

6 Section 4: Development of Learning Environments and Student Support Activities

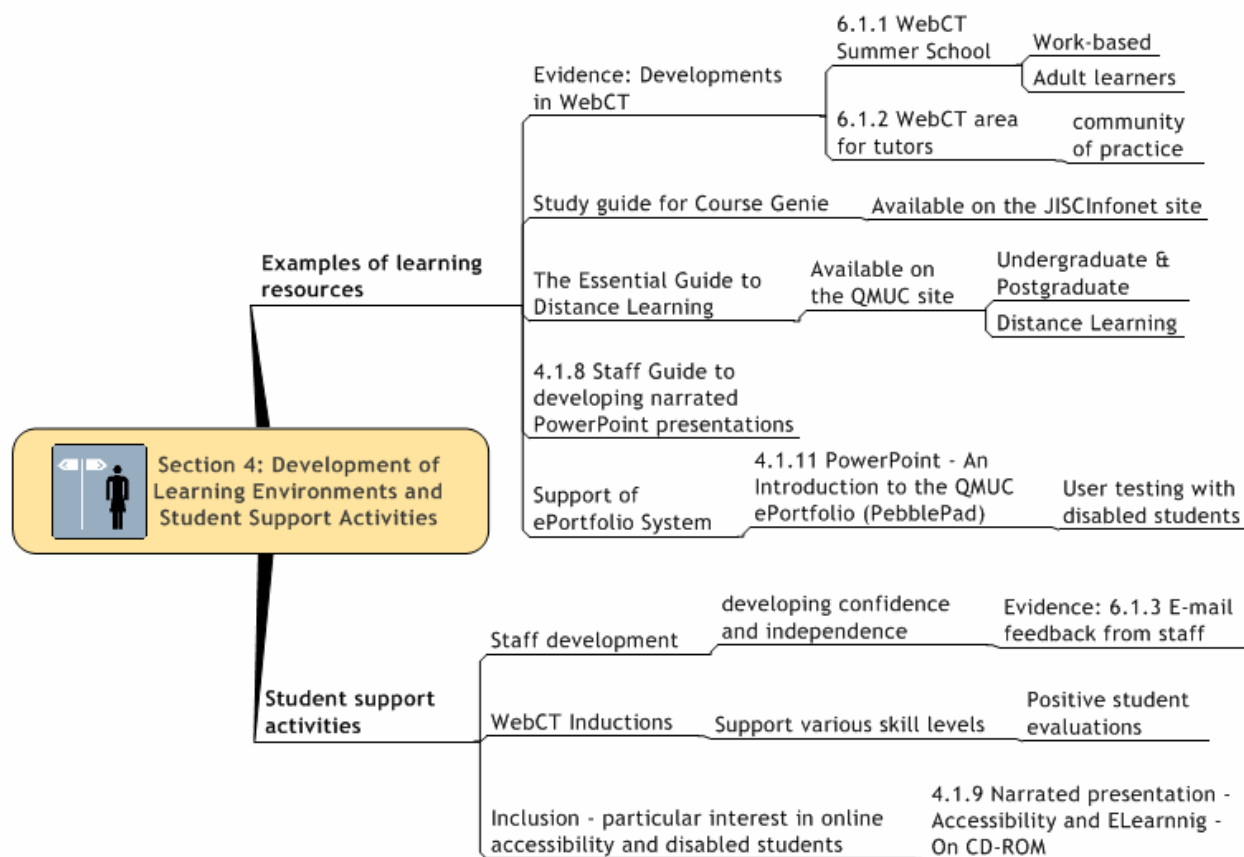


Figure 6 Section 4 Development of Learning Environments and Student Support Activities Map

