



# Research degrees at a distance

Peter Forrest – Associate Director of UELconnect

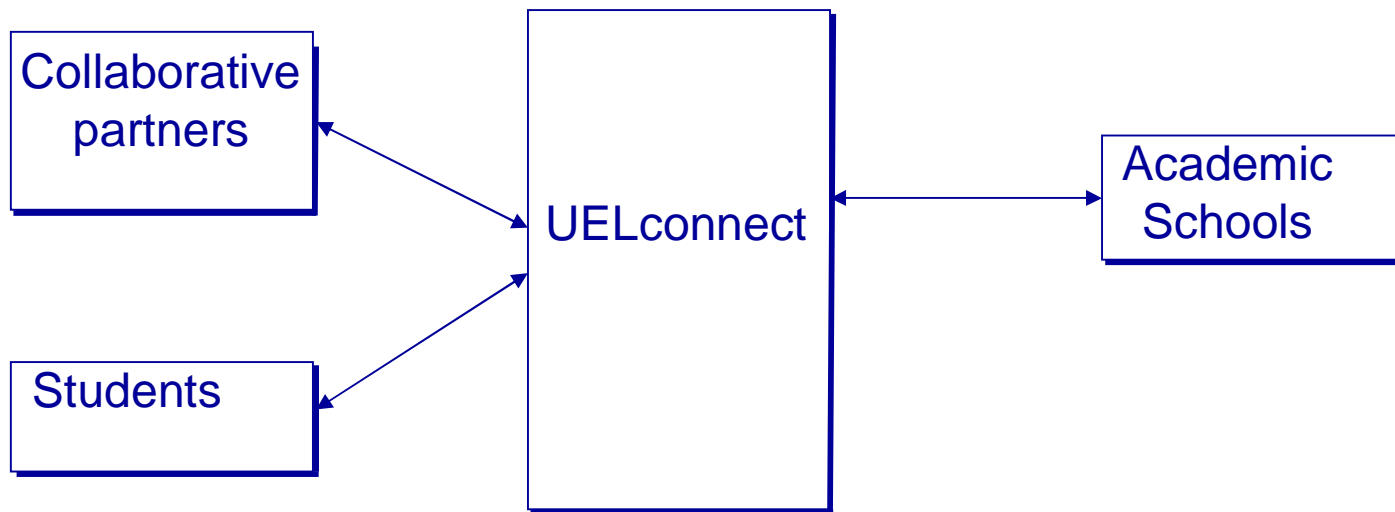
UK Council for Graduate Education  
July 2009

- Unique centralised unit within UEL
  - **Fast growing**
  - **Innovative approaches to learning**
  - **Leading provider of distance learning**
  - **Commercial consultancy on elearning**

# UELconnect



*“Centralised”*



# Distance learning at UEL



- Growth over the last 6 years
- 2003: 1 programme, 50 students
- 2009: 29 programmes, 4100 students
- 4 collaborative partners

# Themes



1. Academic course requirements
2. Quality assurance
3. The student experience
4. Appropriate use of technology

# Academic course requirements



- Research degrees at UEL
  - **Core research modules**
    - 2 taught modules: PhD, MPhil, MRes...
  - **Supervisor / student contact**
    - adequate face-to-face contact
    - Documented contact
  - **Formal progression review**
    - Student must attend
  - **Research environment**
    - Normally, at least 6 weeks on campus per year

# Core research modules



- Two modules
  - **Understanding Research Processes and Contexts**
  - **Research Preparation and Planning**
- Generic research methods - not exhaustive!

# Core research modules

- Printed study guides
  - Highly structured
  - Activity-based
    - Basic scenarios
    - Self-reflection
- Reading pack
- Access to journals via Athens
- Access to Student Advisors
- VLE:
  - Online discussion forums
  - Online tutor support

# The student experience



- Equivalence of experience
- DL students
  - **Committed, self-motivated**
  - **Independent learners**
  - **Time management**
- Community
  - **Peers**
  - **Academic support**
  - **Pastoral support**
- Direction and clarity
  - **Clear structure**
  - **Forward planning**

# The student experience



1. Research methods
2. Access to resources
3. Contact & supervision
4. Research environment

# Access to resources

- Funding, ethics, codes of practice
  - UEL Graduate School, online
- “First sweep” tools
- Athens access to journals
- Search and alert
- “Ask a Librarian”
- Bibliography tools



