

**On-Line Discussion Forums:
New Platforms to Supplement Face-to-Face Professional
Development at a Comprehensive University**

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KEYWORDS Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Academic Staff Development. Professionalization

ABSTRACT Academic staff development has become a challenge due to academics' tight schedule and workload at University. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the level of participation and perception of effectiveness and value among participants in using online discussion forums in Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The study adopted a mixed method approach. Instead of a normal five day face-to-face workshop, it was conducted over three days as other areas were covered through the discussion forum. Thirty lecturers with access to Blackboard were invited to participate in an on-line discussion forum on an assessment topic. Data was collected through monitoring the on-line discussion forum for five weeks and a questionnaire which was sent by e-mail. Data was analysed through SPSS. Employers' experienced relative advantage as their employees would have minimal work time loss and no travel time loss. The findings of this study suggest that Blackboard has a potential to become a widespread medium for continuing professional staff development at university. The on-line discussion forum was found to be observable, trialable, valuable and acceptable to supplement face-to-face workshops. It is recommended for further use to supplement face-to-face staff development workshops at university with room for improvement.