My approach to learning and teaching is supportive and student-centred (Rogers 1961; QELTA n.d.). I support QMUC's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), WebCT, and support staff to develop learning activities and resources within this online environment. I work with academic staff to help them develop WebCT areas to support both individual modules and entire programmes. These can be for all levels of students (Evidence 1.1.2, Recent Projects). I also support students at all levels by delivering WebCT induction sessions, see 2.1.1 – 2.1.6. I believe in teaching by example so when we ran WebCT Summer School last year, this was supported by a WebCT area which exemplified what staff might be expected to develop, Evidence 6.1.1. I hope to extend this use of WebCT for staff development, and try to build a community of learners (Wenger 1998) mediated by an online WebCT site where staff can develop their skills see Evidence 6.1.2, and 7.1.1 journal entries 11 & 29. This will be a learning forum where staff can

support and learn from each other through online discussions and resource sharing. Building a community of learners is also core to the QELTA (n.d) strategy. Unfortunately the roll out of this site has temporarily been put on hold as we move to a new version of WebCT.

I encourage academic staff to make the best use of the elearning resources, but am sensitive to the pressure they can be under. Often the learning of a new skill is a 'means to an end', required to get a specific job done. They may need to develop new materials in a tight time-frame and can feel pressured for examples see Evidence 7.1.1, journal entries 35 & 52. I talk to staff to help them define their goals and guide them towards realistic solutions. When trained staff have particular difficulties, I discuss these with them to work out where misconceptions have come from, for example, I have realised that staff often approach WebCT from an Internet model so for example try to hyperlink between modules, and need to learn how a VLE behaves. My role is to facilitate staff development by providing support and encouragement and helping to build confidence and independence (Rogers 1967). This approach encourages deep learning (Ramsden 2003) and attitudinal, behavioural changes rather than knowledge transmission. I try to do this by being open, supportive and honest. I am pleased that my attitude has received a positive response, see email evidence 6.1.3. I work with academic staff to develop printed study guides for both campus based and distance learning students. Students, especially distance learning, need the guide to give them pathways through the learning materials, and to focus the reading they are required to do. An example of this is my work on the 'Essential Guide to Distance Learning' which has been developed in collaboration with several members of staff to provide support for distance learning students. This material can also be accessed online at:

<http://www.qmuc.ac.uk/goodscholarship/>

While a full PDF can be downloaded from

http://www.qmuc.ac.uk/goodscholarship/EG_6FINALV3.pdf

I also develop study guides for staff, for example I worked on a training pack for Course Genie, software that converts WORD documents into HTML pages. This contained three exercises to help staff familiarise themselves with the software. Available at: <http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/Resources/external-resources/course-genie-qmuc/view>.

See also the guide for staff developing narrated presentations, Evidence 4.1.8. As an awareness of student needs is fundamental for all teachers, the example presentation for this guide is on 'Accessibility and eLearning', and is aimed at making tutors using WebCT aware of the online accessibility requirements for disabled students, Evidence 4.1.9 on CD-ROM.

