



**Can Distance Learning become an  
effective mode of delivery for the Public  
Health Masters programme?**

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**LUTON**

# **Why - Distance learning For THE Public Health Masters ?**

Questions:

Why did we start?

Why are we doing it?

Can we do it?

# Why did we start?

- Enquires made in relation to the Public Health Master programme between February and July 2006 were 120
- Of these 120, 22 accept other University
- 88 was conversion failure rate
- All 88 students had made 5 or more email requests  
for information

# Audit

- Questionnaires were sent out in September 2006
- 100 % response after 6 weeks.

# Answers

- Countries of origin - 13 UK, 10 EU, 65 from all over the world however the majority were from developing countries.
- Slightly more women than men but this was of no significant.
- Neither was their qualification, type of work.
- The course fee was not cited as a problem.
- The problem lay with the 80% attendance

# Reasons offered:

**Home** - no study leave

too costly travel per day to study sessions

**Overseas** - If I leave my job I may not get one  
when I return

I have family responsibilities so I  
cannot stay in the UK

**Length of course** – was not an issue

**Course content** - was considered flexible

# **Solution**

95% - requested a distance learning  
pathway

# Why are we doing it?



It would appear the demographics of post graduate students entering studies are moving towards the mature and slightly more female candidates.

As non-traditional students, they may well be juggling family responsibilities with a return to study.

# Distance Learning – why?

Student comments:

Enables study when time is right for me!

Enables repeated attempts

Enables time with the family without concerns.



# How can we do it?

If we consider delivery of this educational programme via Distance Learning, this would overcome geographical boundaries and would support the autonomy of a student (Billings *et al.*, 2001).

However Kevern and Webb (2004) identified in that mature

- students:
- A. They often lack coping strategies
  - B. They need support systems for effectively managing the course workload

**What are the major  
problems? .**

**How do we enable and  
sustain engagement if we  
consider a Distance  
Learning approach?**

# **A quantitative research study investigated how engagement can be achieved?**

**Students group - Operating Department Practitioners**

**The students were in 2 cohorts**

**Group A     21**

**Group B     23**

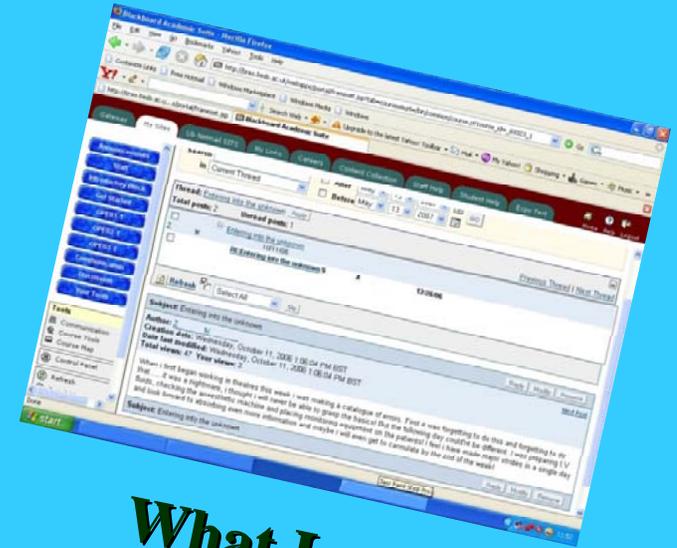
**They were matched groups in relation to demographic features**