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[Cited by 726](#) - [Related articles](#) - [Web Search](#) - [BL Direct](#) - [All 2 versions](#)

[citation] Introduction to automata theory, languages, and computation  
JE Hopcroft, R Motwani, JD Ullman - *ACM SIGACT News*, 2001 - ACM New York, NY, USA  
... Some years ago, we found that many **graduate students** came to Stanford with a course in automata theory that did not include the theory of intractability. ...  
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[The Campus Climate Revisited: Chilly for Women Faculty, Administrators, and Graduate Students](#) [Final ...  
BR Sandler - 1986 - [eric.ed.gov](#)  
... ED298837 - The Campus Climate Revisited: Chilly for Women Faculty, Administrators, and **Graduate Students**. [Final Report.] ...  
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[Introduction to linear regression analysis](#)  
DC Montgomery, EA Peck, GG Vining, J Vining - 1982 - ASA  
... understanding. A more dif cult question is whether the text is adequate for advanced **graduate students** in statistics. This question ...  
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[Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions](#)  
LS Aiken, SG West - 1991 - [books.google.com](#)  
... Such a sourcebook would Page 11. X MULTIPLE REGRESSION be useful to both **graduate students** and researchers facing this statistical problem . ...  
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[Computer simulation of liquids](#)  
MP Allen, DJ Tildesley - 1989 - [books.google.com](#)  
... We hope that it will be useful to first-year **graduate students**, research workers in industry and academia, and to teachers and lecturers who want to use the ...  
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A PLACE FROM WHERE TO SPEAK: THE UNIVERSITY AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM. Badley, G. <http://zetoc.mimas.ac.uk/wzgw?db=etoc&terms=RN251397039&field=zid>

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# Contact and supervision



- Supervisors – students
- Advisors – students
- Students – students
- Extending beyond the VLE
- Rethinking “face to face”
- Blogs, chats, video, 2<sup>nd</sup> Life, “webinars”, etc

# Supervision through blogging



- Blog is private: only the student and supervisor(s) have access
  - Student adds a blog entry
    - Eg “I am currently investigating x: here is what I think, so far...”
  - Supervisor adds a comment
    - Eg “If you’re looking into x, you might also consider y...”
  - Supervisor and student hold a conversation using the blog comments functionality.
- Suitable for 1 to 1 contact.
- Simple, text-based, well-understood

# Chat sessions



- 1 to 1, or group sessions
- Real time, “synchronous” contact
- Text-based, or voice-enabled
- Group sessions *must* be moderated

Show messages from: This conversation | Today | This week | Last 30 days | Beginning

**Annette Odell says:** 10:39:48  
How's everything going then Rob?

**robert.j.bourne says:** 10:40:02

Slowly but surely 😊

**Annette Odell says:** 10:40:20  
What progress since we last talked?

**robert.j.bourne says:** 10:40:58  
Well I have taken advantage of the advice that you kindly gave me and reviewed the relevant literature

**Annette Odell says:** 10:41:15  
Did you find the Prensky reference?

**robert.j.bourne says:** 10:54:03  
Mark Prensky?

10:54:38  
Yep I got that, digital natives and so forth. Not sure I like the term 'immigrants' however

**Annette Odell says:** 10:57:31  
Yes, a lot of those terms are highly suspect, aren't they? Did you read the data out of S.Africa? The one where they refer to 'digital strangers'? Now, that is an unsavoury term!

**robert.j.bourne says:** 10:59:09  
Digital strangers, interesting. It does sound vaguely threatening. Could be interesting to tie that in to the social aspects of web usage, stranger danger!

**Annette Odell says:** 10:59:29  
Despite that, I do recommend that you read the new Tapslow publication 'Born Digital'. I think the 'digital natives/immigrants/strangers' terms all need serious critique.

**robert.j.bourne**



In the office


Menu

Emoticons Videos Set Font

I suggest you look at the global 'net generation' research (for Chapter 2 in particular) .E.g. Kennedy at Melbourne, Aspley at Cape Town, Reeves at Athabasca. And Chris Evan's ESRC funded research in the UK. Do you need references or can you search those down?

