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PEDAGOGIC RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION INTO THE ROLE OF COMPUTER-MEDIATED CONFERENCING AND VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS TO IMPROVE HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM STUDENT SUPERVISION AND PEER SUPPORT WHILST ON INDUSTRIAL PLACEMENT

Stuart McGugan
Susi Peacock

Queen Margaret University College

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the contribution that networked technologies can make to support learning during work placements. An educational case study is presented which evaluates the development and implementation of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) amongst a group of undergraduate students studying hospitality and tourism management at Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh. The case study reveals that it is feasible to create an online facility that can be beneficial to both students and placement tutors. Moreover, it is revealed that the development of a VLE for placement learning can serve as an effective means of introducing both placement tutors and students to use of computer mediated conferencing as a means of communication.

However, it has been found that a number of barriers do exist which prevent the potential of such a facility being fully realised. Principal amongst these barriers were restrictions on student access, and student and staff unfamiliarity with using computer mediated conferencing as a pedagogic tool. It was also found that the preferred use of computer mediated conferencing was to support informal discussion between students and tutors. A more formal use in respect of making connections between placement experience and classroom learning was not in evidence. This is considered to be a missed opportunity. The study concludes that more needs to be done to promote a more 'formal' use of computer mediated conferencing as a mechanism to abstract learning from experience (reflection).

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3   LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

The following abbreviations have been used in the writing of this study:

CMC   Asynchronous Computer Mediated Conferencing

ITGC   Industrial Tutors' Group Conference

FAQs   Frequently Asked Questions

LTSN   Learning and Teaching Support Network

NCIHE   National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education

QMUC   Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh

SPSS   Statistical Package for Social Scientists

VLE   Virtual Learning Environment

WebCT   Web Based Course Tools

4   INTRODUCTION

4.1   Background to Study

The Quality Assurance Agency (2001:4) define placement learning as "a planned period of learning, normally outside the institution at which the student is enrolled, where the learning outcomes are an intended part of a programme of study". One method that has commonly been used to incorporate this placement learning into the curriculum has been through the use of *work experience*. Gray (2001:4) notes that work placements have a relatively long history at higher education level through which undergraduates gain experience and knowledge (within their subject domain) of the world of work. Dutton et al (2001:49) argue that this type of experience offers the educator an important way to contextualise the learning of the student through reference to industry. This contextualisation is consistent with Recommendation 18 of the UK National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education. This recommendation states that "all institutions should, over the medium term, identify opportunities to increase the extent to which programmes help students to become more familiar with work, and help them reflect on such experience'" (NCIHE, 1997). Raelin (2000, cited in Gray 2001:4) has argued that work-based learning is different from classroom learning in a number of different ways:

- Firstly, work-based learning is centred around reflection on work practices, and it is not just a question of acquiring knowledge and a set of technical skills (though these can be important).

- Secondly, work-based learning views learning as arising from action and problem solving within a working environment that is centred around projects and challenges to individuals and organisations.

- Thirdly, work-based learning sees the creation of knowledge as a shared and collective activity, one in which people discuss ideas and share problems and solutions.

- Finally, work-based learning requires not only the acquisition of new knowledge, but also the acquisition of meta-competence - learning to learn.

Therefore transforming work experience into meaningful learning outcomes and maximising student satisfaction from the placement component of their programme represents an important goal for educators.

While student satisfaction with the placement learning will depend on many factors (placement planning, student expectations, nature of the work etc.), it is the role of *placement supervision* that is of interest here. Typically placement supervision involves a visit or visits from the student's university or college. While this face to face contact offers many benefits (for student, employer and institution), it is a relatively costly exercise and may not always be practicable or effective. Indeed a recent Springboard study reports that "only 35% of students thought their placement supervision from their university/college was good", and goes on to recommend that the "supervision of placements by the university/college and employer needs serious attention" (Springboard, 2001). The main reasons cited for this dissatisfaction included: unclear placement objectives, inconsistency of visitation practice and a lack of communication. Within this context, this study will investigate the use of online support for placement learning in the subject domain of Hospitality and Tourism. In particular the study will seek to consider the potential of computer mediated conferencing (CMC) in a placement learning context. It is noted by McConnell (2000:26) that this type of interaction has the potential to:

- Help clarify ideas and concepts through discussion;

- Develop critical thinking;

- Provide opportunities for learners to share information and ideas;

- Develop communication skills;

- Provide a context where learners can take control of their own learning in a social context;

- Provide validation of individuals' ideas and ways of thinking through conversation (verbalising); multiple perspectives (cognitive restructuring); and argument (conceptual conflict resolution).

Achieving these benefits in the context of placement learning is therefore considered to be a worthy aspiration. To do this, the study will be based on an evaluation of a virtual learning environment that has been designed to facilitate the development of co-operative learning amongst a group of hospitality and tourism students.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To provide an overview of the literature on the use and value of virtual support for work-based learning.

- To identify and discuss the issues in preparing students and staff in the meaningful use of CMC and VLEs prior to commencing their industrial placement.

- To explore students' and staff reactions to, and participation in CMC through a VLE while undertaking their industrial placement.

- To discuss individual, social and technical barriers for the meaningful implementation of CMC and VLEs from the student and staff perspective.

- To disseminate by raising awareness, throughout the duration of the project, of the possible role of VLEs and CMC in supporting industrial placement.

- To develop practical guidelines for academic staff using CMC and VLEs to support students on placement.

1.3 WebCT Virtual Learning Environments

The virtual learning environment that will be used to form the basis of the placement support is WebCT (www.webct.com). McConnell (2000:55-56) describes this as a web-based course authoring and electronic communication system and is based on the principle of providing course designers with a set of individual tools that can be used in a variety of combinations according to the requirements of particular modules. What has subsequently emerged is a software package that offers tutors a choice of tools with a range of uses. How these tools can be used to create a virtual learning environment to support student placement will be highlighted during the reporting of this research. Of particular interest in this respect will be the use of online communication using CMC. This form of interaction involves communication based on computers and telecommunications, which allow for communal interaction amongst students and between students and tutors. McConnell (2000:34) describes the process as one in which "messages are entered on to a communal message space and users can attach new messages or responses to existing ones in a way that allows a conversation to develop". McConnell (2001:34) also notes that this conversation is not constrained by time or place and has the potential to promote more reflective interaction. Moreover, the text-based nature of the computer-mediated narrative provides a permanent learning resource that can facilitate knowledge construction. CMC by its very nature records *talk* as it happens, allowing both learner and tutor to refer to this narrative at a future date.

Within this context therefore, CMC is seen as offering a range of desirable learning opportunities for the work placement supervisor.

4.2 The Use of a Case Study

To explore the potential of a WebCT designed VLE as an approach to support placement learning, an educational case study was carried out at the researchers' own institution, Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh (QMUC). This type of enquiry can be viewed as a systematic process (see for example Bassey, 1999:65-91) and will be discussed more fully in Section 3. What should be noted here is that the case study undertaken at QMUC utilised a range of data gathering techniques. These included:

- A three-part questionnaire survey of a group of hospitality and tourism students, before, during and on completion of their work-based placement.

- The monitoring of student participation in online discussions during the placement.

- Personal interviews with a placement tutor and a learning technologist at QMUC

- A self-completion questionnaire, personal and telephone interviews and a focus group discussion with placement tutors external to QMUC.

It can be argued that this multi-dimensional approach has the potential to engage the case reader with a 'veracity of experience' and has the capacity for understanding complexity in particular contexts (Simons, 1996:229). Moreover, as Alderman et al (1976:60) note, case studies in educational research should be viewed as "a step to action... they begin in a world of action and contribute to it and their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use".

5 LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 The Nature of Work-Based Learning

Work-based learning has been defined (in its broadest terms) as learning at higher education level derived from undertaking paid or unpaid work (Garnett, 1997 cited in Gray 2000:4). Harvey et al (1998) make the point that there is a difference between *working* and undertaking a period of *work experience*. In these authors' words *work experience* is defined as a "period of work that is designed to encourage reflection on the experience and to identify the learning that comes through working". Gray (2001:4) notes that this type of learning is often linked to an accredited programme of study where the objective of the experience is 'learning for work'. According to Harvey, this type of accredited work experience can take four broad forms:

- Placing students in a supervised work setting for a specified number of weeks as part of a sandwich course (usually for an academic or calendar year) or to provide a number of periods of professional experience in disciplines where there is a professional or regulatory body requirement that students undertake practical work as part of the undergraduate study;

- Providing students with the opportunity to undertake short periods of work experience relevant to their discipline;

- Arranging for students to undertake employer-linked project work, either on an individual or a team basis;

- Arranging workplace visits or case study simulations to give students a brief insight into a particular world of work.

According to Blackwell et al (2001:270) a number of claims can be made for this type of work-based learning as part of the higher education curriculum. These can be summarised as follows:

- *Changing teachers' attitudes.* Work experience arrangements should symbolise that the world of work is something to be taken seriously. It is also hoped that workplace concerns will 'rub off' on some teachers.

- *A more relevant curriculum.* Work experience becomes a part of the curriculum, which, if nothing else, is a symbol that the world of work is a legitimate part of learning.

- *Informing employers.* Involvement in work experience schemes can make employers more aware of what higher education does, and of the circumstances under which it operates.

- *An employability signal.* Employers, who often seek evidence of it during recruitment, can see on-the-job learning as intrinsically valuable.

- *Motivating learners.* This is where work experience gives the learner a career direction, which can enhance the motivation to learn.

- *Preparation for work.* The changing nature of work requires graduates to be work-ready following graduation to ensure economic competitiveness in a global context.

Harvey et al (1998) make the point that work experience will have an important role to play in the development of students as lifelong learners. However Blackwell et al (2001:283) note that this assumes that students have the wherewithal to gain from the experience, and that learners have the capacity to abstract learning from their experience (reflection). As the author notes, this raises interesting questions about how students learn to reflect and how higher education teaches them to do it better:

> It is important for students to take responsibility for their own transformative learning (noting that) although students can readily describe their experiences, it is the articulation of what has been learned that is the key. That, in turn depends upon initial purposefulness and then regular reflection that involves others.   (Blackwell et al, 2001:283).

From this it can perhaps be argued that mechanisms need to be in place that can facilitate the involvement of others (students, teachers, employers) in a constructive way.

5.2   How Students Learn and Develop Through Work Experience

Guile and Griffiths (2001:117) argue that in order to consider how students learn and develop through work experience, it is important to consider the learning that occurs *within* and *between* the different contexts of education and work. Distinguishing between the types of learning that may occur in these different contexts, can perhaps best be achieved through reference to the concepts of vertical and horizontal development. According to Glick (1995:376-379) the concept of vertical development consists of the individual progressing through a hierarchy of cognitive skills and knowledge moving towards greater levels of abstraction, and that this type of intellectual development normally occurs in a formal educational context. By contrast, the concept of horizontal

development refers to the process of change and development within an individual as s/he moves from one context (eg. school) to another (eg. a workplace). For example an individual's sense of identity might change as a result of working in a factory as distinct from working in a university (Guile and Griffiths, 2001:117). With this conceptualisation work should not be viewed simply as a context which students learn about, but rather work, like education, is a context through which students can learn and develop (Guile and Griffiths, 2001:117). The challenge therefore is to assist students in relating their horizontal development to their vertical development, encouraging students to make links rather than viewing the two as separate and distinct (Guile and Griffiths, 2001:16).

