The Open University Worldwide

Educational Technology at the Open University

Professor Josie Taylor
Access is fundamental to the mission of the Open University. It wouldn't be very open if there were lots of barriers for you to climb over before you got there. It may be that you have a disability. It may be a social barrier. It may be an economic barrier or it may be that you work full time.

Ruth Stokes
It does take personal commitment. It did take up my weekends and you know when you're working full time at the same point, but I think that that's something that you do have to personally commit to if there is something that you want at the end of it.

Nicky Whitsed
Most of our students can't actually come in here. So we have to think very hard about how we take the resources out to the students.

Laura Dewis
We've been able to employ some quite experimental technologies that have been developed by the Knowledge Media Institute at the Open University.

Murilo Matos Mendonca
Flash Meeting which is the tool which is used for videoconferencing and that allows many people to participate and interact.

Laura Dewis
They include presence-aware instant messaging systems. So that means you know who is online studying at the same time as you and you can connect with them very easily through Textchat.

Murilo Matos Mendonça
Compendium is a programme or tool that is used for making mind maps and helping students organise their thoughts.

Laura Dewis
And it's really about connecting our learners and allowing them to support each other and make more sense of the resources that we're giving them and also construct their own learning journeys.

Mike Lucas
What we do as a University is to try and engender a sense of independence amongst the learners.

Laura Dewis
What we've employed is a virtual learning environment called Noodles. It's open source so it's very low cost to develop.

Mike Lucas
It means that quite a number of courses are now beginning to deliver an online material which immediately then links into the collaborative frameworks that we have.

Laura Dewis
Such as discussion forums to connect up our students. It gives them an ability to record their learning in things like learning journals and publish those thoughts and notes with other students. It also allows us to track the students' progress and for them to track their own progress through the course and also store their documents and resources in one place.

Professor Hazel Rymer
I think it's much easier to learn things if you have an active way of learning. If you just have to sit and read after a while you switch off. In the virtual microscope any student anywhere in the world can study a huge range of samples that there's no way that they would physically ever be able to see all of those samples. In the comfort of their own homes and with their computer, they can manipulate the samples without the expense of having a real microscope there in front of them. So students have a much richer experience.

Peter Scott
We've always designed here from scratch for the learners, so what we want to do for you is reach you in new ways. We want to be able to have an online event running here in Milton Keynes or running online in Edinburgh or in Brussels or wherever the event is and reach you in the field. So webcasting has always been a really interesting technology for us.

Woman (on film)
Welcome to something that I find somewhat scary but extremely exciting. I've never done anything like this in my life before where you've got both a virtual and a real audience.

Peter Scott
Getting to people at scale. There are thousands of you who want to know about this right here, right now. Can't pack you all into one lecture theatre. Don't have to. You're just where you are. I need to be able to get stuff to you. But you want to interact with me. You don't just want to sit and listen to it like it's television or a lecture, you want to be able to engage with the material, get inside it and mess around with it. You've got to be able to reach inside a package and tweak the values of the simulation and see those changes. These days what you want to be able to do is do that live and online with other people.

Mike Lucas
One of the benefits of the new technologies is that we can engender a sense of the importance of collaboration that clearly supports some of the team working skills that, particularly in a virtual environment, modern employers are seeking.

Ruth Stokes
So much of our work in life now is over email, over the net. Going back to what I do as a European role, I can't be in every city and every office on a daily basis. I think it's just the way the world is changing.

Sara Pierson
The feedback that we get from employers of Open University students is that many of them are more ready for the workplace than graduates from traditional universities.

Ruth Stokes
Certainly the kind of time management, the drive and commitment that the people show is exactly what we want in employees.

Peter Scott
The OU designs from the ground up for a new type of learner. It always has done and as new types of learner have changed as technologies changed, as the world has moved on, we've adapted to that. We've made sure that we're giving learners what they need, not what we're used to giving.