Add more people to this chat

**Annette Odell**



Personalise »

# Skype: voice or video



- “You can be right there with them” – current advertising campaign
- 1 to 1 video (possible to pay for multi-user conference)
- Skype and Pamela
  - Call recording
  - Video recording
  - Requires caller consent

# Online presentations



- Dimdim / Elluminate
- Group presentations
  - Eg Additional sessions on specific research methods
- Recordable

### Dimdim Web Meeting

Room Name: pgforrest Dial-in: 712-432-6139 Passcode: 743677 Tools 00:14:35 End Meeting

Show Items (3)

- Computer Screen
- Whiteboard
- Documents (1)**
- Web Pages

Participants (1)

pgforrest...

Invite... Manage

Now Sharing: uel\_cge\_jul09\_v0.2.ppt Record Full Screen

**UELconnect**  
University of East London

*“Centralised”*

```

    graph LR
      CP[Collaborative partners] --> UC[UELconnect]
      S[Students] --> UC
      UC --> AS[Academic Schools]
  
```

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### Public Chat

Welcome to your Dimdim Web Meeting.

**me:** Hi all, just getting set up. I will start at 10:30



pgforrest (Video Broadcaster)

Live

Hands Free Talk

Powered By Dimdim Emoticon

# Second Life

- 1 to 1, or group
- May “feel” more like a lecture or seminar group, though this can be deceptive
- Voice-enabled or text-based chat
- Integrate presentations or video
- Requires a fairly high level of technical knowledge



# Second Life at UEL



- UEL – SmartLab
- Practice-based PhDs in 3 main research clusters:
  - Performance Technologies and New Media Arts
  - Virtual worlds, learning environments & gaming
  - Assistive technologies
- Exploring areas such as:
  - Online identity
  - Gender roles on stage and screen
  - Emotionally empowering role play

# Initiatives at UEL



- New Social Learning platform
  - A greater sense of community
  - Profile
  - “Friends”
  - Student contributions
  - File sharing
  - Discussions



# Loncett

## Mentoring the mentors

These pages house the video files and associated discussion forums for the UEL PCET Mentoring the mentors project, launched in June 2009.

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### Group members



## Mentoring the mentors

*Mentoring  
the  
mentors*

**Owner:** [Martin Belgrove](#)  
Group members: 5

### Description:

The 'Who Will Mentor the Mentors Project' is a joint project between the Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) Team at the Cass School of Education and Uelconnect (formally the School of Distance and E-Learning).

The project is funded by LONCETT, with the aim to build both capacity and sustainability in our partnerships with local colleges, through providing access to effective asynchronous mentoring support.

**Brief description:** These pages house the video files and associated discussion forums for the UEL PCET Mentoring the mentors project, launched in June 2009.

**Interests:** For technical support contact [m.belgrove@uel.ac.uk](mailto:m.belgrove@uel.ac.uk)

**Website:**

### Group files



Placement handbook - part time  
11 days ago



Mentor training Powerpoint  
11 days ago



Aims of the project  
14 days ago  
[More](#)

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### Group pages

[1](#) [2](#) [Next »](#)



**Theme 1: What is the mentor role?**  
Last updated 11 days ago by [Martin Belgrove](#)



**Theme 2: What are the professional development rewards from the role?**  
Last updated 11 days ago by [Martin Belgrove](#)



**Theme 3: How does the learning from the mentor-trainee relationship take place?**  
Last updated 11 days ago by [Martin Belgrove](#)

## Loncett

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### Page navigation

↳ [Theme 3: How does the learning from the mentor-trainee relationship take place?](#)

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## Theme 3: How does the learning from the mentor-trainee relationship take place?

Theme 3, Video 1. How does the learning change over time?



Theme 3, Video 2. What should trainees expect from the first meeting with a mentor? - Trainee perspective



# Making it work



- Staff development
  - Technical skills
  - Course design and choice of technologies
  - Online facilitation
- Student development
  - Technical skills
  - “Netiquette”

# The research environment



- Difficult to manage at a distance
- Maintain requirement for 6 weeks per year on campus?
- Use external partner “research centres”?
- Develop processes for quality assuring research at a distance?

# How far do you want to go?

- Use technology appropriately
  - No “one size fits all”
  - One tool is never enough
- Rethink key requirements
- Staff and student development
- Full “distance learning” is challenging – but not impossible!