# Group Participation

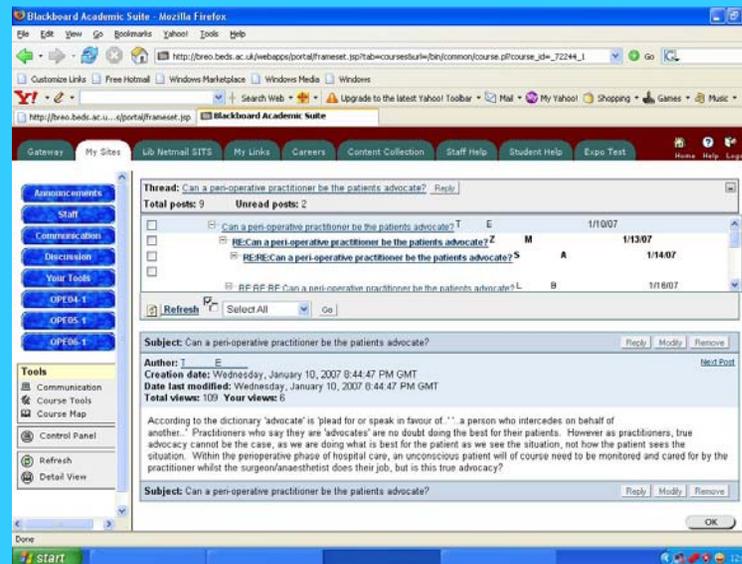


Who I am

The Learning Community

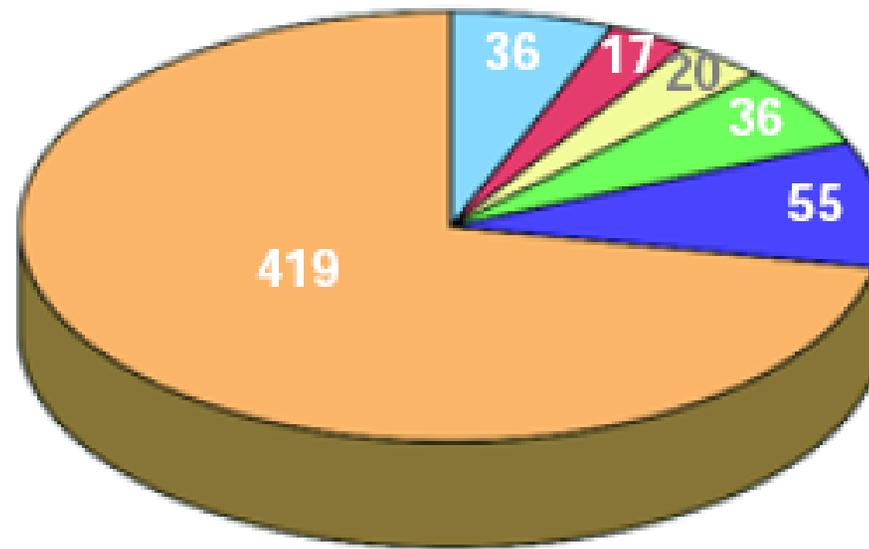


What I am



# Results

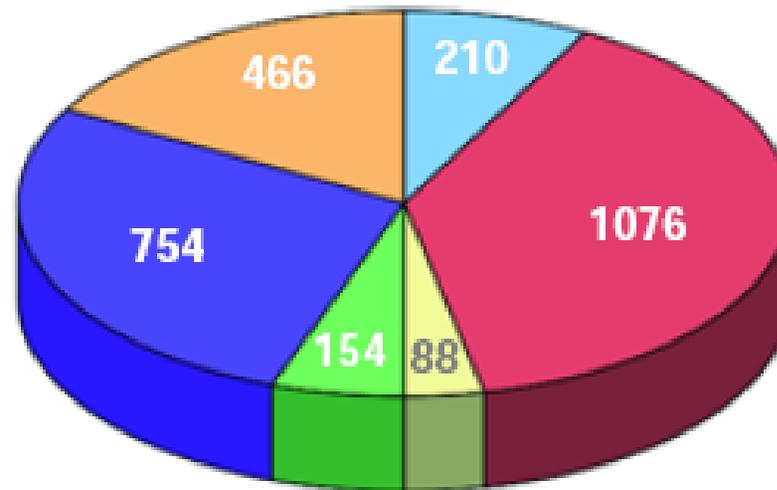
Analysis of hits made by Cohort A



- Admin Info
- Assignments
- Learning Resources
- Learning Materials
- Web Links
- Get Started