From this Guile and Griffiths (2001:125-126) put forward a model of work experience (Appendix A) which is based, in their words, upon the idea of a *reflexive theory of learning.* This model the authors argue takes "greater account of the influence of the context and organisation of work upon student learning and development and the situated nature of that learning". It is also argued that this model promotes a new pedagogic approach that relates vertical and horizontal learning. The authors use the term *connectivity* to define the purpose of this pedagogic approach, arguing that learners not only have to develop the capacity to participate within workplace activities and cultures: they must also learn how to draw upon their formal learning and use it to interrogate workplace practices (Guille and Griffiths, 2001:126). It is considered that this model is useful in our assessment of the use of CMC to support work placements as it attempts to take account of the learning that occurs within and between the different contexts of education and work.

5.3   Networked Technology and Learning

The Internet has the potential to be an invaluable tool for learning, teaching and assessment and can be expected to become more so as it develops. Britain and Liber (1999:4) make the observation that increasing numbers of teaching staff are beginning to put their lecture notes and reading lists online. As a result, this has created an interest amongst software developers to explore ways that build upon established networked technologies in an educational context. As Britain and Liber (1999:4) note, these systems are known by a variety of names such as online learning environments, learning management systems, collaborative learning software or virtual learning environments. For the purpose of this research the term virtual learning environment will be used and can be defined as follows:

> Web-based toolkits that facilitate learning through provision and integration of online teaching and learning tools. These tools usually consist of most of the following: Facilities for electronic communication between teachers and students such as discussion lists, bulletin boards and chat rooms; facilities for group work online; online learning materials; links to remote resources; course timetables and reading lists; online assessment tools; and an administrative area.
>
> http://inspiral.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/about/vlemle.html

From the above definition it can be noted that these web-based toolkits can be used to create a complete online course for use with off-campus students (distance learning). Alternatively tutors may choose a selection of individual tools to support traditional campus based learning in activities ranging from project work and discussions to presentations and assessment. In their review of studies into this form of delivery, Jung et al (2002:153) identify a number of the features which these media rich online environments can offer. These include allowing people to interact with others asynchronously or synchronously in collaborative and distributed environments (Dede, 1995; Harasim et al, 1995), gaining access to remote multimedia databases for active and resource-based learning (Hiltz, 1994), and managing self-paced individual learning in a flexible way (Naidu, 1997). Among these features Jung et al (2002:153) note that "expanded interactivity is especially important in overcoming one of the shortcomings of traditional distance education, that is, lack of interpersonal interaction". Particularly useful in this respect is CMC.

5.4   Learning Opportunities using Computer Mediated Conferencing

Salmon (2000:7) describes this form of communication as offering a new way of teaching in higher education. Most online discussion will occur asynchronously, although it is possible (but difficult) for users to co-ordinate times when they are online together.

Jung et al (2002:153) identifies three types of asynchronous interaction in a web-based learning environment: content-centred academic interaction, which occurs between learners and tutors or between learners and online resources; collaborative interaction among learners; and social interaction between learners and instructor. McConnell (2000:73-76) notes that the asynchronous nature of this form of communication offers both the tutor and the learner a number of potential benefits.

These include:

- It is less confrontational than traditional face to face interaction. This allows for more equal participation of learners who may find classroom situations intimidating.

- It has the potential to encourage more reflective interaction. With face to face communication, the immediacy of the situation often requires both the tutor and the learner to respond quickly. With asynchronous online discussion, tutors and learners can revisit and reflect on topics of conversations after more thought and reading.

- It is a *timeless* medium allowing for limitless group interaction that can carry on well after the classroom event has finished.

- The text-based nature of the computer-mediated narrative provides a permanent learning resource that can facilitate knowledge construction. Very often with face to face discussion, good insights and observations are made in a classroom situation which are not recorded and therefore easily forgotten. CMC by its very nature records *talk* as it happens. Both learner and tutor can refer to this narrative at a future date.

- It is easy for both tutors and learners to monitor their contributions and the contributions of others. This may be useful for a tutor who wishes to examine student performance both in terms of quantity and quality of contributions. Moreover learners can be encouraged to reflect on their performance and can use their online postings as evidence of their contributions.

- The nature of asynchronous chat allows for more flexibility as to where and when participants can contribute. Participants can *fit in* their learning around other commitments. Moreover the fact that asynchronous chat is not spatially dependent frees up travel time necessary to take part in face to face discussion. Self-study can therefore be done from home, in the office, at a cyber café.

- It has considerable potential to develop co-operation in learning. McConnell (2000:8) notes that co-operative learning involves participants working together on some task or issue in a way that promotes individual learning through processes of collaboration in groups.

These potential learning opportunities made available through the use of CMC presents the online tutor with the challenge of developing an instructional system that embodies this constructivist view of learning. According to Grabinger et al (1997:66), such an instructional system should promote (as its guiding principles):

- Investigation within authentic contexts;

- The growth of student responsibility, initiative and decision making;

- The cultivation of collaboration among students and tutors;

- The use of dynamic, interdisciplinary, learning activities that promote higher-order thinking processes such as critical evaluation and reflection.

Salmon (2000) has developed one such instructional system, which will now be reviewed.

5.5 A Model for CMC in Education and Training

Based on her own empirical research into computer mediated conferencing, Salmon (2000:22-37) presents a model to guide learning and teaching online. This model is presented in Appendix B and is broken down into five stages as follows:

Stage One: Access and Motivation

At this initial stage of the process the online tutor needs to be achieve two important objectives. Firstly, the need to be sure that the participant can access both quickly and easily the online conferencing system. It is noted that at this stage the tutor will want to be sure that the learner:

- Gets to know about the availability and benefits of the conferencing system;

- Obtains a password and dials up or accesses the system through a network;

- Arrives in the virtual learning environment at a point where the conferences are available on the computer screen.

At this stage participants will need information and technical support to get online. This may be offered through technical backup, email, telephone points of contact, technical manuals and online help via frequently asked questions (FAQs).

The second tutoring objective at this stage is to recognise that participants will need strong motivation to put in the time and effort to engage in online activity. As Salmon (2000:27) observes "it is a great mistake to assume that any participant will want to divert hours and hours to online conferences without good reason". Participants will therefore need encouragement, and this may be achieved by defining clarity of purpose, stressing the value of online discussion from a learner perspective, and giving clear guidance on the amount of time to spend on activities.

Stage Two: Online Socialisation

Preece (2000, cited in Salmon 2000:28) makes the point that while CMC offers the opportunity for online socialisation, it will not in itself create the social interaction. While social interaction is a cornerstone of the constructivist approach to learning, a number of barriers to socialisation are likely to exist in the development of online learning communities. These barriers may include:

- The embarrassment of making a mistake in front of other participants (not just the computer);

- Text based communication highlighting poor spelling;

- Studying in an alien environment;

- The lack of non-verbal and visual clues;

- Participants struggling to find a sense of time and place.

Online tutoring therefore needs to think of strategies to overcome these barriers and to recognise that different types of students will use and respond to online discussions in different ways. Possible approaches here include inducting participants in an explicitly targeted way. For example, explaining the role of the tutor and online etiquette. Power relationships between tutor and participant can be clarified at this stage through preferred forms of address. The use of photographs can be used to personalise text-based communication, and participants can be encouraged to read and enjoy the postings of others.

Stage Three: Information Exchange

Stage three of the model is characterised by fast and immediate information exchange. Here the student will interact with course resources such as hard copy readings, online web-links and with people (the tutor and fellow course participants). Salmon (2000:30) observes that "in my experience, participants become excited, even joyful about the immediate access and fast information exchange. They also show consternation at the volume of information suddenly becoming available".

Information overload may therefore become an issue at this stage. This can be accentuated by the 'messiness' of conferencing (particularly in comparison with course materials) and may be a problem that is experienced by both learners and tutors. The role of the tutor is therefore to try and make things manageable, both for themselves and for the participants. Imposing some degree of structure to influence how the learning material is navigated would appear to be one strategy available to achieve some online

discipline and comprehension. As Salmon (2000:31) notes "e-moderating at this stage calls for preparation and planning, as in any good teaching". Furthermore, in responding to participants' demands for help (which at this stage may be considerable), the tutor may seek to develop and provide a series of automated replies to FAQs. While this may help tutors to manage their workload in practice, it will perhaps diminish the experiential communication, which only personalised responses can inspire (Preece 1999, cited in Salmon 2000:31).

Stage Four: Knowledge Construction
According to Jonassen et al (1995:16) "knowledge construction occurs when participants explore issues, take positions, discuss their positions in an argumentative format and reflect on and re-evaluate their positions". Central to this is the creation of a learning community where participants widen their own viewpoint by appreciating the different perspectives of others, and through the examples and experiences advanced by fellow students. This is founded on the principle that participants are liable to learn as much from one another as from course material or from the interjections of a tutor (Rowntree 1995:207). The key tutor objective at this stage will be to build and develop this learning community. Crucial to this will be the process of building and sustaining a discussion. Feenberg (1989:34) describes this as a 'weaving process' that is characterised by some or all of the following activities:

- Collecting participant statements and relating these to concepts and theories covered by the course;

- Being part of the group and adding your own experiences and examples;

- Summarising at regular intervals;

- Adding new topics and questions to a discussion thread;

- Sharing the leadership role with the course participants.

This final point is perhaps the most difficult for course participants to adjust to, as it calls into question the traditional locus of power between tutor and learner.

Stage Five: Development
The constructivist approach to learning is perhaps best illustrated at this stage where participants take responsibility for their own learning and become more confident and critical thinkers. There has been a transition from tutor-led to student-led learning, whereby participants will explore their own thinking and knowledge building processes (Biggs, 1995, cited in Salmon 2000:36). The tutoring objective at this stage will be to

devise ways to encourage these higher level skills. Common approaches used to achieve this objective may involve the use of learning journals to promote reflection, or through a process of constructive peer, tutor and self-review.

6 METHODOLOGY

6.1 VLE Development

Using WebCT software a prototype module entitled 'Supervised Work Experience' was created by March 2002. The aim of the module would be to support students on their 21-week placement in the hospitality and tourism industry. It should be noted that development activities involved in the design of this VLE included:

- Discussions with final year students who had already completed their period of supervised work experience.

- Discussions with the teaching staff involved in the supervision of placement learning.

The Homepage and Functions of the VLE is illustrated in Appendices C and D.

