

## TOWARDS FLEXIBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Thursday 22 January 2009

**Title and Presenter:**

**Rethinking learning spaces: a flexible framework**

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**Sub Theme & Paper Type:**

Flexible Spaces – Presentation

**Abstract:**

Scarborough School of Education (SSE) offers a part-time Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Policy and Practice for experienced practitioners currently employed in settings where young children are receiving education and care. The programme encompasses flexible delivery systems in order to meet learner and employer needs, making use of online as well as face to face methods through blended learning. The presentation demonstrates the unique challenges of delivering teaching in two spaces; the virtual and face-to-face and highlights how each space may provide different learning experiences. Finally, student responses to flexible learning spaces are discussed.

Given the available tools, Blackboard VLE and the authoring software *Articulate Rapid E-Learning Studio*, the presentation highlights three challenges for delivery in flexible space. First there is the challenge of timetabling and delivering ten, one-hour online sessions and ten two-hour face-to-face sessions for 17 part-time students taking the Learning to Learn in Study and at Work level 4 module on this foundation degree and presents the unique solutions developed by the degree team to meet the timetable and delivery challenges. The challenge of 'presence' in flexible learning spaces is considered through the use of 'e-moderating'.

Virtual and face-to face spaces were adapted and re-designed to take advantage of both traditional and on-line learning interactions and activities to facilitate more effective use the limited time these students have for learning within this particular module. In particular the presentation will provide examples of how the activities in the virtual space developed knowledge and understanding of ideas that were expanded upon in the face-to-face sessions. Additionally, the presentation demonstrates how the face-to-face learning space became increasingly flexible as the traditional 'sage on the stage' model gave way to a more facilitative model allowing students to apply and evaluate that which was learned online.

The success of this first flexible learning space is evaluated through student responses, which to date have been mixed: in particular, more mature part-time students who have little ICT skills find the blended learning delivery challenging.