# Results

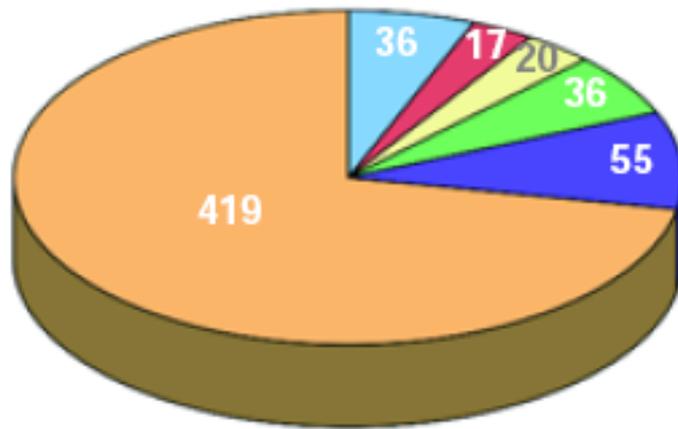
Analysis of hits made by Cohort B



- Admin Info
- Assignments
- Learning Resources
- Learning Materials
- Web Links
- Get Started

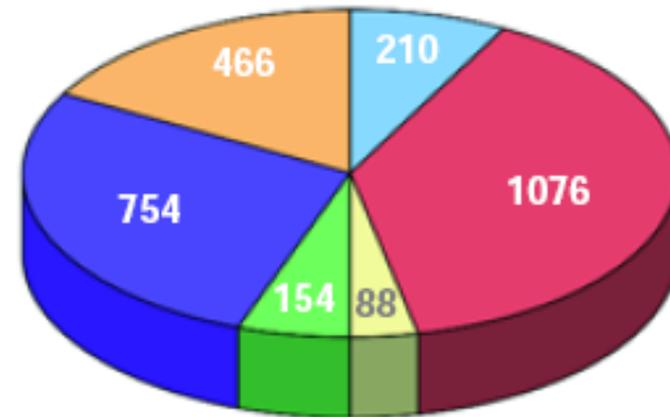
# Results

Analysis of hits made by Cohort A



Admin Info      Learning Materials  
Assignments      Web Links  
Learning Resources      Get Started

Analysis of hits made by Cohort B



Admin Info      Learning Materials  
Assignments      Web Links  
Learning Resources      Get Started

## Question

*Is there active constructivism taking place within the Operating Department Practice undergraduate pathway?*

*What effect, if any is this having on the student experience?*

## Question

As previously stated the demographics of the A and B cohorts were identical as were the results of the semester 1 exercises, we decided for our intervention we would introduce four discussion boards.

Each of these discussion boards has a potential topic for the students final paper.

The instructions given to the students were that they had weeks 1-4 where they should engage with the a synchronistic discussion on at least five occasions.

Meaningful debate using references to support this debate on the topic they had chosen should be used.

Weeks 5&6 the students could draft a paper in for submission in week 7, it was suggested that the students use three of the five posting to support their paper.

