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Distance Learning for Information Professionals

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Title: Distance Learning for Information Professionals: a practical, reality-driven model for postgraduate education

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Abstract:

The expansion of distance learning and an understanding of the benefits it can offer to both the university and the individual has led to the growth of methodologies, pedagogies and models aimed at diversifying and maximising the student experience and increasing student numbers. This paper will address these issues in relation to the establishment of a flexible, but complex, distance learning model developed for the international market by the Centre for Archive and Information Studies (CAIS) at the University of Dundee. It will argue that the role of technology can be overplayed for an educational programme seeking to provide professional, online qualifications to information professionals and will provide a practical, reality-driven example of providing education at a distance that will assist fellow educators to make informed decisions in the implementation process. Based on experience, the authors will argue that effective online instruction is dependent upon (1) high-quality and easily accessible learning materials; (2) expert tuition; (3) student support; (4) flexibility; (5) the creation of an online community; (6) and reliable technology.

Keywords: Distance Learning; Information; Professional; CAIS; Archives; Technology

Introduction

Online education is here to stay. The establishment of Open Universities in Europe and Canada from the 1970s increased remote access to higher education through correspondence courses, television and radio. In subsequent decades, distance learning has grown to represent an increasing proportion of academic courses within universities and colleges throughout the world, facilitated by the development of both the internet and educational technologies [1]. Its flexibility, accessibility and affordability enables people to access an education that they may otherwise be unable to obtain due to physical distance, schedule conflicts and unaffordable costs and it enables universities to reach-out to sectors of society and areas of the world that they may be unable to reach with 'traditional' on-campus taught programmes, diversifying their student profile in the process.

This expansion of distance learning and an understanding of the benefits it can offer to both the university and the individual has led to the growth of methodologies, pedagogies and models aimed at diversifying and maximising the student experience and increasing student numbers. This paper will address these issues in relation to the establishment of a flexible, but complex, distance learning model developed for the international market by the Centre for Archive and Information Studies (CAIS) at the University of Dundee. It will argue that the role of technology can be overplayed for an educational programme seeking to provide professional, online qualifications to information professionals and will provide a practical, reality-driven example of providing education at a distance that will assist fellow educators to make informed decisions in the implementation process. Based on experience, the authors argue that effective online instruction is dependent upon (1) high-quality and easily

accessible learning materials; (2) expert tuition; (3) student support; (4) flexibility; (5) the creation of an online community; (6) and reliable technology.

Background

Formal postgraduate recordkeeping education, provided by the Centre for Archive and Information Studies, has been available since 2004. The establishment of the Centre was preceded by significant discussion on the form recordkeeping education should take and how it could be provided. Throughout the previous two decades, debate had centred around how recordkeepers based in Scotland and other parts of the UK, unable to travel to study at existing academic programmes located during that period in London, Liverpool, Dublin, Aberystwyth and Bangor, might gain professional knowledge, skills and expertise and a formal academic qualification.

Throughout 2002 and 2003 a Scottish-based collaboration between a number of Scottish Universities was discussed, which would have offered a multi-site postgraduate degree in Archives and Records Management. Despite much support and goodwill, the discussions failed to produce a collaborative way forward and the idea was abandoned. The representatives from the University of Dundee felt strongly that a route into a career in recordkeeping was needed in the UK, and should be readily accessible to all, not only those who could travel to Dundee (which is located 60 miles north of Edinburgh). The decision was made to support the development of a Master's programme in Archives and Records Management by distance learning. Support from the University in the form of a Strategic Initiative Grant was provided and the Centre for Archive and Information Studies (CAIS)

was established within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (now the School of Humanities), enrolling its first students in September 2004.

