Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers

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The Open University is an online course to support women returners, engineers, and technology enthusiasts who have taken a break from their STEM careers and have returned recently 2010 participants. The course was aimed at those returning to all types of science, engineering, and technology 2011. The course has been running since 2007 and has been supported by the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) through the returns to Science, Engineering and Technology (reforce) project. The course provides an introduction to the benefits of returning to STEM and equips returners with the knowledge and skills to refresh and retrain in their chosen field.

The course is designed to support returners who wish to refresh their knowledge and skills in their chosen field, and it provides a platform for returners to connect with others in similar situations. The course is delivered online through a series of modules covering various topics in science, engineering, and technology.

**Return to Science Engineering and Technology**

We carried out 23 in-depth interviews examining factors leading to reported outcomes which were analyzed using an employability framework (ReQuard and Lindsey 2008). Visual explorations of employment and unemployment focus on either supply-side or demand-side factors. This analysis uses a more holistic framework that includes individual, personal, and external factors.

A postal survey was sent to 185 women who had taken the return to SSET course in 2005/6. They were all graduates in STEM subjects who were looking to return after a career break and had given their permission to be contacted from time to time. There were 91 responses (50% response rate). Of these 62% were in employment or self-employed, and only 5 unemployed after a 10 year career break to look after her two children Rajini has now returned to a lab-based science career.

The design of the course includes case studies, expert interviews, and interactive sessions. The course is designed to help returners refresh and retrain in their chosen field. The course provides a platform for returners to connect with others in similar situations. The course is delivered online through a series of modules covering various topics in science, engineering, and technology.

**Practical Tools and Support for Employability**

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

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

The course has been running in large scale but with local presence. Participants have been from all over the UK and Ireland since the initial 2 years. The course is delivered online in an innovative way. The participants are identified with the help of voting experts who have identified with us online forums. The second element of the course has been enhanced to online SL and an audio part to identify short-term and long-term themes.

**Return to Science Engineering and Technology**

**The course has been very innovative in many respects - delivery in virtual and physical environments.**

The first key area of innovation has been in the use of innovative learning technologies to enhance social presence and networking between participants such as in portfolios, online forums, virtual and real environments and identity collaboration sites.

Secondly, the course has been run in large scale but with local presence. Participants have been from all over the UK and Ireland since the initial 2 years. The course is delivered online in an innovative way. The participants are identified with the help of voting experts who have identified with us online forums. The second element of the course has been enhanced to online SL and an audio part to identify short-term and long-term themes.