

## TOWARDS FLEXIBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### Title and Presenter:

**Implementing a departmental blended learning strategy**

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### Sub Theme & Paper Type:

Flexible Delivery –Showcase

### Abstract:

Scarborough School of Education (SSE) has recently embarked upon a blended learning strategy to enhance the experience of its undergraduate and part-time students. The approach is informed by a study of effective change in educational organisations, making it a grass-roots strategy owned by the teaching staff involved in its implementation. The aim is to reduce the extent of traditional didactic teaching and to enable more flexible and personalised learning through the greater use of small group tutorials and interactive online materials. The objective of the initial phase is for every teaching staff member to design and implement at least one blended learning session per semester. To achieve this, the authoring software *Articulate Rapid E-Learning Studio* is being used to create narrated slideshows with embedded learning games and quizzes for deployment on the VLE. *Articulate* was chosen for its ease of use, enabling staff without specialist IT skills to take ownership. Some online materials will replace traditional lectures, and others will deepen students' understanding by providing opportunities for formative assessment and mastery learning.

Staff workshops in September 2008 were led by two eLearning specialists in SSE, who introduced blended learning and the aims of the strategy, and provided training in *Articulate*. Workshops in January will consolidate progress, share ideas and further develop applications and learning activities. In the following academic year – and when staff feel confident and competent to proceed – the focus will turn to developing online collaboration between learners and creating closer linkages between formative assessment tasks created with *Articulate*, and group tutorial provision.

Student responses to date have been positive: in particular, part-time students and those with young families have benefited from the flexibility already made possible. It is hoped that the greater use of directed study, online assessment and collaborative tasks will reduce students' dependency and give them space to develop as effective, autonomous learners.

The presentation will elaborate the SSE blended learning strategy and the staff-owned change model which underpins it. Examples of learning materials on *Blackboard* will be demonstrated and the effectiveness of various activities to foster flexible, personalised and collaborative learning will be compared.