The Centre now offers Masters and Postgraduate Diploma qualifications in Archives and Records Management; Records Management and Information Rights; Records Management and Digital Preservation; Family and Local History as well as Postgraduate Certificates in Archives and Records Management; Archival Studies; Records Management; Records Management and Information Rights; Digital Recordkeeping; and Family and Local History. It has over 35 modules available, all of which are available for single-module study via a Continuing Professional Development route. All programmes seek to emphasise the importance of theory *and* practice. With theory and practice embedded in the curriculum CAIS educates professional recordkeepers, not vocational practitioners. In providing a degree of theoretical contextualisation, the CAIS approach corresponds to the emergence of Archival Science as a separate autonomous scientific discipline and the increasing awareness of the importance of records and information within society. Since 2004 the Centre for Archive and Information Studies has provided postgraduate educational provision for over 1000 archivists, records managers and genealogists and is the world-leader in providing distance learning education across these disciplines. This success has been recognised with the University and the School of Humanities where CAIS staff have now been charged with the re-development of the MLitt in Scottish History by distance learning programme, sit on a small University working group whose remit is to examine new educational systems that may assist distance learning more than the system currently in place, displaying the increasing importance being given to distance learning as a mode of study within the University of Dundee, and act as the School of Humanities Distance Learning Officer.

A practical, reality-driven model for Postgraduate education

In 2003/04, when a suite of distance learning professional educational programmes was being discussed and established by CAIS, it was not a given that technology could explicitly enhance learning (what the literature now explicitly calls Technology Enhanced Learning [TEL]),[2] as opposed to simply facilitating the expansion of learning to a wider audience.

This is unsurprising as the technology was obviously not as advanced as it is today.

Therefore, it was common for distance learning programmes to start from an unsophisticated base, utilising technology that was designed to facilitate on-campus teaching. Seen as a poor relation to on-campus taught provision, distance learning was often left to piggy-back onto whichever systems and software were presently in place within the educational organisation that played host to the distance learning programme. It was frequently seen as a cheap alternative to taught programmes. It was obvious from the outset that CAIS programmes would be no different in this respect, having to deal with limited financial resources, a small number of staff and a legacy system (Blackboard Learn) that was not distance learning specific. Therefore, the opportunity to be original and dynamic in the technological provision that was built into the CAIS programmes was, admittedly, constrained from the outset by external forces. As Kirkwood and Price state:

Using technology is costly, not only in terms of the financial investment made by institutions for infrastructure, equipment and technical support staff, but also in relation to the personal investment made by staff and students in using the technology for teaching and learning [3].

This will be common to many academic environments where educational practitioners considering the development of distance learning programmes are not specialised in system software and virtual learning environments; do not have the time to develop knowledge and expertise in these areas; and do not have an education technologist available in their organisation to take the lead, generate new ideas or implement technologically-innovative ideas.

