

## Learning to Teach at a Distance

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This paper is a reflective account of the first two years of creating and running a distance learning foundation degree in electronics and computing from the point of view of two relatively new lecturers.

Institutions in the UK are currently under pressure to widen participation by opening new markets and distance learning is one way in which they can do this. A Foundation Degree is a UK-based undergraduate qualification which integrates both academic and work-based learning. Learning at work serves a variety of purposes and takes many forms. This work-based learning aspect of a Foundation Degree means that all participating students will be employed, either full-time or part-time. Delivering a Foundation Degree at a distance gives flexibility which means that the students can participate without disruption to their employment.

In this paper, we reflect on the methods and issues that have arisen during the first two years of creating and running a distance learning course. One aspect considered was to find out who a distance learning course may appeal to and why. Other issues considered include how the course was marketed and whether or not this proved to be effective. Before starting to produce material for individual modules, we had to develop a course structure and this took a lot of time, with many iterations. Because initial costs for setting up the course were large, external funding was sought. Eventually we were successful in getting funding from the European Social Fund which enabled the course development to go ahead. When developing individual modules, issues such as whether to write original materials or to base the course around existing learning materials, such as books, were considered. Several media were considered when deciding how to deliver the course, including Web delivery, CD and paper. We shall discuss our reasons for deciding on a CD based delivery. Staff developed their skills in several different ways including external training, existing staff experience and through peer review.

Other issues considered in the paper include how distance learning courses integrate into the existing structures of the institution. How is writing and teaching on a distance learning course put into staff timetables? How is it dealt with in the staff workload audit? In addition, the academic support is historically set up to deal with face to face teaching. How adaptive are areas such as assignment handling and academic support to dealing with distance learning? We look at how much of the impetus for change in these structures had to come from the course team, rather than from the institution.

Developing the course also led on to further developments, such as re-use of some of the modules on other courses.