6.2 Assessing the Impact of the VLE

To assess the impact of the VLE, feedback was obtained from a variety of sources. This involved collecting data from the QMUC students, QMUC placement tutors, a QMUC learning technologist and placement tutors external to QMUC. An account of these approaches will now be presented.

6.2.1 Self-completion questionnaire with students pre-placement

This was undertaken at QMUC in April 2002 immediately after students were given their first demonstration of the Supervised Work Experience VLE. As part of a placement briefing, students were given a lecture about the contents and role of the online support and shown how to use the online discussion forum. The placement tutor and the learning technologist undertook this briefing session.

Using a self-completion questionnaire the researchers sought to collect data on two main topics. Firstly, a profile of the group of students who would have the opportunity to use the VLE over the coming months. In particular, the researchers wanted to establish their general use of and prevailing attitudes towards the Internet. Secondly, to gauge initial reaction to the VLE that had just been presented to students. As the data to be gathered would comprise predominantly of background information, it was decided to use a series of closed ended attitude questions. The questionnaire used is presented in Appendix E. In total 27 out of 40 questionnaires were returned. This represents a response rate of 67.5%. The data generated from these questionnaires was then inputted into the computed software package SPSS and descriptive statistics generated.

6.2.2   Self-completion postal questionnaire with students during their placement

This was undertaken during June 2002 with the researchers seeking to establish whether students were able to access the VLE during their placement, and if so, where they were accessing it from. The researcher also wanted to establish whether the students were engaged with the VLE, and to determine which elements of the VLE were considered to be of particular value. As the group of students to be surveyed were now geographically dispersed (See Appendix F) it was decided to use a postal questionnaire. This questionnaire is included in Appendix G together with a copy of the covering letter (Appendix H). It was decided to include a £5 note (presented as gift) with this mailing to encourage response rate.

In total, 30 out of a mail survey of 40 questionnaires were returned. This represents a response rate of 75%.

6.2.3   The monitoring of student participation in the VLE during their placement

This monitoring was undertaken to help the researchers build up a picture of actual student usage as distinct for intended usage. Using support from the QMUC WebCT Administrator, the researchers were able set up a link whereby the WebCT Surveillance tool ' student tracking' could be downloaded into a Microsoft Excel file using a web query. From this the researchers were able to monitor:

- How many students accessed the module each day of the placement period;
- The total number of bulletin postings read;
- The total number of bulletin postings made.

To assist in analysis, cumulative graphs were constructed which show trends in these measures on a week by week basis.

6.2.4   Self-completion questionnaire with students on return from placement

In early November 2002, after the students had returned from their placement, they were asked to complete a third questionnaire (see Appendix I). The aim of this questionnaire was to gather feedback from both those students who had and those who had not used the VLE during their placement. The questionnaire focused on several key areas including access to a PC and Internet, tools used within the VLE (for example, discussions, calendar) and suggested future developments. The questionnaire included

both open and closed questions. 25 out of 40 questionnaires were returned. Results were processed in SPSS and student comments were analysed for key themes.

6.2.5   Questionnaire and discussion with placement learning tutors

To provide a wider perspective external data was collected. In particular the researchers wanted to establish whether placement tutors at other institutions were using web-based technology and to obtain feedback on the QMUC WebCT site. To do this the researchers gave a presentation at an Industrial Tutor's Conference at Birmingham on the 14th June 2002. At this event two data gathering exercises were undertaken. Firstly, during the talk, the audience was asked to complete a questionnaire which asked them to assess their use of web-based technology in general, and in the context of placement learning in particular. Open-ended questions were used to encourage a range of responses. 10 questionnaires were completed and a summary list of written comments was produced. The questionnaire was also used to identify respondents who would be willing to participate in future research about this topic. A copy of this questionnaire is presented in Appendix J.

Secondly, following this presentation, a focus group workshop was carried out with 6 placement tutors and one employer. This lasted for approximately 50 minutes. The focus of this session was to assess reaction to the QMUC initiative and to investigate ways by which the WebCT site may be developed. A summary set of notes was compiled after the event.

6.2.6   Telephone interviews with placement tutors

A member of the project team conducted three semi-structured telephone interviews with staff in English and Irish higher education institutions between late November 2002 and early January 2003. These staff had voluntarily agreed to participate in a telephone interview when attending a workshop at the Industrial Tutors' Group Conference. The respondents were either tutors responsible for organising placements for students or lecturers who taught students on placements and had some involvement in the placement process.

The aim of the interviews was to provide a better understanding of use and attitudes towards web technologies to support students on placement. The 30-minute interview (Appendix K) covered issues such as definitions of web technologies, current and planned use, advantages of and barriers to uptake. The basis of the interviews was the

key themes, which had emerged through Industrial Tutors' Group Conference. All interviews were transcribed and anonymised. The results were compared with the questionnaire data gathered at the Industrial Tutors' Group Conference and the interviews of the tutors at QMUC in Scotland and provide a richer picture of attitudes to and use of web technologies for placement learning.

6.2.7   Personal interviews with identified staff at QMUC

Two members of staff at Queen Margaret University College were identified and asked to participate in an in-depth interview in August 2002. These participants were: the placement tutor whose course was being used in this study and the learning technologist who was working with the placement tutor in this respect. These two staff members were selected on the basis that it was felt that they could make an informed contribution to the aims of the research. In particular the researcher wanted to consider different types of attitudes towards the value of placement learning together with attitudes towards the initiative. It was also considered that these personnel would significantly influence whether online support for placement learning became an accepted approach at QMUC. A semi-structured interview (Appendix L) was used for this purpose.

7 FINDINGS

7.1   Students views before the placement

All the students participating in the survey used the Internet for email, with 23 students (85%) accessing their email at least once every 3 days. In contrast only 4 of the students (14.8%) used the Internet for chat rooms and discussion.

When asked to consider other uses of technologies, the role of the Internet as an information provider featured strongly. 25 students (92.6%) used the Internet for study-based information searching at least every two weeks, and 23 students (85.2%) used the Internet for leisure-based information searching at least every two weeks. Indeed the role of the Internet as an information provider was the most popular reason cited (9 respondents). Comments such as "there is loads of information at your finger tips" and "I find the Internet very helpful when gathering specific information" are typical.

When asked to identify location of access the survey revealed the following:

- Access from Home   18 students   (66%)
- Access from QMUC   26 students   (96%)
- Access from a Library (not QMUC)   3 students   (11%)
- Access from an Internet café   7 students   (25%)
- Access from a Place of Work   5 students   (18.5%)

It is perhaps interesting to note that slow speed of access was the most popular dislike about using the Internet (4 students). Comments such as '"sometimes it takes a long time to go from Web site to site" and "can be time consuming searching for info/research" are typical of this view. That said 19 students (70%), either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they were confident when using the Internet.

When asked to consider the value of the Internet for learning a positive attitude was revealed. 19 students (77%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the view that that the Internet was a valuable tool for learning. Moreover 14 students (51%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they would like to see more use of the Internet in their learning. It is interesting to note that 10 students (37%) gave a neutral view to this question which perhaps indicates a degree of uncertainty with the topic.

The final part of the survey asked students to give their initial reaction to the VLE that had been developed to support their placement learning. As this site had just been presented to the students, the positive response should perhaps be viewed with caution as limited time had been given to students to reflect on their response.

That said, 25 students (80%), either agreed or strongly agreed with the use of the Internet on placement, while 15 students (55%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the WebCT site would be useful during their placement. Again it is interesting to note the high proportion of neutral responses to this question, 8 students (29%), again reflecting a degree of uncertainty with the topic.

7.2   Students views during the placement

7.2.1   Internet Access

The majority of the respondents, 21 students (70%), had access to the Internet while out on placement. However a significant minority, 9 students (30%), had no access. Of those students who did have access to the Internet, 14 students (46.7%) had access at their place of work, while 20 students (66.7%), had access outwith their place of work. When looking at the response to this question in more detail, of those students who had access at their place of work, the majority had their access restricted, 10 students (33.3%). Some of the comments put forward to explain this restricted access are revealing:

- "The computer available is used by 5 other staff members, therefore I usually wait until late afternoon to use it."

- "I'm only allowed to look at relevant websites to do with work - not allowed to surf"

- "I can only use the Internet when I finish work, but there are always people hanging around and moving me off the computer."

- "There are only 6 computers for 300 internationals, and they are in human resources which is only open when we are actually working, so its hard to get a break to use them."

Access in these cases would seem to be determined by a variety of factors ranging from workplace rules to a high demand on IT resources. It should also be noted that out of the 30 students who participated in the survey, only 4 students (13.3%) had access at their place of work all the time.

When we examine the group of students who had access outwith their place of work a number of access points were identified. These were:

- From home: - 9 students

- From an Internet café: - 7 students

- From an educational establishment: - 6 students

- From a friend's home - 1 student

- From a laptop connected to a mobile phone - 1 student

- From a tourist information centre - 1 student

- From a hairdressing salon - 1 student

(It should be noted than some students had more than one access point).

When considering the nature of this access, it can be noted that there were less restrictions outwith the workplace than at the workplace, with 11 students (36.7%) able to access all the time, and 8 students (26.7%) having restricted access. For those who had restricted access outwith their place of work, some of the explanations included:

- "The University is not open after I finish work, I'm not living at home and the Internet café is in town."

- "I only have access to email - not WebCT."

- "Restricted when on the phone - we only have one phone line."

- "'he Tourist Information closes from 12.00 - 14.00 that's when my lunch falls, so I can't really go to it then and I don't finish work until 7.00 or 8.00 - by that time it is closed."

It is interesting to note that 12 out of 30 students (40%) were required to pay for Internet access. For these students, the cost per hour varied as follows:

- Less than £1 per hour -   1 student

- £1-£1.99 per hour -   2 students

- More than £3 per hour - 5 students

- Rates vary -   1 student

- Not Sure -   2 students

- Missing -   1 student

The high cost of access (more than £3 per hour) experienced by some students is considered significant.

7.2.2   WebCT Access

By June 2002, 19 of the students surveyed (63.3%) had accessed the placement learning VLE. Of this group, 3 students (10%) had accessed it once, 8 students (26.7%) had accessed it between 2-5 times, while 7 students (23.3%) had accessed it more than 5 times. While these figures indicate reasonable levels of participation, they also reveal that many students had still to use the facility. For those students who fell into this category, some of the explanations included:

- "Too expensive to stay on for a long time - a 7 Euro phone card lasts about 20 minutes."

- "No access on campsite and very hard to get into town when café is open."

- "Here, I haven't had enough time to sit down and spend time logging in and I don't have time to talk. I only have five minutes, which I use to email home."

- "Have not had time to read through WebCT manual or go online."

From the above it can be noted that for some students the lack of time, access and money, rather than a lack of motivation were preventing participation in the WebCT module. This is also evident when students were asked to identify what would encourage them to access the VLE facility. Responses included:

- "Cheaper Internet access."

- "If the Internet was set up on the campsite I would be able to access it then."