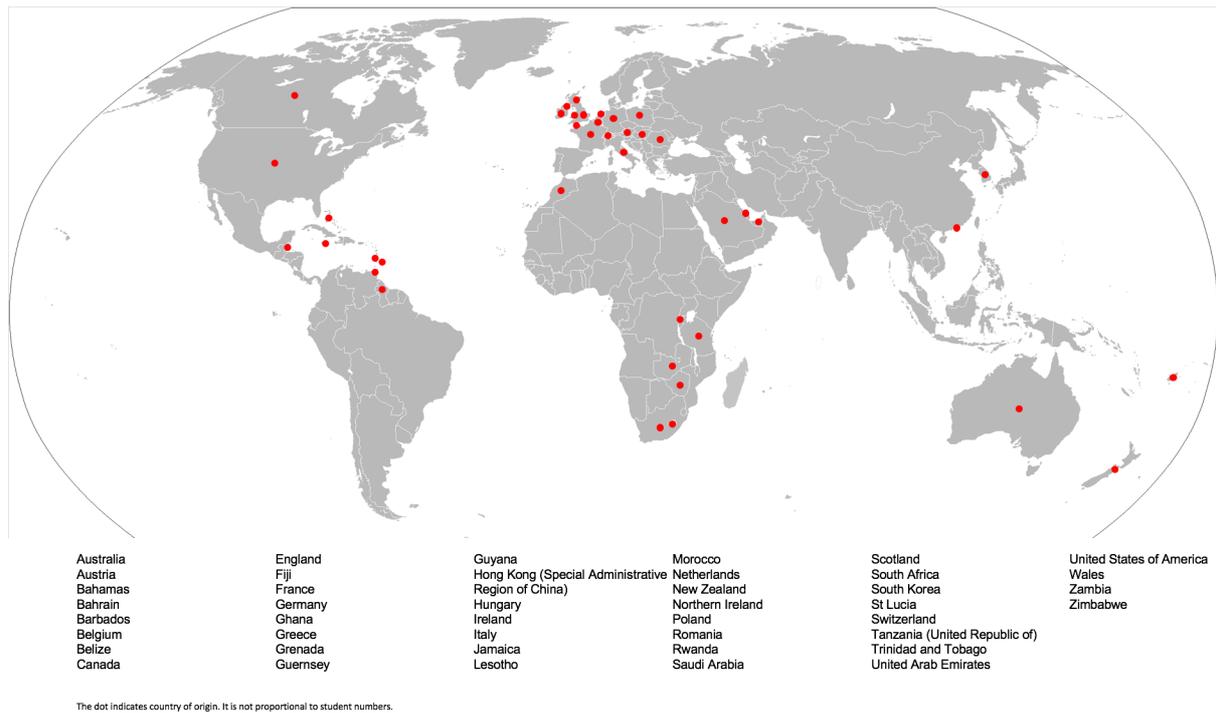
However, the success of CAIS programmes illustrates that technology does not have to be, nor should it be, the dominant factor when setting up a distance learning programme and, in this instance, a distance learning programme for information professionals. Considering why may be difficult to conceive of in a period where we are, as a society, generally quite technologically deterministic. However, the key questions that all teaching and learning systems need to consider carefully are what are the needs of the intended students and what are the intended learning outcomes of the course? Distance learning students can bring different challenges when considering these fundamental questions. For example, in 2006 Tallent-Runnels and colleagues found that learners at a distance were (1) mostly non-traditional students, who were older than normal college-age students; (2) were highly motivated, goal-oriented, and determined to achieve good learning outcomes from online education; and (3) normally had important roles in their local communities [4]. They are, in other words, predominantly a different breed from the straight-out-of-school, taught on-campus student.

To effectively ascertain what is required from a distance learning programme that understands these challenges and reflects difference necessitates a period of discussion and consultation relating to distance learning and educational pedagogies prior to moving onto

the developmental stages of an educational programme. In 2003, when CAIS had its period of consultation and was considering the needs of the intended students that would be coming to our organisation for a professional qualification, the following questions / areas were asked and discussed: what will the age range of our students be? Where will our students be located around the world? What level of prior learning will our students have? What family commitments will our students have? What employment commitments will our students have? Who will be paying for our students to study? What technological knowledge and understanding will our students have? What personality type are our students likely to be? Developing a programme rationale and outline based upon answers to these questions provides a rich information base upon which to underpin the educational programme that will ultimately be created. What was clear from an analysis of our results was that innovative and cutting-edge technological provision was not at the top of the list. One of the main reasons for this was that it was evident that some students would not have a high-level of technological knowledge and it was felt necessary to ensure that individuals were not discriminated against. Professional postgraduate programmes tend to attract students of a working age seeking to enter the professional arena. Additionally, a broadness of programme provision where-by students can take Archive, Records Management or Family and Local History programmes at a variety of different levels (Masters / Postgraduate Diploma/ Postgraduate Certificate / single modules for Continuing Professional Development) can create vast discrepancies in age range and it was evident for CAIS that a Family and Local History programme, for example, would generally attract students from an older age group, many of whom would be retired. This has been borne out since 2004 where over half of the students on the programme have been situated in the age-range of 51 and over.

Admittedly, in 2003/04, computer literacy was not as commonplace as it is today although it may be incorrect to assume that now all are able to manoeuvre around a computer or mobile device with ease and expertise. For example in 2015, as reported in the Daily Telegraph, the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) said many workers lacked the basic IT and computer literacy skills needed to support Britain's burgeoning digital economy[5]. It is important that students are able to work with the educational system and are not feeling challenged or even threatened by the user interface that they are required to utilise on a regular basis or unable to complete an aspect of the programme because of their unfamiliarity with technology.

