

PAPER:

***SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN A FLEXIBLE
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT –
CAN IT BE MANAGED BETTER?***

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Background:

The Educational Planning Unit of the Open Training & Education Network (OTEN) conducted research on distance education withdrawal and completion rates. The result and research report included suggestions for OTEN to overcome retention problems of distance education students. These suggestions, were presented to a Process Improvement Group (PIG), and centred on an “institutional approach” to achieving “student success”. The PIG considered the suggestions and recommended that a variety of the suggestion be implemented.

To implement some of the recommendations, the PIG considered that the appointment of a manager of each teaching area in OTEN would be necessary. So in November 1997, four Student Learning Managers were appointed an OTEN.

The aim of the Student Learning Manager is to implement strategies to increase working and retention rates. This places a great importance on getting students working and keeping going until completion. OTEN is considered the market leader in distance education in Australia, and, as such, we should develop and protect that reputation by consistently addressing our core business of assisting students to reach their educational goals.

Abstract:

With the increasing popularity of flexible learning, and the resultant large enrolment numbers, providing individualised support for all students has become increasingly difficult. The consequences of which are reflected in lower working retention, and completion rates in distance education.

In the past, individualised “mainstream” student support has generally been relegated to the teachers, with various strategies and solutions being devised. However, the tendency has occurred for the “wheel to be reinvented” within an institution in regards to the trialing, implementation, and evaluation of these strategies. Faced with the enormity of the work alone, innovative ideas to support students have been localised, or at the worst, lost.

At the Open Training & Education Network (OTEN) this problem is being addressed through the implementation of four Student Learning Managers, one of each faculty area. The role of the Student Learning Manager is still evolving, however, the primary aims of the position is to share information and ideas within, and between faculties, to assist staff in their efforts to steer the student to study success. The initial results – measured in terms of student working rates – reveal that this increased communication within OLP, which is facilitated through the Student Learning Management position, has been extremely successful.

The aim of this workshop is to consider the management of student support for mainstream students engaged in flexible learning, and consequently discuss what role and responsibilities this management may entail.