

# PROWE

Personal Repositories Online Wiki Environment

## 'How To/Questions to Ask' Guides



*Guide Five:*

**The Users' Perspective**

*Part Two – technology issues*

## Overview

Part time distance tutors are increasingly dependent on technology even if their classes are not given online. Increasingly administration and support is also offered via online environments and encounters – again, even if teaching is not focused there. This permits greater flexibility for tutors to live and work away from their parent institution but may also disadvantage them. They may not have access to central institution wide systems, resources, training and technical help. On the other hand this may require them to be more technically savvy than campus colleagues or may result in them using different technical tools because they need to supply and service them themselves. Older tutors may find the whole process of getting online a stressful challenge especially when they don't have access to colleagues to help them with technical and software issues. There is the inherent danger in new systems of further widening a digital gap, rather than bridging it, thereby realising the potential of new tools for supporting part time distance staff.

## Critical issues

**Usability, compatibility and interoperability** are the most critical of issues in getting a new system off the ground. These apply equally within the work context and outside since for many tutors the two are blurred by their status as portfolio or part time workers. **Support** for coping with change may also be a driver in whether or not systems are accepted and used. **Contractual rights and responsibilities** and conditions of service may also impact on how users feel about participation.

## How it works

### *Usability*

- What new user training is available? User support? And Helpdesk resources?
- Is new hardware required?
- Is access to the system well integrated with other routine tasks, is it “on the way” to other things you regularly do?
- Can you access and use systems easily from different locations?

### *Inter-relationship with other institutional systems*

- Is the system housed within known software, within a VLE, for example?
- Is the software readily available and compatible with that already in use?
- How many different passwords and ‘clicks’ are needed to move around?
- Can you use the same hardware to access all applications and systems?

### *Compatibility with daily life*

- Is the system accessible remotely and via the type of Internet connection you have?
- Does the system compliment other routine daily activity?
- Does it require you to duplicate tasks you already do elsewhere?
- Is there any possibility of access to the system for others you collaborate with who are not within the system?



### **Contractual issues**

#### *Rights and responsibilities*

- If it is licensed, do you personally need an extra licence or permission to make use of the system?
- Is there any arrangement for continued use after present employment ends?
- Do any licences used allow use on and off campus and/or in other locations?
- Are there firewall issues? Do you need special arrangements to work remotely or to access from multiple locations?

#### *Transferability*

- Can you take files with you, or export them to a mobile format when you resign or retire?
- Are files held in a suitable format so that you can (could) use them elsewhere?
- Could you use materials in a different institution within the terms of the existing licensing etc?

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