Similarly, a distance learning programme with genuine desires to be international in the proper meaning of the world (rather than simply oriented to Western societies) has to recognise that bandwidth can still be unreliable in many parts of the world and that students may only have the ability to spend short periods of time online engaging with the Virtual Learning Environment. It can also be difficult to convey complex technological instructions to students at a distance, particularly for those who do not consider English as not their first language. From the conception stage of the CAIS programmes it was decided that one of the key objectives would be to facilitate training and professional qualifications for all students, irrespective of location. As a result, these internationally-focused programmes would not be aimed solely at those working or volunteering in Scotland or the United Kingdom and would not discriminate, as far as possible, against students in less affluent areas of the world. CAIS has currently had students from 43 different countries.



Therefore, if this analysis led CAIS educators to believe that educational provision for information professionals cannot be guided by technology to prevent discrimination against sectors of society that were key markets for the programmes being created, what principles did our results suggest ought to be at the centre of programme development? Based on experience, the authors argue that effective online education is dependent upon six key components. They are as follows: high-quality and easily accessible learning materials; expert tuition; student support; flexibility; the creation of an online community; and reliable technology.

Replicas of first generation distance learning programmes, the main features of which lie in correspondence learning and a reliance on print material and customised textbooks, should not, any longer, be an option for educational providers. Providing students with text books, followed by a requirement to submit work at a specific date creates a static educational experience and difficulties with revising content, which can be regarded as unacceptable

within a profession which is constantly developing and fast-changing. A professional qualification taught by distance learning should provide an opportunity to ensure that students put theory and content into direct practice in their working or volunteering environment. As a result, individuals on professional educational programmes often want simply to (1) locate information; (2) be given the tools with which to analyse and discuss this information; and (3) understand how to apply this knowledge to a workplace or within individual professional development. Quality learning materials facilitate this and they need to be easy-to-navigate and have clarity in terms of what is required. Additionally, a common feature on a professional qualification programme is the financial sponsor – often, a student will be working in an organisation that wishes to ensure that their employee obtains the relevant professional qualification to enable them to carry out their duties professionally and to provide expertise and knowledge within the organisation. Indeed, for entry onto CAIS programmes it is a requirement that students are working or volunteering in an appropriate information-centric / recordkeeping organisation. Sponsoring employers often understandably demand to see visual evidence that students are receiving appropriate educational materials, expert module tuition and a breadth of available study options that will enable students to tailor their degrees to their needs or the needs of their sponsoring organisation. These factors contribute to a clear difference in providing educational programmes that are specifically designed to train people to become professionals in a given area and whom are currently employed or volunteering in a professional environment. Therefore, extensive consideration must be given to whether the programme can be successfully managed, authored and taught within the workload of internal university members of staff or whether a policy of recruiting individuals external to the university on a consultancy-basis would be best. A decision was made by CAIS to commission external module authors, experts in specific subject areas, to provide academic and professional

content, IPR and copyright of which was then assigned to the University (thereby securing the content in the long-term). This was due to an understanding that the core team at CAIS was simply too small and under-equipped to provide adequate, fully-rounded and balanced information education in all areas of professional theory and practice. For example, following a reorganisation in 2014, CAIS has 2 academic faculty members, the University Archivist on a 0.3 FTE and 1.5 administrative staff. It is clear that such a small team cannot be expert in all areas of study to the depth required. Innovative solutions have to be found and commissioning external expertise has enabled the department to currently offer 35 modules for study in subjects areas as diverse as Archive Management, Complying with Information Legislation, Palaeography and Diplomatic, Oral History and House History [6]. This enables the provision of teaching materials, the ability to create a breadth of programme structure and module choice that can appeal to both students and sponsoring organisations, and ensures that students benefit from content created by practitioners with significant experience that is based in practice. It also allows for the contracting of authors from a wide range of countries, ensuring an outward-looking international approach. These module authors then have the option to become module tutors. It is also imperative that students at a distance have access to external literature – difficult to access books resources can be sent to students, copyright-permitting, or made available for loan and reading lists are sent to students in advance of modules so that they can make arrangements to obtain or loan texts where required. Additionally, key information management journals - *Archivaria*, *Records Management Journal*, *Archival Science* and so on – must be available to students either via the organisational library or separate access arrangements.