- "Perhaps for those students working in Edinburgh, a computer at college dedicated to them for this purpose, at weekends - allowing them access it and when they are not working."

For those students who had access to the site, 5 students (16.7%) had experienced technical difficulties while the majority, 13 students (43.3%), had encountered no technical difficulties. It should be also noted that technical problems related more to the technology the students were using than with the VLE. Indeed, out of 18 students who commented on how they found using the placement VLE, 14 stated that that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the VLE was easy to navigate. The 4 other respondents gave a neutral response to this statement. When we examine the

students' use of the different VLE components at the time of the survey, the results were as follows:

- 16 students (53.3%) had used the discussion area;

- 12 students (40.0%) had used the calendar area;

- 7 students (23.3%) had used the background resources area;

- 4 students (13.3%) had used the FAQ area;

- 1 student (3.3%) had used the lecturer video area;

- 2 students (6.7%) had used the student video area;

- 12 students (40%) had used the documentation area.

From this it can be noted that the discussion, calendar and documentation areas were the most used, and by implication, most useful as the following comments reveal:

- Documentation – "it is helpful for recording purposes, if I lost any paperwork by accident, I could easily get a copy through WebCT."

- Calendar – "helps us keep track of deadlines"

- Discussion – "it's interesting to see how other students are getting on - collaborative learning!"

- Discussion and Documentation – "you can use documentation to type your assignments into the forums and you can use discussion to hear what everyone else is doing."

One final point concerns whether the VLE that had been developed was sufficient to meet their needs. When asked whether they would like to see more content on the VLE, 14 out of the 17 students who answered this question (82.4%) were either neutral or disagreed with the statement. It can be concluded that the majority of the students were content with the content of the WebCT module. Some of the suggestions for development included:

- "More graphics"

- "More footage of past student placements would be much appreciated."

- "Private message board, a way to send certain students a message no-one else can read."

Moreover, when asked whether they had any other comments to make on the design and organisation of the WebCT module, all the comments received were considered to be positive. Comments that were here included:

- "It was a very good idea - well done."

- "I think it is really good because it makes you feel like there is someone there for you if you need it."

- "I will set sometime aside to use the WebCT as it is a great means of communicating with other students on their placements."

7.3 Student participation in the VLE

During the course of the placement, data was gathered from the WebCT database and collated in a spreadsheet. This shows the number of times per week that a student would access the WebCT module and the number of postings read and made to the discussion board. Charts 1 and 2 illustrate this behaviour over a 20-week period. It should be noted that students commenced their placement from point 18 on the graphs.
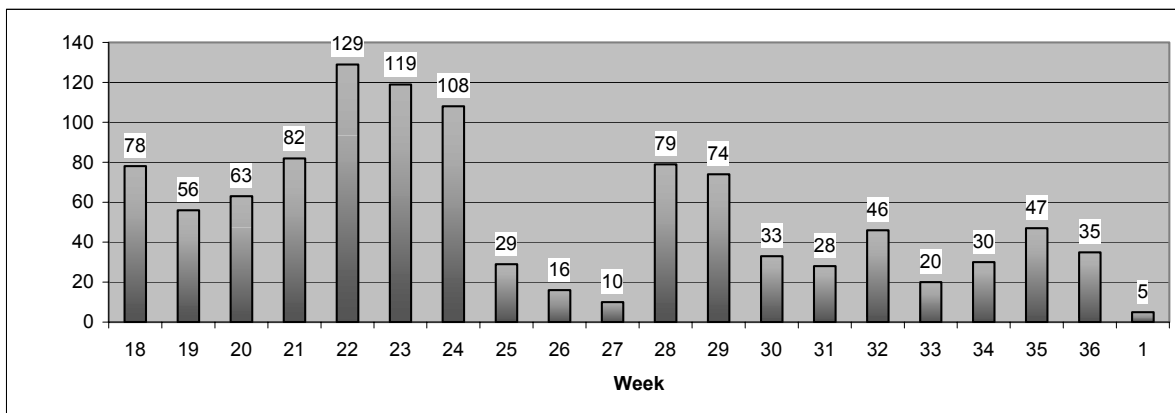
Chart 1:   Student Visitation to Placement VLE

From this rather basic data gathering approach a number of observations can be made. First, it can be observed that initially there was a high level of activity, peaking at 129 visits and 90 postings in weeks 22 and 23 respectively. This was then followed by a drop in participation, with a low of only 10 visits and 3 postings made in week 27. Participation has since picked up, but not to the higher levels of the earlier weeks. One possible explanation for this pattern of behaviour could be that the site was popular at the start due to a certain novelty or curiosity value. As this interest wore off, participation levels

declined and it was only when the postal questionnaire was sent out as part of this study that the participation levels increased. A second point of interest concerns the significant difference between postings read (high) and posting made (low). This perhaps suggests a degree of student apprehension about expressing themselves freely in a public forum.
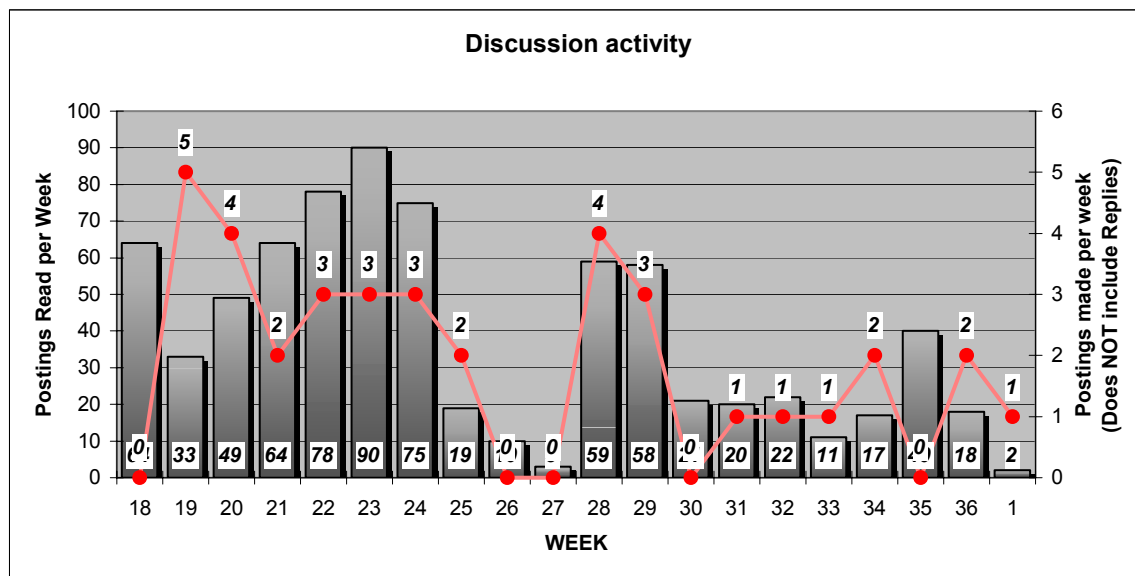
Chart 2: Student Postings and Readings

7.4 Students views after the placement

Of the 25 questionnaires that were completed, 15 respondents had accessed WebCT whilst on placement whilst 10 had not. The results of this survey very much confirm the views received by students during the placement.

The two main reasons cited for not accessing WebCT was no or restricted access to a computer and/or Internet and lack of time: "very hard to access Internet, didn't have much time." Some students also requested more training on the VLE prior to placement, more interaction between tutors and students and one even suggested that it should be made compulsory: "… imperative for everyone to use…".

Of the 15 respondents that accessed WebCT during their placements, half had accessed it between 2 to 5 times whilst half had accessed it over 5 times. Limited technical problems were reported with over 60% accessing WebCT at work and approximately a third accessing from home. The most useful tool was the documentation

area (13 of the students found it useful or very useful): "the documentation area was very useful for being able to download all the documentation needed for several assessments."

Also, over 60% of the respondents found the discussion tool useful. Comments focused on keeping in touch, finding out what other students were doing and their progress:

- "I found the discussion area most useful as you were able to find out how other students were getting on."
- "Discussion area - it was good to have contact with other students and lecturers. You didn't feel alone then."

Also, students stated that they liked knowing that there was this communication channel, especially with tutors, if they needed it: "reassurance that they were there if ever you needed them."

Negative comments tended to focus on lack of tutor participation, dislike of using an online discussion with everyone in the group and lack of synchronicity: "…personally I don't like to discuss things with 'everyone'."

The calendar was also quite popular since it reminded students of assessment deadlines. Other areas like the video of students and lecturers were not considered to be as useful and had access issues.

7.5   Interview with the Learning Technologist

When asked about her initial reaction to the idea of offering online support for placement learning with hospitality and tourism students she stated that she was positive towards the idea:

> From my own experience of teacher training I know you can feel isolated and lonely - so it would be useful if we could provide effective support to address isolation and this can colour what you do in the future. Making sure that they (the students) still feel part of the QMUC scene. It's to do with isolation, but also to do with feeling okay about coming back.

This personal empathy by the learning technologist towards the aspiration of the initiative is considered to be significant. Another point raised concerned the fact that the online support may be able to help students reflect on their experiences during their placement:

> You can be so busy sometimes that you don't stand back and think what
> have I learnt from this - and it is so easy to forget things learnt on
> placement - if it can be used as a reflective tool, this would be incredibly
> useful.

When asked to describe her experiences of the project a number of interesting points emerged. With regards to working relationship with the placement tutor the initial experience was considered to be very positive. For instance the tutor's contributions in the planning stages were described as "fabulous" commenting that he had been "open to putting all sorts of things into WebCT". It is also interesting to note that the contribution of the placement tutor had increased as the project evolved: "his contribution has been right from the start till now and it is continuing".

When asked about staff and student contribution in the use of CMC it was noted that participation in the last couple of weeks had been sporadic. When asked to offer an explanation it was stated:

> I think at the start people were interested, wanted to start off, wanted to
> say hi and here are my initial experiences, but it has started to fall off
> now. I think the fact they are not compelled is important.

Asked whether she was disappointed with the participation she responded (quite strongly) that she was not. "I was amazed with the informal response. I thought there would be considerably less. What I now think we need to do is stand back and say what we really want to achieve." When then asked whether she thought the tutors had a clear idea about what they wanted to achieve through CMC the response was "No, I think the tutors just wanted to have informal chit chat for students". While this use of informal discussion was considered useful in providing a communication link for some students and their peers it was felt that a more formal use of CMC could have been adopted. Asked what this formal role would be it was stated that online contributions should be rewarded and should form part of the assessment:

> There is a debate within learning technology as to whether you should
> assess students for their online contributions. My gut feeling is that
> students are so busy that you can't ask them to do things that are not
> assessed.

