Learning online during the Course for Trainers

Taking this online course will create some challenges for many of you who are not used to online learning. This resource is being provided to offer advice to make your learning experience more productive and enjoyable.

Communication and support

In this course, we will use online forums as the main tool for communication. The forums will connect you to colleagues and trainers, enabling you to share ideas and problems at any time. It will be a way to work together, rather than individually. One good reason for trying to work together in the course is that our workplaces are often organised to allow this kind of collaboration. Also, in learning, group work tends to promote deeper understanding of a subject and better critical thinking by encouraging dialogue with others. Dialogue challenges us to understand nuances and to clearly articulate what we know and are still learning.

Online forums are a different way of learning from face-to-face discussion, and it is necessary to learn how to use them successfully. For example, there are much longer time delays in an online discussion, and you might miss non-verbal cues such as tone of voice or facial expression. Some differences are positive: you have more time to think about what you want to say. Some are a nuisance: it can sometimes be easier to misinterpret people's written words.

So how can we check if our forums are working well?

Here is a description of an effective forum:

Everyone participates, and everyone feels confident they will be listened to;

It is a supportive community, because people have come to trust each other, and look out for each other while respecting differences;

The group has shared experiences and fought shared "enemies", such as some forecasting problems, for example;

Everyone facilitates at times, which means taking some responsibility for discussions and activities, and for encouraging and helping others;

Everyone takes initiative at times, by asking questions and starting discussions, rather than being passive and waiting to be told what to do;

Arguments happen: people feel safe enough to challenge and disagree respectfully, which helps everyone to think and learn;

Everyone writes carefully, putting their points clearly and constructively, and the structure of a discussion is obvious and easy to follow;

Participants trust others to respect their words, to put a good interpretation on them, and not to misquote them.

Very few forums have all these characteristics all the time, but with your help, this is what we aim for in this course.

One additional word about communication: If you have an issue that you would like to discuss privately with the trainers, please use email. You can find the contact email of all trainers in their Moodle Profile. For administrative issues, please direct your message to Mustafa Adiguzel or Patrick Parrish.

Managing your study time

Surveys carried out in distance learning show that the great majority of participants give their reason for not enjoying it or for giving up the courses as **not having enough time**. You may consider this finding as a good reason to give some consideration to how you are going to find time to participate in this course before you start.

You are expected to dedicate about four to six hours a week to this course. You may also need to allow some extra time for reflection. While participating in this course you will need to carry

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out a range of activities: working through the course resources, interacting with your fellow colleagues and trainers, and completing course activities. The Course Study Calendar shows you how the different activities fit into the twelve study weeks of the whole course, highlighting what modules and study periods you will be studying depending on the track you are following (Trainers, Part-time Trainers or Training Managers). You can download the course study calendar and keep it handy for reference. We will also be providing weekly reminders about the activities and assignments.

A very useful, tried and tested way of planning your participation in a distance learning course like this one, is to create a personal planner. How you do this precisely will depend on your own life and the commitments you have to family, work, leisure and so on. Try filling in a weekly planner similar to the table below.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

We strongly encourage you to dedicate about one hour per day to this course, spreading the time you spend working on the course assignments throughout your week. But most importantly, you should try to be genuinely realistic about the time you have available. Also, try to anticipate any possible distractions, commitments or times when you will not be able to dedicate time to the course or even not feel like doing it (like immediately after you get home from work or during weekends, for example). Again, all these things depend on you. The main point is to make the plan realistic for the life you lead.

One of the best reasons for planning ahead is that it enables you to feel free at the times you are not "scheduled" to be working on the course assignments. If you don't plan, you may find that you constantly have a nagging feeling that you ought to be working on your assignments.

Additionally, you may find that in some weeks it has just not been possible to devote as much time to the course activities as you would like. If this is the case, you will need to plan how to make more time in the near future. It may be helpful to contact the trainers to discuss your participation in activities that you did not complete within any particular week. Remember, you will need to complete all graded assignments to receive your course certificate. In addition a high level of participation in the other course activities, like forums, will not only help you learn more, but also allow you to receive a certificate with distinction.

Active Learning

Being an active learner helps to maintain your enthusiasm for participating in the course, and you also gain confidence in your ability to cope with new challenges that come within. Active learners rarely just read their course material; they find every way they can to interact with the course resources, trainers and fellow colleagues attending the same course. Some suggestions to keep active are:

> Highlighting useful material you read that can help you complete the course activities, particularly in completing your Training Development Plan and Personal Action Plan

> Working out the links between current material and previous sections to help build your knowledge and understanding

> Taking notes that help make the topics meaningful to you

> Thinking about what you are trying to achieve at any given point, making choices about what you read and listen to and engaging with the parts that are particularly relevant to the tasks in hand

> Communicating to trainers and colleagues (via forums, chat sessions, email). This can give a boost to your morale and really helps when you feel stuck

> Reflecting on what you are learning from each section and the ways you can apply it in your workplace

Using feedback from trainers

Don't miss the opportunity to learn from feedback given on your assignments and other course activities. The feedback on your work serves various purposes and you should consider it as a central part of the learning experience. It can:

Promote dialogue between you and your trainers;

Enable you to monitor your progress;

Help you to identify your strengths and weaknesses;

Point out further resources that can help you in your course activities.

When you receive feedback, take time to absorb and reflect on it. Don't hesitate to ask for clarification or further guidance from your trainers if you feel it would be helpful.

You might also get useful feedback from colleagues. For example, the responses to your posts in an online discussion forum for a course activity might help you assess your understanding of a topic.