In the CAIS example, module authors provide approximately 50,000 words per module. This material is uploaded to the Virtual Learning Environment and split into units and sections. It

is also available as a PDF for students who prefer, or need, to work offline. These learning materials are delivered in the style of a seminar or tutorial with students being encouraged to absorb and analyse information, think about its practical application, and extend their knowledge through their own research in a number of ways. Formative and summative assessment are integrated into the learning materials. Additionally, this approach enables immediate transferal of materials to students, enables them to search the text easily and increases the ability of staff to quickly make module changes, updating, revising and ensuring that they are as up-to-date as can be realistically expected. It also, very importantly, enables the embedding on the VLE of copies of archival material – crucial for certain modules such as Palaeography and Diplomatic. Therefore, whilst this approach may not be cutting-edge, it does meet the key objectives of ensuring that students seeking to obtain a qualification and become information professionals are able to easily locate key module information, are given the tools with which to analyse and discuss this information and are equipped to understand how to apply this knowledge to their workplace or professional development.

However, securing quality learning materials is not sufficient on its own and it needs to be coupled with expert tuition and a consistent teaching presence. For distance learning students, teaching presence is of additional importance. Studying at a distance can be an isolating experience and responses from tutors are critical to students learning - they contribute to student satisfaction with the educational provision. Students require direct instruction, timely and informative feedback that they can apply in a practical, professional setting, quick responses to queries and tutor-led facilitation of discussion. Successful student-teacher interaction will serve to augment the students' independent interaction with the course contents. In the view of Bailey and Card, fostering good relationships and communication between instructors and students is crucial and can be achieved by instructors' empathy for

students, passion for teaching, and willingness to help students succeed [7]. This can be achieved in a variety of ways and routine technology can be utilised here to enable this - online instructors do need to facilitate interaction in different ways via asynchronous and synchronous communication in text, audio, and video formats, for example. However, ensuring that quality teaching is taking place is difficult in a standard teaching model and is admittedly under more strain if employing external individuals to tutor on your programmes. As a result, time does need to be spent training teachers, monitoring their performance and ensuring that an adequate amount of time is being committed to the teaching process - this is particularly key as studies have indicated that it takes more time to teach online courses than that on traditional, on-campus taught courses [8]. One of the failings of distance learning programmes in general is that, as Crawford-Ferre & Wiest have written, 'most instructors new to online teaching begin with little to no training or preparation specific to this delivery mode [9].' Mitigating this is difficult and time-intensive. Tutors at CAIS, as Honorary Teaching Fellows of the University, receive full guidance on University policy and procedures, on the use of the VLE and on CAIS teaching practice. All modules are read and feedback provided by the Programme Leaders [10] prior to content being placed on the VLE and any substantive changes in content or assessment must be agreed in advance of them being made available. Only CAIS staff upload module content to the VLE to ensure that the content is presented appropriately. CAIS staff request a sample of tutor feedback on assessed tasks to ensure that consistency is achieved across all modules and between programmes and second marking is undertaken in-house. Annual Teaching Review meetings, attended by tutors, offer the opportunity to discuss a variety of issues surrounding the tutoring process however the meeting must be restricted to two days as tutors are current information professionals and are not paid to attend. They often do so out of goodwill, taking annual leave or losing out on consultancy work. As a result, to return to the issue of technological

development, there has to be a necessary trade-off between tutoring expertise and technology as it is very difficult to adequately disperse in-depth knowledge of technological developments within educational systems to external tutors and ensure that consistency of practice is taking place.

The third essential component of an effective distance learning educational system is student support as studying at a distance can lead to isolation, with little face-to-face social interaction with other students. There are particular student demands and behavioural issues peculiar to teaching at a distance and these issues do not always present themselves as overtly as they would during an on-campus programme. Therefore, as much as possible needs to be done in advance of students starting their programme of studies to ease their entry into, or back into, university life. As well as a study school (see below), extensive guidance is necessary. This guidance should contain details on how to use the teaching system, the teaching style and support they can expect from the educational provider, what is required of and from them, and what is available to them in terms of University services and support. In a programme providing a professional qualification, students should be encouraged or required to have a professional mentor within their working or volunteering organisation, or outside it if a suitable individual can be located, with whom they should meet on a consistent basis to discuss their studies. On the CAIS programmes it is a requirement for all Masters or Postgraduate Diploma students on an Archive or Records Management programme to have a mentor that is a qualified information professional with at least 5 years of post-qualification experience. The mentor should be required to submit a report to the educational department every semester – this ensures that any issues that may be affecting a student can be raised in a confidential manner and expands the number of professional colleagues with awareness of, and a vested interest in, the educational programme being provided. In a similar vein to the

