

# Tutor Handbook

Tools and ideas to help tutors run effective online courses.

[www.onlineinset.net](http://www.onlineinset.net)

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## What's different about online learning?

Online learning gives increased flexibility

- Students can learn in groups using a computer suite or study on their own at work or at home or anywhere where there is Internet access
- The tutor can enrol students from one setting, or take students from a number of settings
- The tutor can track student progress using online administration tools
- Course participants can contact their tutor or other course members through email, or through the online course discussion forums
- The materials are always available so even if a group session is missed then students can catch up

Online Learning gives increased accessibility

- Traditional courses are timetabled for a set time and place whereas online courses can run at almost any time
- Materials are online 24/7 and tutors and students can make reference to them
- Students and tutors can read and write and work even when they are travelling
- Tutors can regularly check student progress from any online computer
- Short periods of time can be utilised to go online and read messages

Tutor Preparation

- The core presentation is already written for you
- Tutors need to get familiar with the structure and content of the course
- Tutors can give their energies to helping students to apply the learning and can add additional tasks and discussion topics
- There are opportunities for blended learning where the online course is combined with face to face meetings.

Duration

- Courses can run for a set time with a clear start and finish date
- Cohorts can be established and left open for people to join and leave as the tutor invites more students to join
- The core courses take about six hours to work through, but can be extended when additional activities and materials are included

Tutor role

- Teaching, guiding, creating a social dimension for learning, advising, assessing, supporting, facilitating, moderating.....

## Starting up Technical skills

- The online courses are web-based using an SQL data base. The animations are written in Adobe Flash and videos are played through Windows Media Player. These programmes get updated about every six months so you need to make sure you get the latest versions. Instructions are given in the FAQ part of the site.
- Some of your students will be very proficient in using computers and others will be novices. When running a face to face session, encourage the experienced computer users to support those who are less familiar.
- When running a course in a computer suite for the first time make sure that you know how to switch on all the equipment you will need. Network computers have passwords, and you may need the administrator to enable sound files to be played. If a computer is not working see if there are additional Internet connected laptops that can be used as a back-up.
- All students will need an email address and some may require assistance in setting this up.

## Technical Tips

- Make sure that you have a phone so that you can get help if there are problems when a large group of people are all registering at the same time. These problems are often down to individual issues with the computers being used.
- If a log in fails after a student has registered then do not try to register them again but log them on using someone else's log in details so they can start to read the course content whilst you phone **07817 545221** (Online Training Project Officer) or **01273 507007** (Web Support Officer) for immediate assistance.
- It is very important that the correct course password is entered when people register. Make sure that you write this out for people and emphasise that it must be checked carefully. They will only need to enter this when they register for the course.
- Make sure that all students make a note of their user name and password and write this down on a small card along with the website address for the course.

- The online training officer makes regular checks to see who has joined the online community, and if there is a problem with registration will promptly resolve the issues.

## **Tutor Preparation**

- Online training is different in that the main presentation of knowledge and understanding is delivered for you but it is written by another author. You will need to give time during your initial tutor training day, and on subsequent occasions to become familiar with what is included on the course.
- It is important that you make a note of how you can extend and embed the learning in your normal support role to schools. You may wish to set additional tasks, or draw out further application through writing forum questions based on the content. You may wish to discuss individual pupils directly with students and this is probably best done face to face or through email to preserve confidentiality.
- It is also good to make note of what additional materials you can blend into the learning. It may be that you will want to add your own local resources, such as handouts, videos, additional reading lists or websites, or ask students to share examples of resources they are using in their settings. (E.g. vocabulary lists under subjects (SLCN); social stories, visual timetables, transition plans (ASD) ;school policies, ABC chart, or a recorded interview with a child (Behaviour). These can generally be distributed by email or at any face to face meetings.
- The courses are designed to progress in a linear fashion but when you put the mouse in the hand of the student you may find that they choose to hop around and explore. They may even leave the course to check their email or look at another site because they have control and can surf the web if they so choose. Students read at different rates. Those who are visual learners will watch all the animations and then later read the text. This flexibility is good but can be disconcerting for the tutor as they move around the room and see what people are doing. In traditional courses tutors have more control and are the “sage on the stage”. With online learning you become the “guide on the side”.
- During your first face to face session be sure to direct people to the social area and get them to participate in the discussion forums. You will need to make a minimum requirement for participation otherwise people will not join in. This could be one original contribution and one reply to another student per week or per discussion topic. You must set this to be a manageable work load for you.

- You must consider how many face to face sessions you will run (if any) and how long the course will last. Face to face sessions work well in a computer suite with everyone on individual PCs and if there is also a whiteboard then group discussion can be fostered by commenting on a particular page.
- The courses can be completed together in three half day sessions or twilight sessions held over a half term or longer would give time for people to read the materials, take part in the activities and participate in the discussion forums. It is important to secure time for staff to access the materials as part of their working day, but also to expect that additional time will be given to participate in discussions and further tasks.
- It is easier to develop a sense of community if the course duration is a limited time. If courses are open ended then we find that students do not tend to complete the course.
- Tutors who have a peripatetic role are also able to meet up with students who are studying on their own and discuss their progress. They may have a large group of people from a range of different settings. This is where it is very helpful to put the student in contact with others through the forums and email.
- The tutor makes the decision as to whether the student has completed the course to a satisfactory level.

