 17 indicated a teaching role. Of those who were teaching, 6 taught IT or IT related subjects, 4 taught in the business studies/administration studies area, 3 taught ESL, 2 taught in community services, 1 taught in adult literacy and 1 taught in library and information services.

Involvement with online learning

The first of the team to become involved in online learning did so in the 'early 1990s', the most recent to do so became involved in 1999. On average the team had 3.4 years involvement in online learning.

First exposure to online learning was extremely varied and included:

- a state-wide project developing content for the Women's Education Certificate
- developing online learning materials for Diploma in Community Services
- classroom experimentation using the Internet with students
- developing online learning materials, coordinator of delivery, PD for staff
- using the Internet as an ESL teacher
- developing and delivering IT modules for face to face & online students
- participant in first online project for Admin Studies
- as a student who studied in this environment
- used software called PCAnywhere to enable off-campus students to access computer based learning materials
- member of first project team writing materials for Office Administration Project
- project manager and developer for TAFE SA online pilot
- writing online courses for adult literacy (State), writer for toolbox Central (National)
- trialed two modules
- author and developer of module
- workshops and seminars with TAFE SA for Online
- developing and delivering IT modules online
- attendance at a course meeting, impressed and saw scope and PD potential
- took a group of Community Service students through an online module

Just as the nature of the participants' working role was complex, so too was their involvement in online learning at the time of the research.

- 12 of the team were involved in the professional development or mentoring of other staff in online technologies
- 9 were involved in the development of online modules/training packages
- 8 were involved in online delivery and
- 3 were involved in LearnScope projects

Other online involvement included:

- managing the OEN (PD Network)
- marketing online education services nationally & internationally
- developing the functional specifications for online virtual learning environment
- WebCT Administrator
- helpdesk support
- online education consultant and
- management of online enrolments

12 team members had a major role in their online activity.

Professional Development and online delivery

Everyone in the team had been involved in professional development for online delivery.

All team members had been involved as participants in conferences, seminars or workshops on online delivery or use of WebCT as a platform for delivery. Some had been involved in online professional development. Half of the team had been involved in the delivery of professional development related to online learning. 4 of the team had a mentoring role for other staff developing online skills.

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES

18 practitioner members of the research team were invited to complete a written survey about some of their experiences and beliefs about online learning. 18 completed surveys were returned and the following is an analysis of the responses.

Care needs to be taken in generalising form the responses of this group. The sample was very small and drawn from a narrow range of program areas. All were either innovators or early adopters in online learning and almost all were highly satisfied with their work.

Current role

Multiple roles were the norm with only 3 of the 17 respondents describing a single role. Nearly half of the respondents had 3 or more roles and the average was 2.7. 11 had some form of co-ordination role, be it program or project coordination, or staff management. Table 1 shows how the respondents described their role in online VET activities.

Table 1: Main role in online VET activities

Role	Number
Technical role	5
Instructional role	17
Content role	12
Marketing role	7
Management role	3

Current use of online technologies

Not surprisingly this group primarily use online instructional strategies with only 8 reporting the use of offline strategies. As Table 2 indicates, most respondents use a combination of strategies

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Table 2: Instructional strategies currently used/developing

Strategy	Number Using
online learning activities	18
on-line content delivery	17
discussion forums (bulletin boards or email lists)	17
email communication with individual students	15
on-line assessments	14
online submission of work	13
chat rooms	11
off-line strategies	9
online collaborative learning	8
online learner presentations	4
other on-line strategies	3

Other online strategies used include:
- group presentations
- online conferences, online meetings, online training for teachers interested in delivering and developing online, communication hubs
- quizzes and other interactive content
- email communication with staff as part of staff professional development

Significant factors in the decision to become involved in online learning activities

As Table 3 shows, the most significant factor in the decision to become involved in online learning activities is a personal professional interest in online learning. The other two factors which seem to be significant are the availability of resources and anticipated demand from students. The least likely drivers are pressure from the Institute and demand from industry.

Table 3:   Significance of particular factors in the decision to become involved in online learning activities

	Very significant	Significant	Neutral	Insignificant	NA*
current demand from students	4	1	5	6	2
anticipated demand from students	8	7	3	0	0
demand from industry bodies	2	2	7	6	1
demand from workplaces	3	5	4	5	1
team decision	3	6	6	3	0
pressure from your Institute	0	3	7	7	1
encouragement from your Institute	3	6	3	5	1
state policies on flexible delivery	1	7	6	4	0
national policies on flexible delivery	0	7	5	6	0
resources to experiment	8	8	0	1	1
your own professional interest in online learning	17	1	0	0	0

* NA = No Answer

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Other factors in the decision to become involved in online learning activities include:

- the support of a mentor or encouragement by a colleague
- anticipation of the benefit of technology in improving delivery to students and/or streamlining administration of learning and
- wanting to learn something new or seeing the opportunity for career development

Equally important seems to be the chance opportunity:

> [I was] ...just ready for a change and in the right place. To be honest I hadn't a clue what I was getting into.

and

> Being in the right place at the right time - someone dropped out of online module development - I said I was interested in picking it up and it happened.