relationship with on-campus teaching systems, distance learning often has to make the best of University guidance and support networks that are geared solely to the on-campus student without any consideration of what is required for those paying fees to study with the University at a distance. This can be of particular importance, and a problem for the programme, if IT support is not available out-with of normal working hours. Many students will access the Virtual Learning Environment at night or at weekends and therefore these abnormal studying practices, in relation to the traditional, on-campus student who does not rely so intensively upon the online educational system, can present difficulties. It is therefore imperative that any distance learning programme seeks to mitigate this by timeous and helpful administrative support and by attempting, as much as possible, to ensure that the technology utilised is reliable. Reliability is, for a professional qualification training information professionals, of far more importance than innovative uses of technology.

In addition to quality learning materials, expert tuition and student support is the key issue of flexibility. As Anderson writes, distance learning educators need to understand that:

Contrary to popular belief, the major motivation for enrolment in distance education is not physical access *per se*, but the temporal freedom that allows students to move through a course of studies at a time and pace of their choice [11].

As stated, on many professional programmes, including those with CAIS, it is a requirement of the programme that students *must* be working or volunteering within an appropriate environment both prior to *and throughout* the duration of their studies. Although this commitment may be one-day per week on the CAIS programme, the majority of students are likely to be working full-time. This, coupled with the afore-mentioned age profile of students

on a professional qualification programme, means that students will often be balancing work, family and educational commitments whilst on the programme, meaning that flexibility is very important. As a result, it is necessary to facilitate time off for students on a distance learning programme – in CAIS, a Masters programme can be completed in 2.5 years however students have the flexibility to take up to five years to complete (or longer if they have suitable mitigating circumstances). In order to facilitate this flexibility, students are issued with a module timetable at least six months in advance of the new academic year as each module is likely to run once or twice in an academic year (CAIS has three semesters per year to enable students to study over the summer if they wish) and this enables students to plan ahead with their studies, ensuring that they can undertake the optional modules that are of most interest to them and allowing them to tailor the curriculum to their interests or job requirements.

In a similar vein, professional qualification programmes often need to be more flexible with regards to prior evidence of academic learning so as to accommodate those who have extensive experience of working / volunteering / carrying out research in their chosen subject area. This is particularly important in the information sector as, for example, those working in a Records Management environment have often transferred to a recordkeeping post with neither an appropriate knowledge-base or qualification. Similarly, many Family and Local History students tend to have extensive genealogical research experience but lack any prior academic award or have been out of education for a long time. Therefore, a proportion enter with significant alternative experience and have to be admitted to the programme on the basis of accreditation of prior learning or of prior experiential learning, in accordance with University policy.

Flexibility should only go so far, however, and, for example, modules should be fully timetabled in terms of assessment. The approach to assessment should be designed to include both information theory and practice and formative and summative elements, recognising the independence required in learning at a Postgraduate level, whilst maintaining the supportive environment necessary to ensure an effective experience for students. Summative assessment comprises two elements per module: assessed tasks throughout the module and the submission of final assignments. These have deadlines attached to them and ensure that whilst students can study at their own allotted time during the module, the students are working through the module at a similar pace, reducing the isolation of remote learning. It also provides a mechanism by which it quickly becomes obvious if a student is experiencing difficulties or falling behind with their studies.

As previously mentioned, distance learning can be isolating and it can be difficult to alleviate this feeling completely due to the innate nature of studying at a distance. As Yuan and Kim outline, a social presence is a valuable influence on the development of a learning community and the individual. A high measure of social presence, they argue, ‘enhances learning interaction, fosters the development of critical thinking skills, improves learning performance and leads to greater satisfaction with a course.[12]’ Hence it is crucial to build-in student-student interaction and attempt to facilitate a thriving online community of like-minded students who will progress to be information professionals and can rely and communicate with each other throughout their studies and subsequent careers. Students are encouraged to debate and discuss issues through the discussion forum which is used for informal as well as formal exchanges of views. Additionally, interaction is embedded through group tasks which can provide an opportunity for the social negotiation of knowledge and construction of meaning from students with a variety of different backgrounds, ages, locations and interests.

