Central Queensland University (CQU) is in Queensland, Australia, a large dispersed state with a population of 3.5 million. The university has 12,400 enrolled students, which includes 5,200 distance education students. For its distance students it has traditionally provided well designed printed notes - some of these materials are supplemented by audio and videotapes and audioconferencing.

Since 1992, videoconferencing has been progressively installed and used for teaching across all campuses of the university. A 1997 report into the use of videoconferencing found that, in the previous semester, it had been used for 104 hours of teaching across 4 campuses. The report found that training available to novice users was limited to technical and teaching issues that supported migration of lectures and tutorials and that resources were not available to support staff in any significant adaptation of their teaching to the new medium. Consequently, quality of teaching varied and relied mostly on the interest and enthusiasm of lecturers who invested much of their own time in adapting their teaching strategies and materials to the videoconference environment.

In 1998 a grant was secured to deliver customised training to lecturers and to put into place a process that would support them in converting their teaching style and materials to the videoconference environment. The intent of this project was to incorporate a comprehensive staff development process, driven by curriculum redesign, to develop more interactive, student centred teaching and learning environments using interactive videoconferencing.

Aims and Objectives

The main aims of this project were to:

- Support a practical hands-on approach to staff development that allowed staff to practice in a supportive environment encouraged by their peers.
- Improve the level and quality of interactive teaching and learning strategies, not only in videoconferencing but also in any teaching and learning environment.
- Raise student satisfaction with their classes through more active participation in the teaching and learning process.
- Encourage staff to develop self-reflective practices when planning, developing and maintaining their teaching and learning activities.

In order to achieve these aims, the project managers realised that it would be necessary to engage a private enterprise partner, with videoconferencing expertise, who would work with the university for the period of the grant – two years (1999 - 2000). Once this partner was identified, planning was undertaken to determine how best to provide professional development to the greatest number of staff and what key staff would be needed. A number of key staff were allocated to work part-time on this project.

Key Staff

The project involved a number of key staff:
• Project leader – overall responsibility for the project but little day-to-day involvement.
• Grant officer – overseeing of all aspects of the project from operational aspects to budget.
• On-site project manager (half-time position) – day-to-day operational responsibility of working with all involved in the project. On-site contact and support for lecturers.
• Project support officer – day-to-day operational support for all aspects of the project.

External consultant/private enterprise partner (located 1000 miles away) – on-going support and advice to management team, training workshops and individual support for lecturers.

Participants (mainly lecturers) – attendance at workshops, implementation of new strategies, redesign of courses in consultation with external consultant and on-site project manager.

Key staff interacted in the following ways:

![Figure 1](image_url)

**Key Activities**

The project involved staff in a series of activities that assisted in course redesign and enabled them to implement student-centred teaching and learning strategies in a supportive environment. This support included:

• Professional development workshops in the use of new technologies for open learning (introductory and advanced).
• Team based redesign of the teaching and learning strategies used in courses delivered via interactive videoconferencing.
• Advice and support to meet individual teaching needs.
• An electronic mailing list for collaborative discussions about best practice in meeting and solving the challenges that arise in a changing teaching and learning environment.
• Peer support to meet the everyday concerns of teaching via interactive videoconferencing.
• General support and advice to key personnel such as Instructional Designers, Technical Designers and Senior Management.
• Staff based at the regional campuses able to attend workshops at no cost.
• Staff who worked on the redesign of their units allocated money to provide teaching relief.
Major use of email as a communication mechanism between all participants - this included support for redesign activities from the external consultant.

**Project Model**

The model has evolved through three distinct phases with a fourth yet to be developed:

**Phase 1**

In the original planning, the model was to make it mandatory for all staff who used videoconferencing for teaching to attend a two-day workshop and to redesign all courses taught using the interactive videoconference facilities. It was soon realised that this was not practical and a new approach was formulated that would encourage, but not compel, lecturers to undertake this professional development.

