

**Title:**                    **Developing staff communities to create online student communities**

**Presenters:**        **Pat Atkins and Charlotte Stevens**  
Open University

### **Abstract:**

#### **Session learning outcomes**

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

- Develop a better understanding of the integrated nature of successful student support and the importance of students' sense of community and identity
- Appreciate the partial nature of most staff perspectives on the student experience and stimulate the desire to experience the benefits of a multidisciplinary staff community

#### **Session outline**

Key issues to be addressed are:

This workshop is a reflection on the Open University's Personalised Integrated Learning Support (PILS) Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) work to strengthen support for distance-taught students, particularly through the use of new technologies. The CETL was built around the need to integrate different aspects of the student experience and the way we chose to do that was by engaging staff from different parts of the institution to work together to try to produce a more integrated set of services which built on the strengths of each member of staff. This was underpinned by the development of an integrating model, the ARCS model (Atkins 2008) which built on the work of Tait (2000) which has been influential in the creation of open and distance education (ODE) support systems. The CETL very soon realised the need to consider how the new technologies can both enable specialisation and identity formation at much lower cost than old distance teaching technologies and strengthen peer support and the building of communities of learning amongst students. The work of Wenger (1998) was informative at that in directing our attention to the need for shared interests and activities and the likely desire to engage with others in pursuit of shared goals.

This session will explore how far we had to come to create a community of support staff with a shared set of skills and interests. It will also consider the benefits for students of easy online access to others with shared interests and how engagement in such communities can be nurtured.

#### **Session activities and approximate timings**

10 minutes:

Introduction to integrated view of support leading to need for multidisciplinary team

20 minutes:

Activity exploring partial perspectives and the benefits of enriching both staff and the support of students through engagement with diverse perspectives

10 minutes:

Online student communities – what worked and what didn't

5 minutes:

Creating the multidisciplinary team – pros and cons.

## **References**

Atkins, P. (2008) Transformation and Integration through research and enquiry: a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning perspective. In Weaver, M. (ed), *Transformative Support Models in Higher Education: Educating the Whole Student*, Facet Publishing

Tait, A. (2000) Planning student support for open and distance learning, *Open Learning*, 15(3), 287-299

Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of practice*, Cambridge University Press