Sources of information or advice about online learning matters

As Table 4 shows, colleagues with online learning expertise or discipline expertise are the most used source of information. In this developing field, formal professional development programs are also recognised as a significant source of information.

Table 4: Sources of information or advice

Information Source	Number
work colleagues in other discipline areas who have online learning expertise	16
work colleagues in the same discipline area	13
formal professional development programs	13
the web	12
external networks	6
educational journals and articles	4
other: Listservs	2
technology journals and articles	1

Teachers as effective facilitators of online learning

6 of the respondents thought all teachers could become effective facilitators of online learning, 8 did not think so, and 4 were unsure. Despite these differences, there was considerable agreement on the question of which attributes would indicate that a teacher would be an effective facilitator of online learning.

The most commonly described attribute (13 respondents) was that of being imaginative and creative, a lateral thinker. This was most frequently coupled with the attribute of being a risk taker, someone who was prepared to get out of their comfort zone and try new things, to experiment.

The next most frequently mentioned attribute (9 respondents) was having some computer skills and confidence in using technology. An understanding of the medium and a commitment to online methodologies was an important attribute (8 respondents).

5 respondents thought that already being an effective facilitator was a desirable attribute, while the personal qualities of being flexible/adaptable; of patience and persistence; and being enthusiastic were attributes thought desirable by some respondents.

Other attributes mentioned included:

- good planning and preparation
- knowledge of how to involve students in online activities
- ability to adapt material for online
- having a learner centred philosophy on teaching
- being willing to let go of power
- being prepared to put the time in to doing the module first

One respondent pointed to a key attribute for online developers

> In the development of materials focus on what the students have to do in order to learn rather than on content. Spending many hours developing online content is expensive and counterproductive if it displaces effort that could have been applied to developing effective learning activities. In my opinion it's better to buy content in a textbook or books or other resources which can be used in the online learning activities.

Student attributes to learn effectively through online activities

Only 3 respondents thought that all students could learn effectively through online activities, 10 respondents did not, and 4 were unsure.

One responded, Yes, if online is part of a wider package. No, if online is relied upon solely.

The most common attribute for a student to learn effectively through online activities was having computer skills and being comfortable with the technology (16 respondents). Motivation and a commitment to learning was the second most common attribute for students, together with a willingness to try new methods (each mentioned by 8 respondents).

An independent learning style was thought an important attribute by 7 respondents, and communication skills, a reasonable command of English and an ability to read were each thought desirable attributes by 4 respondents.

Other attributes mentioned included:

- having a visual learning style
- managing time well
- having a sense of humour and patience
- having the ability to use manuals and online help to solve operational problems
- having the confidence to communicate about difficulties as soon as they are encountered

Competencies and online learning

8 Respondents thought that all key competencies could be learnt online, 6 did not and 4 were unsure.

Practical technical skills were the main competencies that respondents thought required hands-on learning rather than online learning. Team skills were also thought to be best developed through offline strategies.

One respondent also pointed to the overwhelming influence of US culture reflected by the Web and suggested that cultural skills might be best imparted face to face, another identified the need for exposure to people of a particular culture.

On the question of whether all competencies in the respondents own industry/teaching area lend themselves to being learnt online, 4 answered yes, 13 answered no, and 1 was unsure.

The same kind of considerations as with key competencies influenced the list of what was best learnt offline. The following are typical of the comments on this issue:

> Some of the basic language and literacy skills may well be better addressed through face to face.

> Some of the practical skills could be taught online with effective multi media but really need a complementary face to face component as well e.g. personal care practices, some communication subjects.

> These are not my teaching area but what about surgical skills, flying an aeroplane, and cooking!!!

> Ones concerning manual handling, also in Community Services there are many concerning attitudes towards groups of people

> Shorthand or language skills, AUSLAN, people skills subjects

> Face to face communication is very fast, spontaneous and unpredictable - also massively coloured by non-verbals. ESL is an area where we are teaching strategies as much as language.

On the question of whether online delivery is more suitable in some industries or occupations than in others, 13 responded yes, 2 responded no and 3 were unsure.

As with the key competencies, many respondents considered that some skills might be best learnt online while others required hands-on practical experience. The following is typical of the comments

> [it is] not clear-cut, there are aspects of training in all industries that can be delivered online: e.g. theory components. Bus drivers may learn about machines and customer service online, but turning a corner in a reticulated bus requires hands-on.