Overall reaction was very positive with the learning technologist stating "I'm delighted with the amount of material, I never anticipated that much going on. The videos of

students are tremendous". She also wanted to emphasise that the project was a trial project, and that it should be evaluated as such. It was also stated that discussions had already taken place with the placement tutor with regards to the next iteration. She also expressed a hope that this initiative could be used to promote the use of WebCT within the Department:

> I think it would be really useful for the tutor to talk to their department
> about their experience. This would be a useful way of showing how
> WebCT could be used.

7.6   Interview with the QMUC Placement Tutor

The placement tutor had 12 years experience and described his role as "helping students to plan and organise their placements". This involved placement preparation through a series of workshops, visiting students, monitoring progress and solving problems when they arose. He also stated that for the majority of the students who he dealt with, the placement would be their first real experience of long term, full time employment.

When asked to identify typical student problems a number of issues were identified. These included adjusting to a new way of living, long hours, tiredness, being homesick and not having their expectations met, particularly within the first weeks of the placement. He described this as a "sort of disillusionment". To identify and address these problems the importance of communication was emphasised. This was usually done by phone and more recently by email.

When asked about his initial reaction to the idea of offering online support for placement learning with hospitality and tourism students he stated that he had had mixed feelings:

> It was an area in which I didn't have any expertise. I knew about WebCT,
> and that it was beginning to be used by staff through the University, but I
> didn't know enough about it to say, that's a great idea, but I did feel it was
> well worth exploring to see how much benefit I might get out of it.

The tutor also expressed reservations as to whether the use of the technology would increase his workload:

> Will it open up a situation where I'm going to be continually writing letters
> electronically to students.

The tutor was then asked what benefits he felt the initiative might be able to offer his practice. Those benefits highlighted included; "as a method of improving communication, as offering information to students and as a means by which students could communicate with each other over the summer". The following comment encapsulates the perceived benefits:

> It might encourage the students to maintain contact with each other, hear what other students are doing, their experiences etc. They are away for 6 and a half months so when they return they can get back together as groups much more easily and quickly.

It can be noted from the response to this question that it is the informal supportive communication that features strongly. It is also interesting to note that a more formal application, say for example linking participation in the online facility to assessment was not included in this response. This can perhaps be explained by reservations the tutor had over Internet access:

> As it is based on the Internet would every student be able to access it? Will they be in a location where they can access it and where the costs are not expensive? Can they persuade the employer to give a limited amount of access per week?

Uncertainty as to the answer to these questions is perhaps significant.

When asked to describe his experiences of the project to date a number of interesting observations were raised. With regards the students' use of CMC, the tutor expressed some disappointment with the level of participation:

> I expected a lot of students to use it. You always get some who would not be interested, but in some ways I have been a bit disappointed in the numbers who have used the system over the summer, but it's not persuaded me to drop the idea.

This perhaps reveals an assumption on the tutor's part that participation would happen automatically. When asked to speculate what the possible barriers may be, the tutor thought the cost of accessing an Internet café in some locations might be a prohibitive. He identified France as a case in point stating that access from there was "extremely expensive".

A second possible barrier put forward concerned student inhibitions about revealing themselves to others. "Is it because they feel inhibited by expressing themselves in a public arena feeling that the whole world will see it?" However he went on to say that he was surprised by this as there are "so many students who are into text messaging and there is no inhibition there". It is interesting to note here that the distinction between public and private forms of online communication was not acknowledged and this is perhaps significant.

When asked how he himself felt about using CMC it was stated that it was something that he hadn't used much commenting that "I think I need a lot more practice". Workload fears were expressed at this stage as the following comment suggests:

> I can see it taking up a lot of time so I need to develop skills so it becomes something that doesn't take over your life, but I do plan to use it more in the future, but not just for placement learning.

This positive attitude is mirrored in a number of comments the tutor made throughout the interview. Comments such as a "much more exciting way of doing it", "innovative" and "100% behind the idea" suggest a future commitment to using CMC in his practice.

Other features of the VLE were also commented on in a positive way. For example the Video FAQ section of the facility was described as "bringing things more to life" through the use of students giving answers. It was also noted that he would introduce students to these video clips in the workshops that he ran as part of the placement presentation.

The tutor also felt that it would be better for the next group of students, describing the idea as having "tremendous potential". Indeed the tutor put forward some developmental ideas during the interview such as a "memory lane concept" described as "brief statements of immediate memories of placement posted by students". He also mentioned that he would eventually like to build in assessment, but felt that as he could not guarantee access to all students at present, this was not an option. From this it was interesting to note that the placement tutor wanted to take the project further. This is considered to be consistent with one of the aspirations of an action research methodology.

A final point emerging from the interview concerned the attitude of the tutor towards the more general use of learning technology in his practice. He very much saw the technology as providing "additional tools" that could be used to complement rather than replace existing practices.

7.7 Discussion with Placement Tutors at the ITGC

7.7.1 Views about web-based technology

There was a wide range of perspectives as to what was meant by the term 'web-based technology', with the term Internet being most frequently mentioned (five responses). This perhaps indicates that the term Web has almost become synonymous with the term Internet.

When examining the responses in more detail the word 'information' featured strongly (five responses). This could be as either an information provider such as gaining information from a website, or as a medium for dissemination where information can be put on the web for easy access. The following response is perhaps indicative of how web-based technology was currently being used:

> I use the Internet on a regular basis for secondary research, company websites, etc. I'm currently looking at the website for the College and entering placement data/information on the Student Intranet, and using Blackboard for lecture notes.

It is perhaps interesting to note that only two respondents mentioned the word 'communication' in the context of web-based technology, both with reference to email. Moreover only two respondents made any reference to virtual learning environments in their responses.

When asked how they felt about using web-based technology in their daily working life there was a mixed response. One respondent was very negative stating "I spend far too much time in front of a computer screen". In contrast two respondents stated that "it was the way forward", while one thought that more could be done: "I think there should be more interest in engaging in web-based technology to improve learning". One respondent was concerned about "keeping up".

When asked about the current use of web-based technology for placement learning the responses indicate limited use. Six respondents stated that they made no use, while four respondents stated that they made limited use. These uses included:

- Making documentation available through the Universities Intranet (one respondent)

- Encouraging students to look for information on the Web (three respondents)

- Using email to support placements (two respondents).

It is perhaps interesting to note that of those who responded and said that they currently made no use, three went on to qualify this as the following comments demonstrate:

- "Not yet, but currently writing it."
- "Not yet! I am waiting to hear the outcome of a bid to support placement students with disabilities."
- "No, but I must!"

7.7.2   Views about QMUC site

The QMUC site was viewed as a positive initiative. Advantages stated included the fact that you could communicate with all students at once and that this would be a good way for them to contact each other. The employer in the discussion stated that she has about 40/50 international students each year and "as there is a computer on all properties, this would create a support culture". This point was agreed upon with one of the respondents noting that the site would offer reassurance, avoiding what she termed a "panic attack".

The use of the VLE as an information repository was also commented upon as a positive feature. Indeed as the discussion progressed, the participants put forward ideas and suggestions as to how content could be enhanced. A key proposal for the future development of the VLE included the employer element. It was felt that this was the missing link as there could be links to company websites, company contact details, student descriptions of previous placements and even links to company CD-ROMs. Another suggestion focused on the creation of a survival guide to working in specific geographic areas.

However, there were a range of concerns which included a fear that face to face contact would be completely replaced by virtual communication. All, but one of the participants used face to face contact to support students on placement. As one respondent remarked "Do we need to do this, when everything is on the web? A really useful site needs to support, not substitute on-site learning".

Also, many were concerned about lack of student access to the Internet whilst on placement thereby creating an unequal experience for students. The employer said that if the student makes an effort there should be no problem about access, however this point was challenged by the placement tutors. This difference of opinion is perhaps significant as it suggests the need to involve the employer 'formally' in the implementation of a placement VLE. This point about unequal access was also raised in

relation to some students' technical skills, and it was noted that some students might find it more difficult to use.

Other discussion in the workshop focused on the role of CMC. There was a general preference for informal rather than formal use: "I don't want it to be too formal as that will be limiting, it's nice to be on their level, even though I'm the boss".

There did however appear to be some confusion between anecdote and reflection. Many of the participants did not make the connection that CMC narrative could be part of the student learning experience. Concerns were expressed about what happened with the students' contributions (after posting) with regards to data protection. Moreover the group dimension of the interaction was not fully appreciated with one tutor commenting "how is it different from email?". In addition, concern was raised about how frequently curriculum staff should access the CMC and the subsequent increase in workload. A final concern was raised about *flaming*: "I've read some bad press about abusive behaviour in chat rooms, so I think I would need to develop a code of practice".

From the above concerns it is perhaps possible to conclude that the placement tutors were both apprehensive and unclear about the potential use CMC in their practice.

7.8   Telephone interviews

In the three institutions, there was some evidence of use of web technologies, for example, use of intranets and VLEs. Currently all three institutions use technology to support students on placement but via email and mobile phone and rarely through more traditional web-based technologies. However, like the tutors at the ITGC, most of the respondents showed a lack of clarity between Information Technology tools, for example, email and PowerPoint (often referred to as 'worldware') and specific technology tools designed to enhance the learning environment, for example, online discussions. All of the respondents would like to develop web-based materials but they listed three key barriers to this. The main barrier cited by all respondents was limited time: "I'd love to develop it [website] but I just, at the moment, don't have time".

In addition, all respondents were concerned about the lack robustness of technical systems in education and also mentioned the age of staff PCs as inhibiting staff involvement in web technologies:

> When I started the job I got a very, very slow computer and I had no patience at all with it, you know, even starting it up before I'd even get on to the Outlook Express page or whatever it was, to start up took forever.

A third obstacle was the lack of support for academic staff venturing into this new mode of programme delivery. There was clearly in two of the institutions a 'learn it yourself' approach. In contrast, the third institution had a central support area that provided support and was establishing groups within the subject specialisms for sharing of good practice. However, the respondent at this institution was slightly concerned that the staff development event on deploying VLEs had given the impression that it would be easier to develop and maintain modules in the VLE than it was. Two respondents also felt that certain members of their school would not engage in staff development for web technologies:

> a lot of our members of staff would be a lot more the older school, so they haven't been brought up with that [using the web] and find it frightening to use it and kind of veer away from it if they can do.

The three respondents provided a range of possible uses for web technologies supporting students on placements. Enhanced communication with and between students was the most frequently cited advantage:

> another thing [the VLE] can do is for those students who have gone overseas, there's hopefully a much more pleasant method and much more immediate method…… of communication between us and them and us and other students….we use email but it's a bit clunky.

Other potential opportunities focused on providing a virtual link with the institution for students on placement by webpages having updated information about the institution and department. Other advantages focused on reducing the administrative processes on a visit (eg. form filling could occur prior to a visit) and monitoring students:

> prior to using [the VLE], I lost the ability to monitor their [student] activity and [the VLE] has given that back to me because you can, at a very crude level, tell how many, what students have logged on, when they did it, how many times, what they looked at etc…. so it's given me back a bit of, a bit of an impression of who needs reminders, who's doing rather well.