A front-end portal is also useful in encouraging the sense of an online community of learners as it facilitates communication with all students and tutors, rather than reducing the community to each individual module. CAIS students have also, independently of staff, developed their own Facebook page. From the outset, an on-campus study school can really assist students to feel comfortable about their forthcoming studies – the CAIS study school, offered twice a year and a requirement for all Postgraduate Diploma or Masters students on an Archive or Records Management pathway and based in the United Kingdom, provides an introduction to a range of topics that the students will deal with during their studies, an opportunity to become familiar with the VLE and provides an opportunity to meet tutors and other students [13]. To enhance the learning process, the number of students on any one group of a module should be kept relatively low. CAIS operates a policy of no more than 15 and it is easy to maintain this when employing external individuals to tutor on our behalf – paying per student means that additional external tutors can be utilised if demand requires it and suitably qualified tutors can be found. Study days / seminars / and visits to a range of institutions can be useful to get students to come together on a particular module, albeit these do have to be voluntary and arrangements need to be in place to ensure that non-participation does not disadvantage any student. However, it is here that the question of personality type, which admittedly can be a difficult one to ascertain in advance, is of importance when determining the type of educational system that ought to be created. For example, within the recordkeeping field, the caricature of professional recordkeeping practitioners and genealogists as dusty, old, socially reticent individuals may indeed be a caricature however that does not mean that there is not a grain of truth also residing within it and it may have contributed to the difficulty CAIS has had in online learner participation [14]. CAIS module tutors are frequently disappointed in the Discussion Boards and programme leaders have made moves to switch to a more Wiki-based approach to facilitate real-time discussion.

However, the experience has been that technological developments and changes in this area simply do not alter engrained practice amongst our students - for our students Wikis and real-time discussions, out-with those set-up by the tutors via Skype or BlackboardConnect, do not facilitate collaborative learning nor encourage and enable group-work, nor do the students really care whether they exist or otherwise. This, to an extent, follows the work of Ke in 2010 that indicated adult learners had mixed feelings about online discussion [15]. Additionally, experience shows that discussion boards can become dominated by one person, intimidating others. Yet it is clear that, considering the asynchronous nature of most online environments, it is necessary for online learners to develop social bonds, which enables them to feel secure and open to communicating with their peers.

Conclusion

Educational providers must be aware that there are occasions when providing a practical, reality-driven, steady if unspectacular online experience, albeit one that is rooted in expert tuition and quality learning materials, is of more benefit than a technologically-driven set of educational tools that require a degree of expertise and familiarity with online environments and practice which obfuscate and complicate rather than intrinsically enlighten. As Kirkwood and Price write, there seem:

....to be many cases of deterministic expectations that introducing technology would, *of itself*, bring about changes in teaching/learning practices. This might contribute to the lack of an explicit educational rationale for many interventions [16].

Therefore, underpinning decisions taken by CAIS is a recognition that technology should not be the driver and that a correct balance between technology and pedagogy is essential. In distance learning education, the times and places can be different but technology does not alter the fundamental objectives – students must be able to access key professional concepts and ideas, be able to assimilate them through practice and ultimately demonstrate professional competence in those areas. Distance learning increases opportunities to access and collaborate with expert professionals in a global range, provides students with flexibility to access courses at their convenience and allows constant adjustments to subjects and content need. In and of itself, distance learning is different and offers expansion and diversification. These are worthy outcomes.

The authors of this paper therefore do not make grand claims to best practice. However, we do think that we have an insight into what is required to set-up and run a successful, professionally-oriented academic Postgraduate distance learning programme and have proved since 2004 that a flexible, comprehensive professional qualification programme, based in recordkeeping theory and practice, can be very successful. The professional education qualifications in information management provided by CAIS have contributed to the expansion of, and improvement in, recordkeeping practice worldwide; have dispersed education around the globe; and have created the next generation of information professionals.

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