

Title: How do visiting tutors learn what to do?

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Outline some of the issues facing Visiting Tutors in Universities (people who share their professional or personal expertise with students on a part time or casual basis)
- Explain some of the barriers to the development of communities of learning for Visiting Tutors
- Describe the strengths and limitations of using web based resources to develop communities of learning
- Review ways to develop communities of learning with Visiting Tutors in their own institutions

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

Part time and casual teaching staff form a large but often forgotten part of the academic community (Bryson (2006a) Knight (2006), Woodall and Geissler (2009)). In my area of Health Sciences their contribution is essential to student learning as they share their expertise as professionals or their experience as patients of service users. In the session I will outline how as a Staff Development Officer I have investigated how Visiting Tutors have been learning what to do – both through an informal consultation and through a small research project (McLean 2007). I expected findings similar to Eraut et al's (1998) study of professionals learning at work – that Visiting Tutors would have found a variety of ways to draw on each others experience.

Instead I found that almost all learning about how to do the job had been done on an individual basis – by reflecting on their own experience of being taught, or occasionally by looking things up on the internet. Reasons for this seem to include lack of time, lack of information about how to contact people, lack of support from University staff, lack of access to University resources, and lack of some one in the 'manager' role that Eraut et al (1999) identified as important in facilitating informal learning.

I will then discuss the various steps I have taken since then to develop a stronger community of learning, drawing on some of the ideas identified by Bryson(2006b) including developing a mailing list, web pages, celebration events, after hours workshops, as well as promoting union membership and producing guidelines for university staff about how to support the Visiting Tutors they invite in. Some innovations have been more successful than others, some will

work in other contexts and some will not. It will be interesting to share and discuss ideas, issues and practicalities.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Introductions 5 mins

Presentation: Who are Visiting Tutors, how do they learn what to do and how can we help them develop a community of learning? 20 mins

Group work on a choice of questions – 10 mins

- a. What are the barriers to the development of communities of learning for Visiting Tutors and why are they there?
- b. Ways to develop communities of learning – what would work in my work context?

Plenary and next steps 10 mins

References

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