Although all the respondents provided examples for the potential of web technologies from the student perspective, they had three specific concerns. The first of this focused on access and the assumption that all students (and their managers on placement) would have access to a PC and the Internet. One respondent stated that some companies have a strict policy about not accessing external websites and receiving external email. Concerns were also voiced about ensuring students were carefully introduced to the VLE prior to placement. Lack of student motivation to discuss online discussion was also seen as a barrier to update of web technologies.

One respondent had previously used email forums for students on placement and this had not been completely successful:

> what we're finding at the moment, is that there is a small minority of students who for whatever reason, don't engage with it [web technologies] .

7.9   Summary of Findings

From the analysis of the data presented in Section 7, a number of conclusions can now be drawn. These can be summarised as follows:

- Students were extremely comfortable and confident with using the Internet especially for email and information searches.

- Students had considerable experience of and few concerns about using technology for one to one communication but were less familiar with using the technology for group communication. This was particularly evident during the placement period where there was a significant difference between students who read messages (high) and students who posted messages (low). This suggests a degree of uncertainty with this type of interaction.

- A significant number of students felt that the Internet was a valuable tool for learning. A key advantage of the Internet was the ease of access to information. However, the main disadvantages cited were speed of access and obtaining relevant information.

- There was a higher than expected number of students accessing the Internet from home and areas outwith the institution including Internet cafes.

- Over 50% liked the idea of the VLE but a significant number were non committal about its potential.

- Over two-thirds of respondents had Internet access whilst on placement but a significant minority did not.

- Of the students that did have access to the Internet at work, some had very limited access, eg. they could only access the Internet at break time.

- For those students paying for Internet access, costs varied, but some students were paying more than £3 per hour. This is considered to be expensive.

- Most of the students had used the VLE, but reasons for not regularly accessing the site focused on lack of time, access and cost rather than motivation.

- The VLE was considered well designed, and its content was considered sufficient to meet student needs.

- Most of the respondents had accessed the discussion area on the VLE and this area together with the Calendar and Documentation areas were considered to be the most useful.

- Overall the VLE had been favourably received by students whilst out on placement.

- The placement tutor had responded positively to the initiative, and considered the introduction to VLEs an important learning opportunity.

- There was a difference of opinion between the learning technologist and the placement tutor when it came to evaluating the potential of CMC. The learning technologist considered that the use of CMC should be embedded in the curriculum in a formal way and should form part of the assessment. The placement tutor did not consider the use of CMC as an appropriate tool for assessment at the present time, as there could be no guarantee of equal access. The other placement tutors shared this view.

- The placement tutor considered that CMC should be used in an informal way and should be used to promote social interaction between learners and the tutor while out on placement. It was considered that this informal social interaction may be a particularly useful way to help students return and readjust to the classroom after a lengthy period in the workplace.

- Tutor concerns were also expressed as to how long they should spend on using CMC in their teaching practice. At present, fears do exist about the increased workload that may arise through the use of CMC. This is considered to be a significant barrier to CMC becoming formally embedded in placement tutors' practice.

- VLEs in general, and CMC in particular, were considered to provide 'additional tools' that could be used to complement rather than replace existing practices. Viewed with

this caveat, their introduction was considered to be positive development to improve the quality of the student experience.

8   D ISCUSSION

This study has sought to evaluate the merits of developing and implementing a VLE to support placement learning. It has been found, perhaps not surprisingly, that it is possible to develop a VLE using existing technologies, and these can be used to support the placement learning of undergraduate students in the subject domain of hospitality and tourism. It has also been found that the development of this type of support is viewed in the main positively by students and placement tutors. However with regards to the implementation of this type of virtual support it has been demonstrated that the full potential is not being fully realised and it is this point which is worthy of further comment.

In the review of the literature into placement learning a key theme to emerge was the need to abstract learning from experience. While the literature acknowledged that the achievement of this would not necessarily be easy, it was hoped that CMC would offer learning opportunities in this respect. Indeed given the asynchronous nature of CMC interaction it was considered that this would provide an ideal mechanism for making the linkages between horizontal and vertical development as outlined in the Connective Model of Work Experience. In reality however this model remains a model, and the practice based on the evidence of this study, tells a different story. It would seem that for the model to be validated, using CMC as its prime agent of interaction, there is a requirement for two important things to happen. Firstly online *talk* has to take place, and secondly this talk has to be made sense of. During this study it has been demonstrated that talk is happening with both students and tutors posting messages to be read. What is not happening is for this talk to be responded to in a way that provides it with real meaning and context. This is not to say that this articulation will not happen in the future, it might just take some time. Indeed many of the participants in the study display the characteristics of reaching stages 2 and 3 of the Salmon model (online socialisation and information exchange), while stages 4 and 5 (knowledge construction and development) have not yet been reached.

From a tutor perspective lack of experience in the use of CMC as a teaching technique is considered to be an issue. It has been argued throughout this report that that CMC offers the placement tutor a number of beneficial learning opportunities, most notably the potential to encourage student reflection. However it is evident that the use of asynchronous group interaction is a 'new' experience for most tutors. The development of skills in the pedagogy of e-moderating is therefore seen as a necessary requirement prior to use. Indeed, given that most tutors will have no real experience as online

learners themselves, it is considered that this staff development need should not be overlooked.

Similarly from a student perspective lack of experience in the use of CMC is also an issue. While it is evident from the study that students are comfortable with the technology and can engage in informal online social interaction with apparent ease, they are less comfortable with the sharing of ideas and experiences in an open forum. Moreover the willingness of students to use CMC to collaborate with their peers and tutors was also lacking. The possibility of students reflecting on their placement experience in this forum is therefore unlikely to be achieved without prior study skills training in the use of CMC for reflection.

To inform this training agenda, it is considered that investigating how both tutors and students feel about using CMC as a form of interaction is worthy of further exploration. McConnell (2000:84) makes an interesting point when he notes that perhaps CMC demands a certain kind of openness in the communications of those involved. The fact that you can see everything that any group member enters into the discussion might be considered threatening to both tutors and learners alike. Moreover using online conferencing means that all communication is made via the keyboard in a textual form. Writing dialogue, for most people, is more time consuming than speaking. This has the potential to create workload problems, and may be particularly problematic for tutors when the conversation is not self-sustaining. Indeed Muirhead (2000:321) observes that the greatest challenge facing teachers in adopting the new technology will be in their personal time management skills, as their teaching day will be no longer governed by the clock, but by the task.

Having said this, the researchers remain optimistic about the value of CMC as a means to support placement learning. Driving this optimism is the predominantly favourable attitude amongst the placement tutors whom the researchers encountered during the study. This is consistent with the findings of research done elsewhere. For example in a study at Sheffield Hallam University, Steel and Hudson (2001:109) concluded that:

> Far from being anti-technology, the overwhelming majority of staff interviewed were in favour of educational technology becoming a part of their own teaching and learning strategies, in terms of the perceived added value that technology brings to their teaching in terms of the benefits to their students.

Parker (1997) and Daugherty and Funke (1998) have presented similar conclusions. The researchers remain convinced that CMC makes available a new and important channel to facilitate both formal and informal talk in learning. This talk, according to Barnes and Todd (1977, cited in McConnell 2000:23) has the potential to help many learners make the link between their present understanding of a topic or issue, and a more meaningful understanding.

The findings that have emerged from this study should therefore be viewed as a starting rather than a finishing point. In this respect the work should provide a useful basis for further research into the role of online support for placement learning.

One possible area to explore might be to look at how different technologies might be used to facilitate CMC in the context of placement learning. For example, this study used WebCT to create the VLE support. While this is a popular package, it is by no means the only software available to accommodate CMC. The use of mobile technologies is another possibility in this respect. During the investigation it was observed that there seemed to exist a high ownership of mobile phones amongst the group of undergraduate students used in the case. Moreover it was noted that many of these students seemed to enjoy using this technology and were comfortable when communicating with text messages. While these observations are based on the researchers' intuition, and the facts (so to speak) would need to be established, it may be the case that this form of communication will have a particular application in the context of supporting placement learning. Perhaps mobile phone technology and CMC could be used together to improve access and encourage use of CMC.

It should also be recognised that this study has focused on a single case study over a relatively short period of time. It is clear to the researchers that the desirability to develop multiple case studies over a longer period of time and in different subject areas should be a requirement for further work in this area. Indeed this construction of knowledge in this way may go some way to establishing the validity (or otherwise) of the Connective Model of Workplace Learning.

One final area for further work concerns the need to understand employer attitudes to online support for placement learning in more depth. The employer's voice (to a large extent) has been missing from this study, and this represents an important gap in our knowledge. Will, for example, employers be willing to participate in CMC discussions with students and tutor's and in so doing create a 'true' community of online learners? Can employers be encouraged to provide placement students with greater access to

networked facilities? Indeed is this a realistic proposition? These questions remain largely unanswered but are considered worthy of a research agenda for the future.

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APPENDIX A: CONNECTIVE MODEL OF WORK EXPERIENCE

Purpose of work experience	Reflexivity
Assumptions about learning and development	Vertical and Horizontal development
Practice of work experience	Working collaboratively to apply and develop knowledge and skill PLUS 'boundary crossing'
Management of work experience	Developing and resituating learning
Outcome of work experience	Polycontextual and connective skills
Role of education and training provider	Develop partnerships with workplaces to create 'environments for learning.'

Source: Guile, D and Griffiths, T (2001) Learning through work experience, *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), 120.