Word Count = 596

6.1.1 WebCT for Summer School

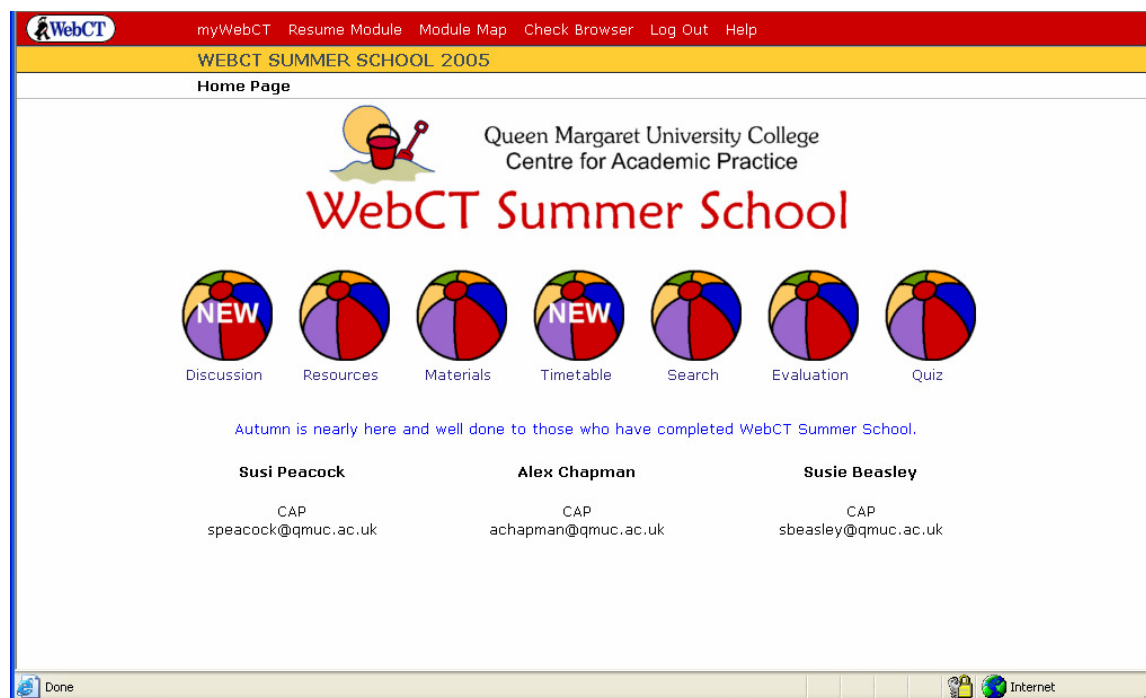


Figure 6.1.1 Figure a – WebCT Summer School - Home

The summer school course itself consisted of 6 half day taught sessions, held over a two month period. Over the duration of the course it was anticipated that the participants would develop their own WebCT area for use with a module the following Semester.

The WebCT interface was designed to be friendly and non-threatening. It was personalised, an approach which is encouraged as it helps staff to take ownership of their module. Use of the WebCT module allowed staff in Summer School to experience WebCT from the student perspective. The site contains examples of all of the features of WebCT that staff may find useful including a quiz, module evaluation, glossary, course materials and a calendar.

The staff responded very well to this site, as you can see from the following table which shows details of the students activity over the period of the course (Student information has been removed). You can see generally high activity levels with people accessing the module up to 298 times. You can also see the number of messages that were posted to the discussion board, the majority posted at least one message and that one person posted 16 in total. It is interesting to note that two students have accessed the course in Feb 2006, six months after the course finished. This suggests to me that staff would use a WebCT community site.

Access Information		Articles		
