

**Submission title:**

Exploring two examples of extended online learning support – Social Media and Online Party

**Abstract:**

This presentation discusses two initiatives introduced across the MSc Blended and Online Education which, although limited in their complexity, extend the scope of a community of online learners, and broaden opportunities for student engagement with curriculum themes. It identifies with the work on 'Inquiry' of Garrison and Anderson (2003) and finds contrast with popular eLearning myths (Weller, 2003).

**Initiative 1: An Online Party**

In June 2015, the programme team hosted the first online alumni party, with a second proposed for December 2015. The MSc BOE has engaged hundreds of academics and professional services staff across the UK and internationally in online dialogue around curriculum development, assessment, support and learning technology. Students' subsequent increased knowledge and practice in the online and blended environments have led to augmentation in their own professional practice and of their colleagues. Over the years, a substantial community alumni, with an unrivalled body of knowledge, has formed. The first online party afforded an opportunity to bring the community of alumni and current students together for the first time to discuss the MSc BOE and current and future professional practice. The presentation will outline this broader context for an online party and reflect on its outcomes.

**Initiative 2: Introducing EDNA**

MSc Blended and Online Education cohorts are encouraged to gather once a week online, through real-time software, WebEX, in 'Virtual Office Hours' sessions. VOHs support the online module delivery approach, discussing, here, with the module leader and with each other, their learning development and path to completing assessment. Twitter had been used occasionally by the programme team, through 2013/14 and 14/15, as a means to communicate key news and events to the broader public, on activities and webinars, provided in the first instance for BOE students. During the 2015/16 session, the programme team encouraged more active student participation through twitter at weekly 'Tweet-Up' sessions, each of which would seek to address a specific theme, relevant to those covered in the module at that time. Unexpectedly Tweet-Ups attracted the attention of those working with educational technologies from the wider community, who joined the conversations. Authors whose works the MSc BOE students were reading at the time were also invited, often able to answer questions about their work that students had.

Lessons learned from these two initiatives will aid in the programme team's thinking about the wider context of a constructive online education-based community, the affordance of social media, and the impact of continued group engagement.

Garrison, D. R. and Anderson, T.. (2003) *E-Learning in the 21st Century: A Framework for Research and Practice*. London: Routledge/Falmer.

Weller, M. (2003). *Delivering learning on the net: the why, what and how of online education*. London: Routledge/Falmer.