## **Leading Forum Discussions**

- The tutor is able to write welcome messages that the student can read after they rejoin their course. These can be updated regularly keeping a record of all messages, or the tutor can remove old messages as necessary.
- It is important to put your students at ease with the technology, the course and also each other so telling them that this is a new way of learning for everyone helps.
- It is good to get people to introduce themselves and tell others on the course who they are, and why they have joined the course and perhaps share something interesting about themselves. So often people begin the course desiring access to the course content, but stay on the course as a result of their membership of a positive social learning community.
- Decide how much minimum participation you expect in the forums and let your students know (through the message board).

- It will be much more interesting for you if you have a range of questions or tasks under each section of the course. Let your students choose which discussions they enter, and encourage them to K.I.S.S. (keep it short and simple) and W.R.I.T.E. (warm, respectful, inquisitive, tentative and encouraging) especially when replying to each other's comments.
- Encourage students to regularly go online for short periods and read the forum discussions.
- Tell your students how often you will be present. If you are able to check forums every day then let them know. If you have set one session a week to respond to forums then tell them you will be responding on a specific day. If you are away for a time then also let students know. Tutors will receive an email whenever someone contributes to a discussion. This gives you an immediate sense of who is participating and acts as a prompt to follow-up if this is appropriate.

## Writing Interesting Questions

- The course contains online quizzes that assess understanding of facts, and the forums are design to give the student the opportunity to reflect and apply their learning in their own situation and to learn from others.
- The tutor can shape and mould the learning by designing a range of questions that will draw out the application of the content and in replying to contributions can share their own experience and knowledge.
  - **Discursive questions:** comment on, describe, assess, consider. These sort of open ended questions enable students to probe and examine further.  
**e.g.** Comment on this quote (Behaviour/Understanding/p2) "Not all challenging behaviour is a problem for the person doing it"
  - **Comprehension questions:** compare, contrast, state in your own words, infer, explain. These questions enable the student to think through what they understand from their own perspective.  
**e.g.** Explain the difference between verbal and non-verbal communication. Is it possible to communicate using only one mode? (SLCN/understanding/p 8)
  - **Experience questions:** how, when, where, what etc. These questions enable students to share personal experiences in a way that can help others.

**e.g.** People with ASD can have sensory anomalies. Tell the group about one example that you have encountered and how you helped the person to cope with this sensitivity. (ASD/Understanding/p 10-15)

- **Opinion questions:** Do you agree? What is your view? These questions enable people to discuss theories in the light of their experience and viewpoint and recognise that others may have a different understanding.

**e.g.** Do you agree with this statement, “The effectiveness of a particular incentive or sanction is not dependent on its size. On the contrary, very mild sanctions can be just as effective as severe ones.” (Behaviour/Interventions/P14)

## Setting additional tasks

- It may be possible to set additional tasks for a group to do according to the time available. These tasks could be individual or group tasks and need to be relevant and practical.
- Students can be asked to write a case study on a child they support, or read an article, or prepare a resource that could be shared with others (e.g. visual timetable, social story, list of incentives, prepare key vocabulary for a particular year group curriculum subject) It is good to give students a choice of task and enough time to complete this.
- The tutor could also ask individuals to be willing to write a summary of the key points raised in a topic or over a week.

## Giving Feedback

- The tutor writes the questions and tasks for the forum and can also respond to students either individually through email, or directly and publicly through the forum response facility or else generally through the message board.
- The tutor can indicate a “hum of awareness” by responding to a few contributions, and can, through feedback maintain a friendly, positive and open learning environment.
- The tutor can comment and draw out the discussion and add new elements. The tutor can refer to other comments that the student may not have read, and point the students to further areas of learning.
- The tutor needs to get the students responding to each other-sharing experiences, asking questions, replying to contributions, so that as the

- course develops the group can become less dependent on the tutor's lead.
- If students want to have further contact with each other then they could participate in synchronous (real time) discussion either through instant messaging (msn, Yahoo Messenger) or through Skype ([www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)) and agree to chat at set times. It is possible to post longer tasks up on a blog (a very basic free web space [www.blogger.com/start](http://www.blogger.com/start)) where people can read them and comment, and students could be encouraged to set this up themselves.
  - Some students will be very active whilst others will read and contribute less. Some people will have personal circumstances that make it difficult to complete the course. Sending a gentle reminder a month after the course has closed should give stragglers the chance to complete the course.

## **Accreditation**

On completion of the course you will be able to issue a Certificate of Online Completion accredited by Online Inset. However, there is no reason why you could not make your own submission for accreditation to a local university or other institution, either as a stand alone course, or as an element in a more extensive training programme. You will need to discuss how to do this, including the relevant accreditation criteria directly with the accrediting body.