

SSERC self-study courses

In the latter part of 2019, SSERC tried out what for the organisation was a new type of professional learning – the self-study course. Strictly speaking, the format was not wholly new as optional self-study modules were incorporated in the last round of our physics Blended Learning course.

The difference this time was that our Optical Radiation Safety course was entirely stand-alone. Optical radiation was chosen as, while it is an essential topic with significant safety issues to consider, we felt that it would not be a priority for schools when it came to releasing staff or paying for a face-to-face course. No charge was levied for the self-study course. The structure of this professional learning initiative was as follows:

- Interested teachers and technicians applied for the course in the usual way.
- Successful applicants were sent links to a course folder that contained a course guide, documents on the safe use of optical radiation, a series of self-check quizzes and corresponding answers.
- Contact details of a course tutor were given.

Participants were directed to read a section of the safety documentation, attempt a quiz, then check their answers. Once the entire documentation had been read and self-assessed, they carried out an assignment. They were required to perform an experiment and list the control measures they put in place. Assignments were sent to the named tutor who would often engage in a dialogue with the course 'attende'e'.

The pilot was well-received, and a further self-study course was scheduled for development in session 2020/2021.

Along came coronavirus.

Our response was two-fold:

- 1) We had begun a second run of the Optical Radiation Safety course, but it was clear that staff would have little or no access to labs and equipment. Hence, our first action was to alter the requirements for the assignment, making it necessary only to describe an activity that could be done in school and to list the control measures that, were you able to carry out the activity, you would put in place.

- 2) Secondly, we fast-tracked the development of two more physics safety courses and modified one of the Blended Learning self-study units in order to make it generally available. For the first time in over a decade, the Physics Teacher Summer School that we run jointly with the Institute of Physics (IOP) in Scotland had to be cancelled. Undeterred, our IOP Scotland partners gave us funding to supply equipment for a further two courses to support a Virtual Summer School initiative.

Feedback indicates that this support has been valued by the profession. The following quotes are typical:

"This course has been a really good way for myself and my team to do some very constructive work while the world has gone a bit crazy so thank you."

"...thoroughly enjoying all the content being provided online via SSERC and the IOP. Feeling very supported and valued."

To find out more about our self-study health & safety [1] and self-study Physics [2] courses, please visit our website.



References

- [1] <https://www.sserc.org.uk/professional-learning/secondary-clpl/health-safety-clpl/>.
- [2] <https://www.sserc.org.uk/professional-learning/secondary-clpl/physics-clpl/>.