



Almpanis, Timos and Miller, Eric and Ross, Maggie and Price, Daran and James, Richard. (2010).  
Piloting Web Conferencing for flexible curriculum delivery. In: Association for learning technology  
conference - ALTC2010, 7-9 Sep 2010, Nottingham, UK.

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We will also consider the inevitable culture change issues that accompany the move from a proprietary to an opensource system.

Participants in this session will gain an understanding of the approach taken to embedding educational technologies in a strategic framework. They will also receive ideas and our lessons learnt on a set of key topics.

Short paper | **Theme:** Four | **Session:** Meeting needs by curriculum development

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## **Piloting the use of synchronous web conferencing for flexible curriculum delivery**

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This paper will report on a pilot project on the use of innovative web technologies – web-conferencing or else virtual classrooms – to enhance the teaching and learning experience. Web conferencing systems are the digital alternative of a class meeting and they can bring together a group of geographically dispersed students. This project focuses on the use of web-conferencing systems with adult, part-time learners who are studying for a postgraduate qualification; this particular student cohort is comprised by busy professionals who are working full-time and have minimum physical presence on campus – nine residential weekends per year.

The selected course has been identified as the most suitable course for this pilot and could be a model of integrating innovative learning technology to redesign the curriculum; as more blended/ distance learning courses are going through validation in various departments of the University, it is anticipated that this course could be the model for the deployment of synchronous tools and a great opportunity has presented itself for synchronous online communications to be explored and exploited.

The MSc programme has been running since January 2008 and student feedback indicates that isolation and lack of study support in between the residentials are the key barriers to their learning. Hourly, timetabled, fortnightly sessions spread in between two residential sessions would possibly increase students' engagement with their studies and would give them an opportunity to discuss with their tutors any course-related questions in real time. The short, scheduled web tutorials have been delivered every other Sunday since February 2010.

Qualitative methods – interviews and focus groups - have been utilised for gathering data as they are seen as fit for purpose. The limited number of informants (3 lecturers + 13 students) does not allow for generalisations to be made from the findings; however, they are highlighting some of the affordances and limitations of synchronous virtual classrooms and they might be of interest to anyone who has utilised or is planning to utilise synchronous web conferencing to support students' learning.

**Chen, Nian-Shing, Ko, Kinshuk and Lin, Taiyu** 2005. *A model for synchronous learning using the Internet*. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 42:2, 181 - 194