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Other respondents identified particular fields of study that were less suitable for online learning including:

- communications
- sign language
- food preparation and restaurant skills
- non computer based trades and occupations where a computer isn't involved
- customer relations
- industries which rely on face to face operations
- industries which rely on taste/smell

On the question of whether all training organisations can become proficient in the delivery of learning online, 12 responded yes, 2 responded no and 4 were unsure.

When asked what characterizes those training organisations, which are most likely to become proficient in the delivery of learning online, there was an almost universal response. They core characteristics were:

- a commitment by the organisation to online learning and a view that its application is beneficial to both staff and students

- a willingness to embrace change, and an ability to put change management strategies into place

- support for staff professional development and the provision of adequate resources to enable staff to undertake necessary training

- resources for mentors to support the facilitators, for IT support staff and a helpdesk

- having technical expertise and instructional design expertise (including online pedagogy)

- having the IT hardware and the ability to create or find/license good content

The following response is a good summary description

> Organisations that - encourage and accept change, provide and promote flexible teaching and learning environments, have senior management endorsing and promoting online learning, are innovative and visionary, have a change management plan, and have a professional development strategy.

Three other characteristics mentioned were of interest:

- scattered employees for whom online communication, group or 1:1 teaching does away with geographical or time barriers
- a commitment to critical trial and evaluation
- high standards in professional conduct

Aspects of online learning

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of a number of benefits commonly attributed to online learning. Every respondent thought the capacity to meet the individual need of students was very important. Significantly, a number questioned the notion that online learning reduces delivery costs, and even if it does, few thought this an important benefit. Table 5 summarises the responses.

Table 5: Importance of commonly stated benefits of online learning

	Very important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very unimportant	NA
meets the individual needs of students	18	0	0	0	0	0
promotes access to VET of disadvantaged learners	10	5	2	0	0	1
meets the needs of workplaces	7	7	3	0	0	1
meets growing demand for VET	5	9	4	0	0	0
meets the needs of the Institute	5	7	5	0	0	1
reduces delivery costs	1	1	9	5	1	1

Respondents listed a wide range of other benefits they attribute to online learning including

- exposure to new technologies and the opportunity to reflect on teaching practice

- the ability to easily tailor content, update material by teacher

- enabling communication between distance learners – each other and the facilitator

- anywhere, anytime learning

- online learning can be a very efficient means of operation. Online learning lends itself to integration with Student Information Systems, campus networks and communication networks, thereby promoting efficiencies in delivery and administration

- online learning allows students who are bit on the shy side to communicate without fear of speaking in front of a large class of students

- when used to broaden the range of study options, rather than replace existing options, it assists in increasing retention/completion rates – especially for off-campus students

In response to another question, one respondent made this relevant observation

> Because they are not burnt onto a CDROM or set in print, online courses can be changed whenever the need for improvement is identified – no need to wait for the next edition or whatever else. This medium is ideal for the application of a commitment to continuous improvement – which is much spoken about, but less often practised.

Respondents were asked how much they personally agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about online learning. The answers were diverse with only two statements revealing a degree of convergence. The statement *Good online teaching is building community, caring for students and being responsive* was agreed with by 17 of the 18 respondents. The statement *The work skills that can be developed online are the more technical skills. The ability to interact and communicate can only be developed in a face-to-face setting* was disagreed with by 16 of the 18 respondents with one indicating that the distinction between work skills and other skills is too crude and that it was therefore impossible to either agree or disagree.

All the other statements showed a very mixed response as Table 6 illustrates.

Table 6:   Levels of agreement with statements about online learning

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Have no view	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	NA
Teaching becomes more creative when it uses interactive multimedia	4	8	1	4	0	1
While emerging online technologies enable different methods of delivery, the teaching strategy is more or less the same as in a face-to-face context.	1	7	1	7	2	0
Online work is undervalued because it is seen as a secondary activity	6	5	4	2	0	1
Teaching online is more intensive than traditional face-to-face education.	7	7	1	1	1	1
In the area of online learning - design, development and teaching are really separate and distinct activities, best done by people with different skills	1	4	0	8	5	0
Good online teaching is building community, caring for students and being responsive	13	4	0	0	0	1
Most teachers and trainers have got into online learning activities because of direct or indirect pressure from their organization	0	3	6	4	3	2
The work skills that can be developed online are the more technical skills. The ability to interact and communicate can only be developed in a face-to-face setting.	0	1	0	9	7	1
Educational media are simply vehicles that deliver instruction but do not influence student achievement any more than the truck that delivers our groceries causes changes in our nutrition.	3	5	1	5	4	0
Instructional approaches which rely on greater structure, shorter steps, reduced verbal loads and self-pacing show consistent advantage over conventional instruction	0	5	6	7	0	0
The knowledge and skills of teachers about online learning is the single most important factor affecting implementation.	6	3	0	6	2	1

The adoption of online delivery

Barriers to the adoption of online delivery appear to fall into three broad categories

- resistance or lack of support from management or influential colleagues
- lack of resources and infrastructure and
- a fear of the unknown and having the confidence to do it the first time

The lack of resources was frequently described in terms of having to learn and develop online activities outside of normal working time

> All my original adoption of online delivery was completed on top of a full workload.

and

> Online delivery was seen as an extra activity not a core activity. This was influenced by the fact that funding is modelled on classroom attendance, and curriculum hours measured on attendance rolls.

