Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers

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Version: Version of Record

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Distance travelled: supporting women returning to STEM careers

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Between 2003 and 2005, the Open University was an online course to support women returning to work in STEM, and subsequently to STEM itself. The course was aimed at those returning to a full-time or part-time STEM career. However, the course was also taken by men and others who were interested in the topic of women returning to STEM. The course was run under the auspices of the UKRC, located in 2001. From 2005-2006, support for the course by the UKRC was provided under the same general title 'Return to STEM'. Central to the overall strategy to 'return' was the development of an online-distance learning course run by the OU Open University (OU).

The women returners who may need to be helped include those who have been out of work for many years, and so have developed a different skill set from those who have been in continuous employment. The OU aimed to support returners who need to relearn the discipline and changing nature of women returning to STEM would not be as continuous as it was in the past, and so may even have been a part-time activity. The course was designed to be flexible, with a good deal of distance learning in parallel with a range of activities. It also enabled women to take the course in a range of different environments, and to be assessed in a range of different environments.

The course was designed to make use of the OU's extensive expertise in distance learning and what we refer to as e-steam: innovative learning technologies. The 10-week module was developed so that it could be easily delivered online with the aim of providing effective tools to help returners to STEM. The course was designed to be accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Participants were able to work at their own pace, and the course was assessed on the basis of the tasks assigned to them and the contributions they made to the group. The course was designed to be flexible, with a good deal of distance learning in parallel with a range of activities. It also enabled women to take the course in a range of different environments, and to be assessed in a range of different environments.

Funding from the EU Equal programme enabled additional support activities to complement the online programme. These included national groups and networking events in both the UK and the EU, as well as the creation of a national network. The course also included a range of activities designed to help returners to STEM, such as mentoring, personal and professional development activities, and opportunities to network. These activities were designed to help returners to STEM to develop new skills and to gain experience in the STEM sector. The course was designed to be flexible, with a good deal of distance learning in parallel with a range of activities. It also enabled women to take the course in a range of different environments, and to be assessed in a range of different environments.

The national partnerships of the UKRC were the first three review points, no longer running, creating an integrated approach capable of responding to changing environments and resource constraints. These included national networks and networking events in both the UK and the EU, as well as the creation of a national network. The course also included a range of activities designed to help returners to STEM, such as mentoring, personal and professional development activities, and opportunities to network. These activities were designed to help returners to STEM to develop new skills and to gain experience in the STEM sector. The course was designed to be flexible, with a good deal of distance learning in parallel with a range of activities. It also enabled women to take the course in a range of different environments, and to be assessed in a range of different environments.

The course improved my confidence ... and got me in touch with other women in the same situation. It was great to know that I wasn’t alone. I managed to build a good network out of it, and most importantly for me, it helped me put together a successful job application.

The design of the course combined the use of the OU’s extensive expertise in distance learning and what we refer to as e-steam: innovative learning technologies. The 10-week module was developed so that it could be easily delivered online. The course was designed to be accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Participants were able to work at their own pace, and the course was assessed on the basis of the tasks assigned to them and the contributions they made to the group. The course was designed to be flexible, with a good deal of distance learning in parallel with a range of activities. It also enabled women to take the course in a range of different environments, and to be assessed in a range of different environments.

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 analyzed using an employability framework (McQuaid and Lindsey 2005). 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 factors, personal circumstances and external factors. A postal survey was sent to 145 women who had taken the 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 (63% response rate). Of these 63% were in employment or self-employed, and only 5 unemployed. After a 10-year career break to look after her two children Rajni has now returned to a lab-based science career.