First Access	Last Access	Hits	Read	Posted
June 28, 2005 11:32am	July 12, 2005 8:17am	38	15	0
May 31, 2005 3:28pm	September 13, 2005 4:36pm	88	49	1
March 20, 2006 4:52pm	March 20, 2006 5:01pm	17	0	0
May 24, 2005 11:59am	November 24, 2005 11:02am	74	30	2
June 7, 2005 9:28am	September 13, 2005 1:15pm	15	11	1
May 24, 2005 10:59am	September 22, 2005 4:46pm	206	98	8
May 31, 2005 3:28pm	November 22, 2005 4:12pm	35	24	2
May 24, 2005 11:03am	August 15, 2005 11:15am	116	64	5
May 30, 2005 11:38am	July 15, 2005 1:10pm	48	21	1
---	---	0	0	0
May 24, 2005 11:02am	October 10, 2005 3:54pm	60	39	1
May 31, 2005 3:39pm	October 19, 2005 8:37am	77	42	16
May 31, 2005 3:31pm	July 27, 2005 2:19pm	117	73	3
June 13, 2005 12:48pm	September 21, 2005 12:33pm	26	9	1
July 15, 2005 1:57pm	July 15, 2005 2:03pm	5	2	1
May 24, 2005 11:02am	October 20, 2005 7:02pm	246	103	14
May 31, 2005 3:34pm	August 16, 2005 12:13pm	114	73	2
May 31, 2005 2:51pm	September 8, 2005 4:35pm	118	83	2
May 31, 2005 2:44pm	October 10, 2005 1:33pm	76	25	3
May 24, 2005 12:14pm	September 8, 2005 2:05pm	164	84	5
June 14, 2005 11:29am	August 3, 2005 4:42pm	61	38	1
May 24, 2005 10:58am	February 24, 2006 10:45am	91	45	1
May 31, 2005 3:28pm	August 26, 2005 9:22am	245	93	4
May 24, 2005 11:01am	July 24, 2005 11:10am	176	71	1
May 24, 2005 10:58am	September 23, 2005 8:37am	93	19	5
June 16, 2005 1:08pm	July 8, 2005 11:43am	20	0	0
May 31, 2005 4:49pm	February 8, 2006 1:26pm	298	109	9
May 31, 2005 3:28pm	June 28, 2005 3:14pm	56	43	1
May 24, 2005 11:00am	June 7, 2005 9:24am	37	24	2