While most who were hesitant to begin commented in terms of confidence in their own competence, one respondent articulated ... a fear of losing that face-to-face teaching that I love.

The most positive response to this question was

> None. I was used to the media so I didn't even think about not using it.

When asked how they first learnt to use information and communications technology for flexible learning, the most frequently cited source was work colleagues in the same discipline area (14 respondents). The next most frequent learning source was involvement in product development projects (10 respondents).

As Table 7 demonstrates, most learning occurred by being involved in rather than learning about online delivery.

Table 7: Sources of learning to use information and communications technology for flexible learning

Information source	Number
work colleagues in the same discipline area	14
product development projects	10
private practice	9
formal training programs	8
action learning projects	7
reading technology journals and articles	7
informal training programs	6
the web	6
reading educational journals and articles	6
work colleagues in other discipline areas who have online learning expertise	5
conferences or seminars	5
external networks	3

Other sources of information were:

- listservs
- network of like minded professionals in the field
- interactive CD's

Table 7 also shows that the respondents used multiple sources for their information with most indicating between 3 and 6 different sources for their information (average = 4).

Professional development

When asked what professional development programs related to online learning they had participated in

- 17 had participated in formal training programs
- 17 had participated in informal training programs
- 14 had participated in development projects and
- 12 had participated in action learning projects

Other professional development programs related to online learning included:

- Web based community building activities
- volunteer teaching
- online and physical conferences
- facilitating and mentoring other staff in LearnScope projects
- being an online student

Participation in these programs has helped the respondents deal with the practical problems they meet in their day-to-day work in a number of ways. Most tangibly the participants have reported an increase in skills and knowledge about online learning; and contact with other like-minded and skilled staff to share knowledge.

However other less tangible but no less valuable outcomes were reported.

> The programs I have participated in have not always helped in a direct way to further my professional development, what they have done is highlight the need to keep experimenting and try new and innovative ideas as there is no one clear answer about online learning that has emerged as "the solution"

> ... working daily with online colleagues in discussing, experimenting is the most effective method for me. Training programs have offered some insight, but as a leader in this field I generally find that formal training programs don't tell me much I don't already know. Hands on doing it with an online network of support has been by far the most effective learning strategy for me.

> Meeting challenges every day is enormously helpful in putting things in perspective and gradually building skills, strategies and understanding. I've needed enormous amounts of support as I have learnt 0 intuitively. Had I not had a great colleague to solve problems with, moan and dream with I'd have fallen off the bus years ago.

18 .

Formal training taught me the fundamentals of how to do it! Development projects have forced me to identify areas in which I need to learn more and to seek assistance. And that assistance has mostly come through informal training by more experienced people than I. Allowed the flexibility to reduce the teaching load a little to do online

As Table 8 shows, there is some convergence in the priorities this group has for further professional development.

Table 8: Priorities for professional development

	High	Medium	Low	NA
establishment of communication networks (e.g. online hubs, support groups, workshops, field days)	15	3	0	0
developing online teaching skills, in particular, communication and facilitation	16	1	0	1
raising awareness about the issues for online learners	16	0	2	0
identification and development of easy-to-use or more powerful tools for online development and delivery	12	4	1	1
training in the use of specific technology tools (e.g. Internet skills, course management software, communication tools)	10	3	4	1
the introduction of support systems (e.g. online student services, online library services, help desk)	8	7	2	1
developing face-to-face teaching skills, in particular, communication and facilitation	9	4	3	2

Other professional development priorities required include

- Formal recognition for participants in training programs where competencies can be mapped against existing accredited courses/modules/competencies
- To keep up to date with all the changes that are happening in my own field of expertise
- Establishing a mentor system within the organisation
- To become more familiar with Web page creation, animation, design as well as content. Everything really!

7 respondents have used the Web for formal professional development, 5 for informal professional development, and 5 for both formal and informal professional development.

Job satisfaction

As Table 9 shows satisfaction with current job is very high among the respondents.

Table 9: Satisfaction with current role

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
10	6	1	1	0

As Table 10 shows involvement in online delivery has been a very positive experience for the majority of respondents, increasing their satisfaction levels.

Table 10: Change in professional satisfaction as a result of involvement in online delivery

Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased
15	2	1

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