Title: **Supporting the transition from the physical to the virtual classroom**

Presenters: **Sarah Cornelius and Darren Gash**
University of Aberdeen and BPP University College

Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will have:

- Discussed the challenges facing teachers who are undertaking a transition from physical to virtual classroom environments.
- Considered how teaching techniques developed in a face to face context can be adapted or re-invented to facilitate effective learning in the virtual classroom
- Identified ways in which effective academic practice in the virtual classroom can be supported and developed.

Session Outline

Much formal learning takes place in a classroom setting and involves real-time interaction with learners. Most teachers have developed their skills in this environment but many are now facing a new challenge - facilitating learning in a virtual classroom without direct face to face contact with their learners. This requires more than technical competence (Bennet & Marsh, 2002). Teachers must be able to use the technology in a way that provides an effective learning experience. Such a challenge also has implications for staff developers who support teachers in making this transition. Although authors such as Salmon (2003) and Macdonald (2008) have provided advice and support for facilitators of asynchronous and blended learning, there is, as yet, very little material available to support teachers in real-time virtual classrooms. Recently produced resources address issues such as planning for sessions and good practice in virtual classrooms (e.g. Chatterton 2010; Onlingnment, 2010; ALT, 2010) and this session will allow participants to consider these as well other concerns that teachers might have when making the transition to a real-time virtual setting.

In both BPP University College and the University of Aberdeen lecturers and teachers are making the transition from face to face to virtual classrooms. This workshop will provide a brief overview of the approach taken by each institution to contextualise ensuing group discussions about the challenges in facilitating a successful transition. Questions to stimulate debate will include:

- What are the strengths and limitations of teaching and learning in the virtual classroom as opposed to the physical classroom? What implications do these strengths and limitations have for teachers in a virtual classroom?

- To what extent do techniques and strategies for teaching and learning designed for the physical classroom need adapting or reconceptualising for the virtual classroom?
- What strategies can be employed to support the teacher's journey from the physical to the virtual classroom?

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

- 10 minutes: Introduction. The rationale for and issues faced by the transition to virtual classroom technologies. Experiences from the University of Aberdeen and BPP University College.
- 10 minutes: Brainstorming session. Delegates will be divided into two groups with one person from each group responsible for documenting points raised on a flip chart.
  - Group 1: The teacher's perspective. Imagine you are facilitating a virtual classroom session; compared to a face-to-face session, what challenges might you face? E.g. from the perspectives of
    - Classroom management?
    - Student/tutor and student/student interaction?
    - Presentation of learning materials?
  - Group 2: The learner's perspective. Imagine you are taking part in a virtual classroom session; compared to a face-to-face session, what challenges might you face? E.g. from the perspectives of
    - Interaction between tutor and peers?
    - Engaging with learning materials?
- 20 minutes: Whole Group Discussion based around challenges raised by each group. The aim is to identify tensions and common ground between teacher and learner challenges, and discuss how these challenges can be addressed with reference to classroom based strategies for facilitating learning, and how they may be adapted for use in the virtual classroom. One of the presenters will document the main points of the discussion as an electronic mindmap projected on screen (Freemind open source format), which can be distributed to delegates afterwards for their reference.
- 5 minutes: Summarise proceedings and lessons learned, including recommendations based on experiences from the University of Aberdeen and BPP University College

References

ALT Webinar Recording (2010) *How to run a virtual classroom session*. Available from: http://repository.alt.ac.uk/view/divisions/classroom/ [Accessed on 29/10/2010].

Bennet S, Marsh D (2002). 'Are we expecting online tutors to run before they can walk?' *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*. 39 (1), 14-20.

Chatterton P (2010) *Designing for Partcipant Engagement with Elluminate Live*. Available from: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/elluminateguidance [Accessed on 29/10/2010].

Macdonald J (2008) Blended learning and online tutoring: planning learner support and activity design. 2nd edition. Aldershot: Gower

Onlingnment (no date) *Live online learning: a facilitator's guide*. Available from: http://onlignment.com/live-online-learning-a-facilitators-guide/ [Accessed on 29/10/2010].

Salmon G (2003) E-moderating, the key to teaching and learning online. 2nd edition, London: Taylor and Francis