Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers

Conference or Workshop Item

How to cite:

© 2012 The Authors

Version: Version of Record
Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers
Clem Herman, Department of Communication and Systems, The Open University UK, c.herman@open.ac.uk

The Open University

Between 2005 and 2011 the Open University ran an online course to support women returning to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) careers. This was as part of the UK Research Councils’ (UKRC) Women Returners Project (Humphrey & Rector, 2003) which aimed to address the large numbers of women with high level qualifications in STEM subjects who are not being ‘re-integrated’ into the workplace after a career break. This resulted in the funding of a specific UK wide course which was delivered through an online modular distance learning course run by the Open University (DLS).

The returner women returners

The course was designed to enable women returning from a break of any length to refresh their skills and acquire the knowledge and confidence to re-enter the STEM workplace. It was characterised by a response to a crucial demand in STEM and resulted in a highly successful course.

The design of the course

The course was developed in collaboration with the EU-supported network on Distance Learning in STEM (DLS) which involved a range of partners, including local, national and international organisations.

Funding from the EU Equal Opportunities programme enabled additional support activities to complement the online programme. These included national groups and networking events in key STEM areas and the development of a successful Delphi approach to identify STEM women’s needs and perceptions. An advisory panel was set up to ensure that the course was designed by STEM women for STEM women, who met regularly to provide advice and support.

The course comprised a series of modules delivered through distance learning. The content was designed to be flexible and accessible, and to meet the needs of those returning to work in STEM.

The course was designed to support women returning from any career break, and was characterised by its flexibility and accessibility. It was developed in collaboration with the EU-supported network on Distance Learning in STEM (DLS) which involved a range of partners, including local, national and international organisations.

Where next?
The project team have developed an extended “returner” tool to support students with employability. The team have been in discussion with the Centre for Inclusion and Curriculum and the Careers Advisory Service about possible ways to use this animated raccoon to support university strategic plans and help meet targets for student engagement with employability issues.

Innovative learning technologies to enhance social presence: Tutorial in Second Life

We carried out 23 in-depth interviews examining factors leading to reported outcomes which were analysed using an employability framework (Redmond and Lindsey, 2003). Visual explorations of employment and unemployment focus solely on either supply-side or demand-side factors. This analysis uses a more holistic framework that includes individual factors, personal circumstances and external factors.

A postal survey was sent to 145 women who had taken the return to STEM course in 2005/6. They were all graduates in STEM subjects who were looking to return to work after a career break and had given their permission to be contacted further to support their return.

Practical Tools and Support for Employability

- CV development
- Career Planning
- Goal Setting
- Interview skills
- Mentoring
- Networking

The course was designed to support women returning from a break of any length to refresh their skills and acquire the knowledge and confidence to re-enter the STEM workplace. It was characterised by a response to a crucial demand in STEM and resulted in a highly successful course.

The course comprised a series of modules delivered through distance learning. The content was designed to be flexible and accessible, and to meet the needs of those returning to work in STEM.

Return to Science Engineering and Technology

The course was developed in collaboration with the EU-supported network on Distance Learning in STEM (DLS) which involved a range of partners, including local, national and international organisations.

Where next?
The project team have developed an extended “returner” tool to support students with employability. The team have been in discussion with the Centre for Inclusion and Curriculum and the Careers Advisory Service about possible ways to use this animated raccoon to support university strategic plans and help meet targets for student engagement with employability issues.

The Open University

Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers
Clem Herman, Department of Communication and Systems, The Open University UK, c.herman@open.ac.uk

The Open University

Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers
Clem Herman, Department of Communication and Systems, The Open University UK, c.herman@open.ac.uk

The Open University

Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers
Clem Herman, Department of Communication and Systems, The Open University UK, c.herman@open.ac.uk

The Open University

Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers
Clem Herman, Department of Communication and Systems, The Open University UK, c.herman@open.ac.uk

The Open University

Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers
Clem Herman, Department of Communication and Systems, The Open University UK, c.herman@open.ac.uk

The Open University

Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers
Clem Herman, Department of Communication and Systems, The Open University UK, c.herman@open.ac.uk

The Open University

Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers
Clem Herman, Department of Communication and Systems, The Open University UK, c.herman@open.ac.uk

The Open University

Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers
Clem Herman, Department of Communication and Systems, The Open University UK, c.herman@open.ac.uk

The Open University

Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers
Clem Herman, Department of Communication and Systems, The Open University UK, c.herman@open.ac.uk

The Open University

Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers
Clem Herman, Department of Communication and Systems, The Open University UK, c.herman@open.ac.uk

The Open University

Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers
Clem Herman, Department of Communication and Systems, The Open University UK, c.herman@open.ac.uk

The Open University

Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers
Clem Herman, Department of Communication and Systems, The Open University UK, c.herman@open.ac.uk

The Open University

Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers
Clem Herman, Department of Communication and Systems, The Open University UK, c.herman@open.ac.uk