**Phase 2**

After appointment of the project manager and engaging the services of the external consultant it was decided that there would be two types of workshops - a two-day introductory workshop and a one-day advanced workshop for more experienced users. Each of these workshops would be run twice a year for the life of the project. Attendance at these workshops was voluntary. In conjunction with the workshops staff could apply for small grants to assist them to redesign their course with assistance from the external consultant and the project manager.

These professional development workshops have been the major component of the project and have enabled lecturers to share expertise, reflect upon their own practice and develop skills in a supportive environment.

**Phase 3**

At the end of the first year, the external consultant and project manager decided to adjust this model by adding a third dimension – individual consultations. After each workshop the consultant would make herself available to meet one-on-one with individuals. In these sessions, lecturers could discuss their needs and ideas relating to videoconferencing. Some of these later went on to apply for redesign grants, but many just required some advice and guidance to help with their videoconference teaching.

**Phase 4**

The challenge for the fourth phase is to create a self-sufficient training model post 2000. At the time of writing, several options for this are being investigated and trialled to provide for both small group and individual training sessions for lecturers. Methods of capturing best practice in order to share this amongst practitioners are also being investigated.

**Training Model**

The training model adopted for 2000 utilised a combination of in-house and external expertise. It was designed to give lecturers initial competence in teaching via videoconference and provide support for them to enhance their skills. It consisted of both formal workshops and informal practice sessions to allow lecturers to trial new skills and techniques. The following illustrates the model adopted:

**Implications and Recommendations**

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The reward systems within the university, for example promotions, place more emphasis on research than on teaching and learning. This makes it difficult to encourage staff allocate time to improving their teaching activities. Lecturers feel that they don’t have the time to commit to attending a workshop plus reworking their teaching strategies for each course they teach using videoconferencing - even though after they complete this process it may decrease the time spent teaching and increase both their enjoyment and that of their students. Despite this barrier, over 100 staff have attended workshops, making it one of the most well attended staff development programmes that has been run at the university. Participant’s evaluations of the workshops have been very positive.

![Diagram](image.png)

Figure 2

Lecturers have also responded well to the individual consultations and have appreciated the one-on-one assistance with their individual teaching needs. As is often the case, the opportunity to work with an external ‘expert’ is perceived as being of great value – often of greater value than utilising internal expertise. However, being given the resources (mainly time) to enable them to reflect on and plan teaching strategies has been beneficial to lecturers involved in the redesign process.

The original aims of the project have been well met with many lecturers adopting new approaches to their videoconference teaching. They have been given the opportunity to reflect on their teaching strategies and
many are striving for greater student participation through various levels of interaction in videoconference sessions. Initial student response has been positive. In the most recent semester, 110 hours of videoconferenced teaching were delivered each week.

One of the strengths of this project has been the on-going relationship with the private enterprise partner who has been available to work with the project managers and lecturers on an ‘as needs’ basis. Outside the workshops and on-site visits, lecturers have had access to the external consultant through email and telephone for on-going support and advice. Our recommendation would be to seek out a private enterprise partner who understands the needs and culture of your organisation and can be adaptive and responsive to your needs. Use of an external specialist involved full-time in their particular industry also ensures that a university has access to the latest information and practice available.

Biographical Sketch

Carol Daunt is a Learning Technology Consultant and Managing Director of LearnTel Pty Ltd. She is an experienced educator and videoconference trainer who has been involved with all forms of teleconferencing since 1986. Since 1992, Carol has been involved in the design, application and effective use of video-conferencing. She works with lecturers, teachers, trainers, health workers and management from many government departments and private organisations throughout Australia, New Zealand, USA and Europe. Carol holds a Dip T, Grad Dip Dist Ed, B Ed & M Ed (Research) – her thesis investigated the nature of interaction in videoconferencing.

Address: GPO Box 3137, Sydney, NSW 1043, AUSTRALIA
Telephone: +61 411 704 664
Facsimile: +612 9904 3591
Email: cdaunt@learntel.com.au
URL: www.learntel.com.au