APPENDIX B: A MODEL FOR CMC IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING
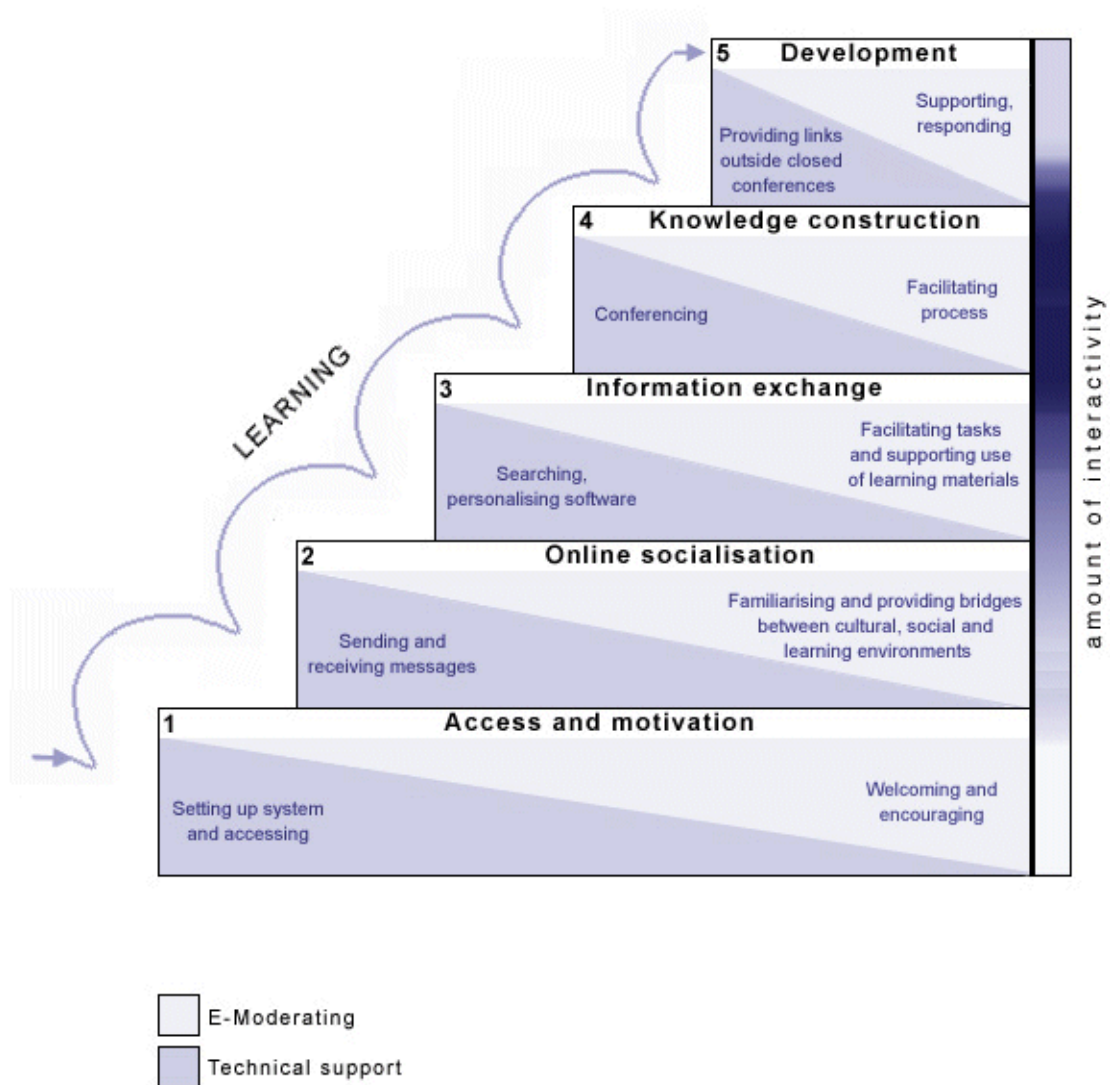
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APPENDIX C: WEBCT MODULE HOMEPAGE

A P P E N D I X D : F U N C T I O N S O F T H E V L E

Introduction	This consists of a brief introduction to the aims and outcomes of the module. -It is based on the module descriptor and is provided to the students both online and on paper.
Previous Experience	Four students were videoed and asked about their experiences on placement. They talked about what they enjoyed on their placement and what they had learnt from it.
Documentation	Students go on placement within and without the UK. During their placement, they are required to complete a number of forms (for example, interim report, progress report, and a disability questionnaire) which need to be submitted to academic staff. Students are provided with the forms prior to leaving for their placement but these are often lost. This has resulted in staff receiving individual adaptations of the same form, for example students have faxed forms to each other. Therefore, the WebCT module has been used as a repository of forms.
Background Resources	One of the academic staff had intended writing a Frequently Asked Questions section. This would include general information about placements (length, purpose, and location) as well as support mechanisms and assessment information. To provide a more visual representation, however, the lecturer was videoed.
Calendar	Diary of key dates inputted by the lecturers. Students have added other crucial dates including birthdays.
Discussions	An online discussion area for students to discuss with each other and their lecturers about their placement experiences.

APPENDIX E: SELF-COMPLETION QUESTIONNAIRE ONE

Queen Margaret University College

EDINBURGH

Queen Margaret University College is investigated the potential of offering online support to students during their period of placement learning. To help in this investigation we would be grateful if you could complete this questionnaire. Thank You.

1a)   Do you use the internet for any of the following activities?

Please Circle

Email (e.g. QMUC, hotmail, etc.)	Yes	No
Information search for work/study	Yes	No
Information search for leisure	Yes	No
Chat Room, Discussion Forum, Bulletin Board	Yes	No
To shop online	Yes	No
Other (please specify)	_____	

1b)   Using the scale presented below, please circle the number that best describes how often you use the internet for each of the following activities

Scale

At least once every three days	Circle	1
At least once every week	Circle	2
At least once every two weeks	Circle	3
At least once every month	Circle	4
Less often	Circle	5

Please Circle

Email (QMUC, Hotmail etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Information search for work/study	1	2	3	4	5
Information search for leisure	1	2	3	4	5
Chat Room, Discussion Forum, Bulletin Board	1	2	3	4	5
To shop online	1	2	3	4	5
Other	1	2	3	4	5

2a)   Do you access the Internet from any of the following locations?

	Please Circle	
Home	Yes	No
QMUC	Yes	No
A Library	Yes	No
An Internet café	Yes	No
A place of work	Yes	No
Other (please specify)	_____	

2b)   Using the scale presented below, please circle the number that best describes how often you access the Internet from each of the following locations

Scale

At least once every three days	Circle 1
At least once every week	Circle 2
At least once every two weeks	Circle 3
At least once every month	Circle 4
At least once very six months	Circle 5
Do not use	Circle 6

			Please Circle			
Home	1	2	3	4	5	6
QMUC	1	2	3	4	5	6
A Library	1	2	3	4	5	6
An Internet café	1	2	3	4	5	6
Place of work	1	2	3	4	5	6
Other	1	2	3	4	5	6

3.   What do you most like about using the Internet? (You may state more than one like)

_____

4.   What do you least like about using the Internet? (You may state more than one dislike)

_____

5.   Using the scale presented below, please circle the number that best describes how you feel about the following statements

Scale

Strongly disagree	Circle	1
Disagree	Circle	2
Neither Agree nor Disagree Circle	Circle	3
Agree	Circle	4
Strongly Agree	Circle	5

I am confident when it comes to using the Internet

                (Please circle)

1   2   3   4   5

The Internet is a valuable tool for my learning

                (Please circle)

1   2   3   4   5

I would like to see more use of the Internet in my learning

(Please circle)

1   2   3   4   5

If I have the opportunity, I will make use of the Internet during my work placement

(Please circle)

1   2   3   4   5

I think the WebCT module will be useful during my placement

(Please circle)

1   2   3   4   5

6a).   Do you have any hospitality & tourism work experience of prior to your placement?

Please circle   Yes   No

6b).   If you answered yes, approximately how hospitality & tourism much work experience do you have?

Less than 3 months

3-6 months

6-12 months

1-2 years

2-3 years

More than 3 years

7a)   Please state your normal country of residence?

        _____

Contact details on Placement (if known)

Name:

Address:

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

WE HOPE YOU ENJOY YOUR PLACEMENT

APPENDIX G: SELF-COMPLETION QUESTIONNAIRE TWO

Queen Margaret University College
EDINBURGH

Queen Margaret University College is investigating the potential of offering online support to students during their period of placement learning. To help with this investigation, we would be grateful if you could complete this questionnaire and return to Stuart McGugan in the envelope provided. Thank you for your time.

Section 1: Access to Internet During Placement

1. Do you have access to the Internet on your placement?

    Yes   No   (Please circle)

    If No, please go to question 2

    If Yes, please go to question 3

2. Would you be prepared to use an Internet café to access the online support from Queen Margaret University College while on placement?

    Yes   No   Not sure   (Please circle)

    If you have answered No or Not sure, please provide an explanation

    ....

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return in the envelope provided.
+++

3. Do you currently have access to the Internet **at your** place of work?

    Yes   No   (Please circle)

    If No, please go to question 6

    If Yes, please go to question 4

4. If you have access to the Internet **at your** place of work, is the access?

    Available all the time   Yes   No   (Please circle)

    Restricted   Yes   No   (Please circle)

5. If your access to the Internet at your place of work is restricted, please state how?

    ……

6. Do you currently have access to the Internet **outwith** your place of work?

    Yes   No   (Please circle)

If No please go to question 11

If Yes, please go to question 7

7. If you answered Yes, please state where you can currently access the Internet from?

    ……
    ……

8. Do you have to pay for Internet access **outwith** your place of work?

    Yes   No   (Please circle)

If you do have to pay, how much does it cost per hour?

    ……

9. If you have access to the Internet **outwith** your place of work, is the access?

    Available all the time   Yes   No   (Please circle)

    Restricted   Yes   No   (Please circle)

10. If your access to the Internet is restricted **outwith** your place of work, please state how?

……

……

Section 2: Use of the QMUC Industrial Placement WebCT Module

11. Have you accessed this WebCT Module?

                                                    Yes   No   (Please circle)

If you answered No, please go to question 12
If you answered Yes, please go to question 14

12. Why have you not accessed the WebCT Module?

……

……

13. What would encourage you to access this WebCT Module?

……

……

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return in the envelope provided.

14. How often have you accessed the WebCT Module since starting your placement?
     (Please tick as appropriate)

Once   ☐   2-5 times   ☐   More than 5 times   ☐

15. Have you experienced any technical difficulties when accessing the WebCT Module?

                                                    Yes   No   (Please circle)

If you answered Yes, what type of problems have you experienced?

……

16. Which areas on the WebCT module have you accessed? (Please tick as many as appropriate)

Discussion   ☐   Calendar   ☐   Background Resources   ☐

FAQ's   ☐   Video of lecturer   ☐   Video of students   ☐

Documentation   ☐   Other   ☐

17. Which area(s) do you find most useful?………………………………………………………………………………………………………..

Why?………

………

18. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements

I find the WebCT Module easy to navigate.

Strongly Agree ☐   Agree ☐   Neutral ☐   Disagree ☐   Strongly Disagree ☐

Do you have any further comments about the design and organisation of the WebCT Module?

………

………

19. I would like more materials on the WebCT Module?

☐   Strongly agree (go to question 20)   ☐   Agree (go to question 20)

☐   Neutral   (go to question 20)

☐   Disagree (go to question 21)   ☐   Strongly disagree (go to question 21)

20. What extra materials would you like on the WebCT Module?

………

21. Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return in the envelope provided.

APPENDIX H: QUESTIONNAIRE COVERING LETTER

Our Ref: SMcG/VMcK/L0007

24 May 2002

«FirstName» «LastName»
«Company»
«Address1»

Stuart McGugan

Department of Hospitality & Tourism

Corstorphine Campus

Direct Dial

Tel 0131 317 3583 Fax 0131 317

3777

Email: smcgugan@qmuc.ac.uk

Dear «FirstName»

Greetings from Queen Margaret University College. I hope your are settling into your placement and are enjoying the world of work. I am writing to you for three reasons.

Firstly, to wish you well with your placement. While placements can often be very hard work, they can also provide invaluable learning opportunities and I hope you can make the most out of the experience.