Figure 6.1.1 Figure b – Student Tracking

6.1.2 WebCT for community of WebCT tutors

The idea behind 'QMUC Online Tutor' is to allow WebCT tutors to form a community of learners. Using tools such as the discussion boards they can share expertise and discuss ideas. I am really interested to see how staff take to using WebCT in this way? It will require them to be pro-active, but I think it will also promote independence.

The site has been designed to look clean and professional, in contrast to the slightly playful look of the WebCT Summer School site. I hope that this will appeal to the practical learner who has come to the site for some 'just-in' time support.



Figure 6.1.2a QMUC Online Tutors – Home Page

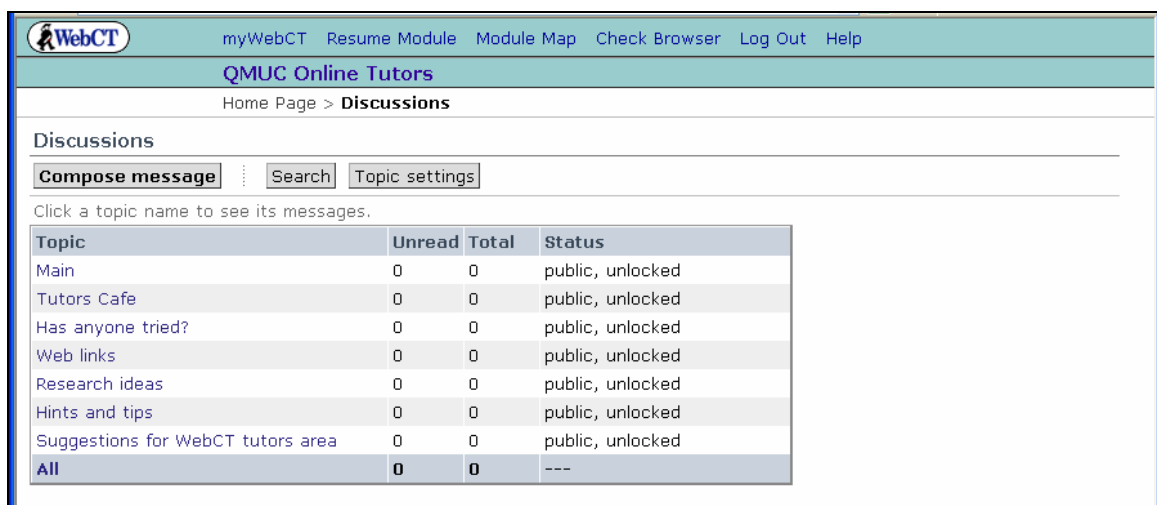


Figure 6.1.2b QMUC Online Tutors – Discussion Board

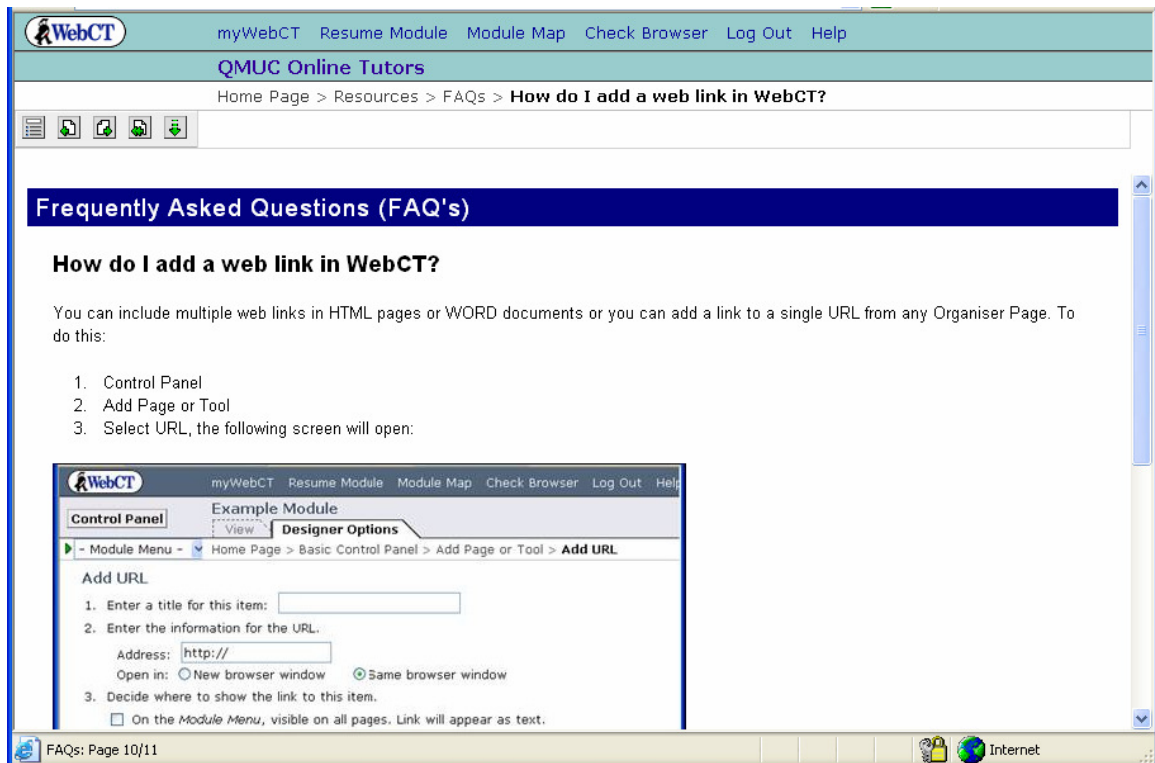


Figure 6.1.2c QMUC Online Tutors – Frequently Asked Questions

The site contains a collection of Frequently asked Questions (FAQ's) these were compiled by looking back as emails from staff and by consulting my teaching journal.

