

# **STEP JOURNAL**

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## **All that is gold does not glitter**

Val Cox studies the online learning scene and considers which of the latest developments are worth hanging on to

THE JURY is still out on e-learning. Many technology firms made a killing in the early days of e-learning by selling to companies eager to embrace and be seen to be using the latest trends. Unfortunately, companies ended up spending huge amounts with little return. This is what can happen if you focus on the fashionability of the method and ignore the principles of effective training. You need instructional designers, rather than technology geeks, to be at the heart of technology-based education. Just as in other areas, such as marketing and finance, the technology is there to serve the value-adding parts of the business.

## **Latest online learning trends**

Massive open online courses (MOOCs) are online degrees, usually offered by universities and often free or at a lower rate than traditional degrees. MOOCs appear to offer access to higher education to those who have been priced out of the market, but on closer inspection most courses don't offer academic credit. Assessment is a critical component of the quality assurance that traditional degrees give to graduates and employers, and some courses have been criticised on that score.

## **How is this relevant to STEP?**

In an ideal world, all delegates would be able to attend face-to-face tuition and engage in discussions with their tutors and peers. But this is not practical for jurisdictions where the number of practitioners is too small to justify regular tuition, with all of its associated costs.

STEP therefore needs to be able to present its education using online tools while maintaining the quality of the design and assessment. We must be wary of trends that look swish and make a splash, but which don't add value for a professional body that needs to be confident it has tested the competence of would-be TEPs.

Fortunately, internet access is now reliable and widespread, allowing STEP and its training partner, CLT International (CLTI), to offer a quality alternative: the STEP Diploma in International Trust Management DL+.

I caught up with the developer, Rob Rowe, who is Director of CLTI, and a user, Prudence Philips, to get views from both sides of the education fence.

## **Rob, what prompted you to set up online STEP courses?**

We've always aimed to deliver face-to-face tuition for STEP, but at times we would find that we only had one or two students in a jurisdiction and neither STEP nor CLTI could afford to send tutors there regularly. On those occasions, we would provide an exam-only option, but I didn't feel that was good enough. A few years ago, the technology needed to access a course online would have excluded some jurisdictions, but improved internet access has made online delivery a viable option.

## **How do the online courses work?**

All of the course materials are available on Moodle as PDFs. Students can print materials out, and we've recorded tutors discussing the important themes in each module, as they would in the classroom, to supplement the course manuals. Students can assess their own progress with self-assessment questions at the end of each module and receive instant feedback from the system, with an explanation of why each answer is right or wrong.

## **Do students sit exams online too?**

No, we arrange for delegates to sit the exam in a local venue, in the same conditions as other students. It is vital to have the same fair playing field for all.

## **Prudence, do you think the DL+ system is user-friendly?**

I am quite impressed with the platform. I was able to roam around all areas incident-free. The instructions are clear and the web pages are easy to read and to follow.

## **Were the different course materials easy enough to find?**

I think the site is well-constructed and properly organised, and presents an excellent learning environment. I particularly like how the links make extra information available to the students and put them in touch with the industry they are entering, or in some instances enhances the experience of people already in the industry. As a past student of this programme, I think this is brilliant.

## **How about the resource quality?**

The podcasts are great, as they introduce the modules and vary the presentation. The sound is crisp and the information is presented in a lecture style, which is more interesting than just reading. Moreover, it is available for the duration of the course and can be replayed as part of a review.

The course material is of the same high quality as the hard copy, as are the review questions, frequently asked questions and quizzes. You guys have thought of everything. I even did one of the quizzes!

## **Were there any other features of the online course that you liked?**

The chat forum addresses the isolation that is common in long-distance courses, as it allows interaction with other students. I feel online delivery is a great development for STEP and CLTI, and that it will enhance the learning experience for all STEP students who choose it.

To find out more about DL+, please contact [PD@step.org](mailto:PD@step.org) or [DLplusdirect@centlaw.com](mailto:DLplusdirect@centlaw.com)

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