Secondly to remind you, or if you do not know already, that there is a WebCT site which has been developed to support you on your placement. Some of the benefits of using this site may be:

- You can talk with other students online and find out how they are getting on
- You can talk with your tutors online (Mr Scott and Mr MacIver)
- You can access resources which may be of use to you on placement. We have made a video of Mr Scott and some students providing advice on how to survive the placement. You may find this useful and also amusing!

You will find enclosed instructions on how to access and use the WebCT site (lilac form) if you have not done so already.

Thirdly, to ask you to complete a short questionnaire. We are interested to find out whether students while out on placement can easily access this WebCT site, and whether it will be of value. For students undertaking their placement in the UK I enclose a pre-paid envelope. For

students undertaking their placement overseas, I enclose an envelope and would be grateful if you could pay the postage at this stage. You will be refunded this when you return to QM (please keep a receipt).

Please return this questionnaire to Stuart McGugan by 15 June 2002.

continued / ….

Page 2

«FirstName» «LastName»   24 May 2002

Finally as a way of thanking you for your time, I enclose a £5 note for you. You may keep this regardless of whether you fill in the questionnaire or not, but obviously I would like you to do so. I would be obliged if you could confirm receipt of this by returning the slip below in the envelope provided.

If you have any queries about this, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Stuart

Stuart McGugan
Lecturer, Department of Hospitality & Tourism

P.S. Mr Scott and Mr MacIver send their regards.

Encs

Please detach and return in the envelope provided
✂
- -

Dear Stuart
I acknowledge receipt of the £5 note sent with your letter dated 24 May 2002.
Yours sincerely

APPENDIX I: SELF-COMPLETION QUESTIONNAIRE THREE

Queen Margaret University College
EDINBURGH

ONLINE SUPPORT FOR PLACEMENT LEARNING: QUESTIONNAIRE 3

QMUC is investigating the potential of offering online support to students during their period of placement learning. To help with this investigation, we would be grateful if you could complete this questionnaire and return to Stuart McGugan.

Section 1: Use of the QMUC Industrial Placement WebCT Module

1) Did you access the WebCT Module during your industrial placement?

Yes   No   (Please circle)

If you answered No, please go to question 2
If you answered Yes, please go to question 6

2) Please explain why you did not access the WebCT Module during your placement?

………
………

3) What would have encouraged you to access this WebCT Module?

………

4) We will be developing WebCT support for Industrial Placements in the future. How would you improve it? You can list as many as you want.

………

5) Would you be prepared to participate in a focus group discussion/interview about this topic? This will take approximately 60 minutes and you will be paid £15 for your assistance

Yes   No   (Please circle)

If yes, please provide your name and email address.

....

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

6)   How often did you access the WebCT Module during your placement? (Please tick as appropriate)

Once   ☐   2-5 times   ☐   More than 5 times   ☐

7)   Did you experience any technical difficulties during this time?

                                                    Yes   No   (Please circle)

If you answered Yes, what type of difficulties did you experience?

....

8)   Where did you mainly access the WebCT Module during your placement?

Home   ☐   Place of work   ☐   Internet Café   ☐   Other (please specify)

....

9)   Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements. (Please tick as appropriate)

During my placement I found the Discussion area to be useful.

Strongly Agree ☐   Agree ☐   Neutral ☐   Disagree ☐   Strongly Disagree ☐ Did not use ☐

During my placement I found the Calendar area to be useful.

Strongly Agree ☐   Agree ☐   Neutral ☐   Disagree ☐   Strongly Disagree ☐ Did not use ☐

During my placement I found the Background Resources area to be useful.

Strongly Agree ☐   Agree ☐   Neutral ☐   Disagree ☐   Strongly Disagree ☐ Did not use ☐

During my placement I found the FAQ's area to be useful.

Strongly Agree ☐   Agree ☐   Neutral ☐   Disagree ☐   Strongly Disagree ☐ Did not use ☐

During my placement I found the Videos of the lecturer to be useful.

Strongly Agree ☐   Agree ☐   Neutral ☐   Disagree ☐   Strongly Disagree ☐ Did not use ☐

During my placement I found the Video of the students to be useful.

Strongly Agree ☐   Agree ☐   Neutral ☐   Disagree ☐   Strongly Disagree ☐ Did not use ☐

During my placement I found the Documentation area to be useful.

Strongly Agree ☐   Agree ☐   Neutral ☐   Disagree ☐   Strongly Disagree ☐ Did not use ☐

10) Please provide an explanation of which area you found **most useful**, stating reasons for your choice?
……

11) Please provide an explanation of which area you found **least useful**, stating reasons for your choice?
……

12) The WebCT module used an online discussion forum as a method of communication.

Approximately how often did you post a message into this discussion forum during your placement?
(Please tick as appropriate)

None   ☐   Once ☐   2-5 times ☐   5 - 10 times ☐   More than 10 times ☐

13) Approximately how often did you read a message that had been posted into this discussion forum during your placement?
(Please tick as appropriate)

None   ☐   Once ☐   2-5 times ☐   5 - 10 times ☐   More than 10 times ☐

14) Do you feel that having the opportunity to use this online discussion forum was helpful to you during your placement?

Yes   ☐   No   ☐   Not Sure   ☐

Please provide an explanation for your answer

………

15) In what ways could the online discussion forum be developed to support you during your placement?

………

16) Did you find the messages from your tutors helpful?

Yes   ☐   No   ☐   Not Sure ☐   Please provide an explanation for your answer

……

17) We will be developing WebCT support for Industrial Placements in the future. How would you improve it? You can list as many as you want.

……

18) Would you be prepared to participate in a focus group discussion/interview about this topic? This will take approximately 60 minutes and you will be paid £15 for your help

                                        Yes   No   (Please circle)

If yes, please provide your name and email address.

………

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Queen Margaret University College
EDINBURGH

ONLINE SUPPORT FOR PLACEMENT LEARNING

The aim of this workshop is to consider the application of web-based technology for placement learning. The workshop will comprise of a presentation that will outline a Virtual Learning Environment that has been developed to support placement learning. This will be followed by a group discussion to explore the value of this online facility. To set the scene for the workshop, we would be grateful if you could answer the following questions.

1. What do you understand by the term web-based technology?

2. What is your experience/use of web-based technology in your daily working life?

3. For you, does there exist any institutional or social pressure to engage with web-based technologies?

4. How do you feel about this?

5. Have you used any web-based technology to support placement learning? Please describe

Name   ………………………………………………………………………………………………

Position   ………………………………………………………………………………………………

Organisation   ………………………………………………………………………………………………

Address   ……………………………………………………………………………………………….

Postcode   ………………………………………….

Phone   ………………………………………….

Email   ………………………………………….

If you would be willing to participate in some further research into the role of online support for placement learning please tick

                                                    Yes   ☐
                                                    No   ☐

<u>Workshop facilitators</u>
Stuart McGugan, Department of Hospitality & Tourism, Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh, EH12 8TS, smcgugan@qmuc.ac.uk

Susi Peacock, Centre for Learning & Teaching, Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh, EH12 8TS, speacock@qmuc.ac.uk

Outline of questions for Industrial Placement Tutors

Personal Details

Job Title ……………………………………
Do you teach/work with only students on placement?
Do you teach/work with a range of students?
Age

20 - 25	26 - 30	31 - 35	36 - 40	41 - 45	46 - 50
51 - 55	56 - 60	over 60			

Years in education

Under 5	6 - 10	11 - 15	16 - 20	21 - 25	over 25

Definitions

1. What do you understand about web-based technology
2. What do you understand about web-technology in the context of learning and teaching?
3. What do you understand by the term 'Virtual Learning Environment'

Staff Perceptions

1. What do you think will be the main advantages for you?
2. What do you think will be the main disadvantages for you?
3. If you reflect on the colleagues in your department
   - How much do they use web technologies
   - What is their attitude to web technologies
   - What do you think their attitude would be to using web technologies to support students on placement

Experience

1. Do use web technology for learning and teaching purposes? Explore experience both generally and for placement students.
2. How do you think that using web technology has changed your teaching? (Explore both technical and pedagogical)
3. How would you like to develop your use of web technology for learning and teaching?
   - In general

- For Placement Learning

4. How do you think that using web technology might change your teaching?
5. What are the main barriers to developing your use of web technology?
6. What time of support are you offered by your institution?

Staff Perception of Student Reaction

1. What do you think the initial student reaction to using web technologies would be?
   - In general
   - Placement Students
   - Has been if experience
2. What barriers do you think the students will have?
3. What do you think will be the main advantages for your students
   - in general
   - on placement
4. What do you think will be the main disadvantages for your students
   - in general
   - on placement

Institutional

Does your institution have a commitment to introducing web technologies?
Are there any institutional/departmental initiatives to using web technologies?
Is web technologies part of one of your institution's strategies eg learning and teaching, elearning strategy?
Is there any institutional encouragement to use web technologies for learning and teaching?
Do you think that your institution is significantly behind or in front of other institutions with regard to web technologies?

Placement Tutor

What are you views as to the value of work experience as part of the Higher Education curriculum?

Can you tell me briefly about the role of the placement tutor at QMUC?

In your experience does the placement tutor encounter any problems in the supervision of students?

When you were first approached with the idea about offering an online resource for placement learning, what was your reaction?

Did you feel the initiative would have merit? Specify and explain.

Did you have any reservations/concerns? Specify and explain.

Had you been using technology in your teaching prior to this?

What do you feel should be the purpose of offering an online resource to students while on their placement?

What do you feel about the SWE WebCT module that was developed and made available to students?

Looking back, would you like to change or develop any aspect of this online resource?

How do you feel the students have responded to this online resource?

How do you feel you have responded to this online resource?

The module uses CMC (online group conferencing) as a means of communication.
How do you feel about using this form of communication?
- Useful?
- Comfortable when using?
- Experienced problems when using?

How do you feel about the support made available to you by the Centre for Learning and Teaching and Learning in preparing you to use the module?
 - Outline the nature of any support?
 - Was it of value?

Have you views changed as to the use of technology in your teaching since the launch of the WebCT SWE module?

Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

Learning Technologist

Can you tell me briefly what are the main functions of a learning technologist at QMUC?

When you were first approached with the idea about offering an online resource for placement learning, what was your reaction?

Did you feel the initiative would have merit? Specify and explain.

Did you have any reservations/concerns? Specify and explain.

Did you have any views as to the value of work experience as part of the Higher Education curriculum?

What do you feel should be the purpose of offering an online resource to students while on their placement?

How did you find working with the placement tutors within the Department of Hospitality & Tourism?
 - Nature of relationship?
 - Contribution to the project?
 - Problems encountered?

What do you feel about the WebCT module that was developed and made available to the students?

Looking back, would you like to change or develop any aspect of this online resource?

The module uses CMC (online group conferencing) as a means of communication.

How well do you feel the students have responded to this form of communication?

How well do you feel the placement tutors have responded to this form of communication?

Do you think the students and staff are making the most out of this form of communication?

Do you have any other comments you would like to add?