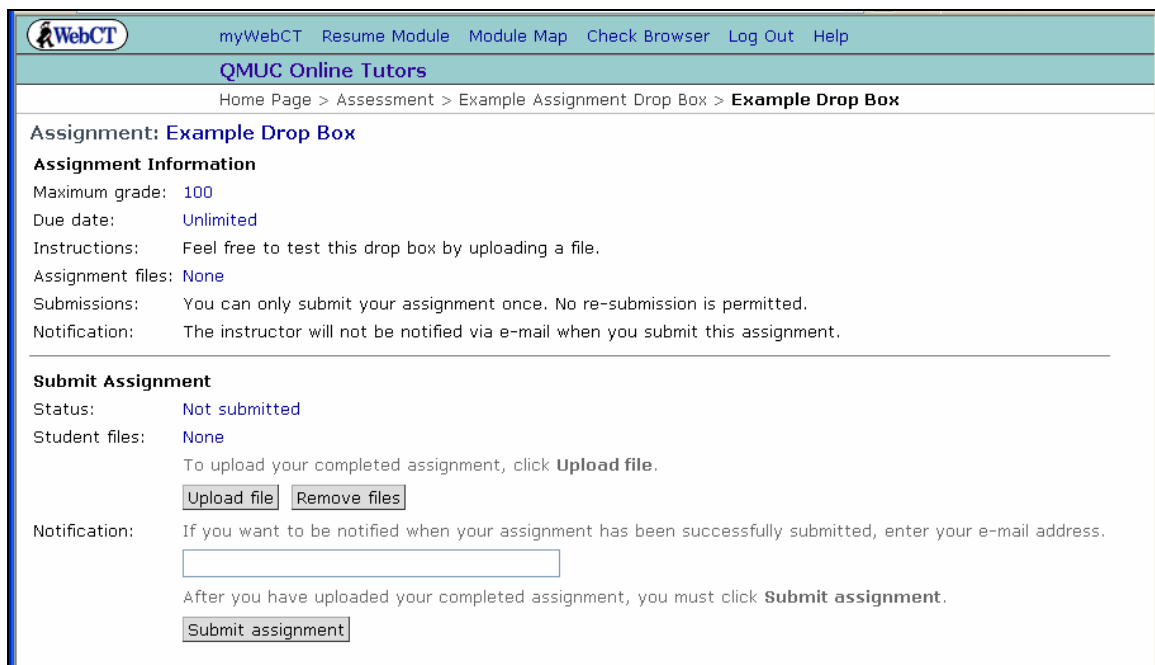


Figure 6.1.2d QMUC Online Tutors – Example drop box

Tools, such as the assignment drop box are included so that staff can experience using this from the student perspective.

6.1.3 Email feedback from academic staff

This first message is an even more gratifying, as it was sent was sent from a member of staff to my manager.

From: Academic Colleague
Sent: 17 March 2006 15:42
To: Academic Colleague
Subject: RE: Workshop

Hi

That would be brilliant!

Had a great meeting with Susie this morning, she's introducing me to the joys of WEB CT – It's brilliant! I was so daunted by the prospect of learning it but she has completely put me at ease!

Bye for now

Academic Colleague

The following selection of email messages were received from staff that I have been working with on a one-to-one basis, these have the original spelling.

From: Academic Colleague 1
Sent: 29 August 2005 12:17
To: Beasley, Susie
Cc:
Subject: Thanks for the support

Hi Susie

Just a wee scribble to say thank you so very much for all your help with the transfer of quizzes and narrated powerpoints into our new WebCT modules. You are a very approachable person, with lots of patience and I think you must be a valued addition to CAP. Thanks again for all your help

Kind Regards
Academic Colleague 1

From: Academic Colleague 2
Sent: 11 August 2005 12:28
To: Beasley, Susie
Subject: RE: WebCT- Progress update

Hi Susie,

That's fantastic. I am thrilled to bits with what you have done - its excellent. You have worked very hard. I will go over your points and look at the site and get back to you.

Thank you so much - you have done a superb job.

Academic Colleague 2

From: Academic Colleague 3
Sent: 24 May 2005 14:34
To: Beasley, Susie
Subject: RE: WebCT Template areas

Many thanks!

It is lovely to encounter support and efficiency...

Best wishes,

Academic Colleague 3

From: Academic Colleague 4
Sent: 27 February 2006 16:21
To:
Subject: Thanks

Hi Susie and Colleague, just to say thanks so much for all the help with WEB CT so far! The class based work is finished now and all the students said it had been really helpful to have web ct. they have a bit more to go but main bulk of learning is done now.

Bye for now

Academic Colleague 4

From: Academic Colleague 5
Sent: 17 March 2006 15:32
To: Beasley, Susie
Subject: RE: WEB CT

Susie

Thanks so much for your time this morning – I'm itching to get started! Hopefully I'll have managed a few sessions by the time I see you next week.

Have a great week-end!

Academic Colleague 5