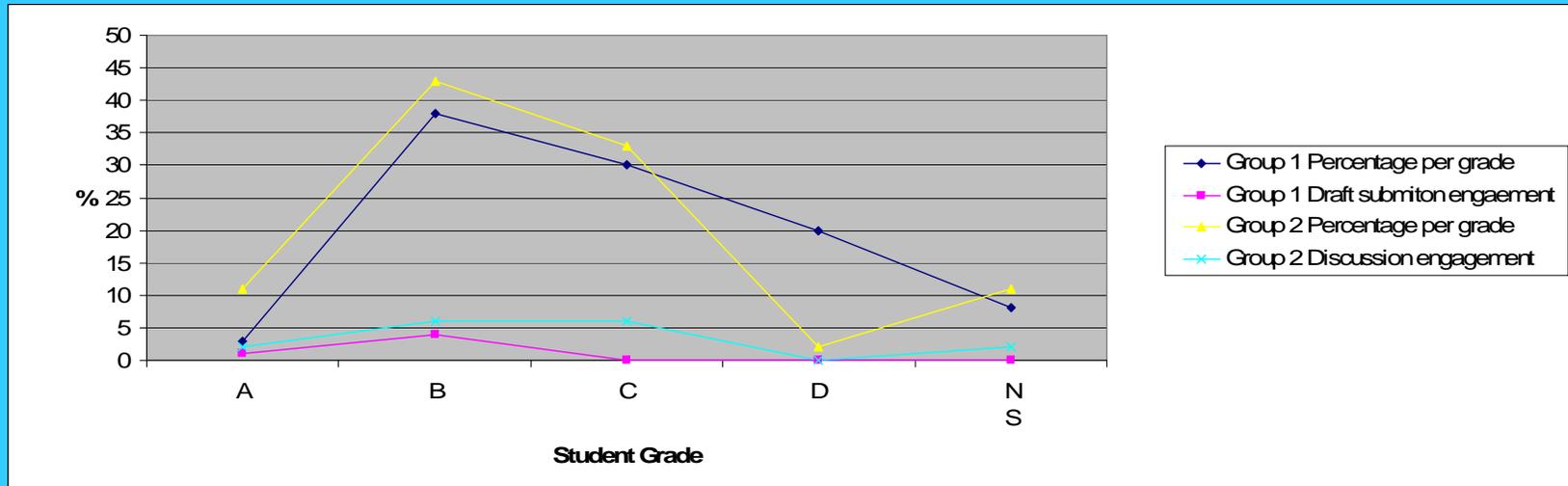
Feedback was to be given in week 13 with the seminar presentation in week 15 with the submission of a 2,500 word essay as with the A cohort

The close of week 5 afforded us the first raw data, 80% of the cohort had engaged with the intervention, confusingly 50% of the cohort had engaged with topic 1, 50% with topic 2, 78% with topic 3 and 71% with topic 4.

Further investigation revealed that students had engaged and supported peers in topics outside of their own chosen one.

Week 7 saw the submission of draft papers by 80% of the Cohort B in comparison 10% by Cohort A. A comparison between the grades of cohort A and B are as follows.

# Student grades



Grade	Cohort A Percentage per grade	Cohort B Percentage per grade
A	3 %	11 %
B	38 %	43 %
C	30 %	33 %
D	20 %	2 %
NS	8 %	11 %

# **Distance Learning could be the way forward.**

**It achieves the key purpose of higher education  
which is to facilitate the autonomy of learners.**

**Boud (2000) and Yorke (2003)**

**Introducing diversity in delivery addresses the  
juxtaposition between learner and teacher.**

# **Conclusion – The way forward**

**Consider carefully the outcomes of the educational programme.**

**Use Course Genie to change our materials into creditable**

# **The Future**

**Blended distance learning is in the hands of the educators.**

**The potential benefits for all the participants in this learning experience are plain to see with the only limiting factor being the imagination.**

# **Our belief**

**Is that blended learning is a  
genie in a bottle, and once  
released it will never go back  
into that bottle again!**

# Recommendations

- 1. Balanced blended learning would meet the needs of future Public Health Masters students.**
- 2. On line needs to be carefully constructed so it is purposeful**
- 3. Engagement needs to be appropriately designed and managed.**



# The Question

**Do we have the skill in the  
same way as we have the  
theory?**



**Thank you**

**Do you have answers for  
us?**

## References:

Billings, D.M., Ward, J.W., Penton-Cooper, L., (2001). Distance learning in nursing. *Seminars in Oncology Nursing* 17 (1), pp 48-54.

Boud, D. (2000) 'Sustainable assessment: Rethinking assessment for the learning society', *Studies in Continuing Education* 22(2), pp.151-167.

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