

## **1 Executive Summary**

The aim of this study is to identify and describe the learning, organisational, strategic and commercial aspects of LIFE's distance learning model. Three comparable distance learning graduate courses have been selected as the framework for the study.

The LIFE Management decided to support distance learning in 2002 in an effort to expand the recruitment base and also out of a desire to internationalise the University. In 2005, the Management allocated extra resources for e-learning and established a dedicated e-learning unit – IT Learning Centre (ITLC). The instructors emphasise that access to an institutionalised e-learning unit is the primary organisational measure which has enabled the development of e-learning at LIFE.

The Management's focus on e-learning and the financial investments have borne fruit, and the positive experiences have been communicated throughout the organisation as a success story. It is one of the main reasons why learning technologies are now widely used throughout the organisation. The good results have also helped retain the Management's positive view of e-learning. Moreover, the introduction of distance learning has spurred a streamlining and troubleshooting process in relation to administrative routines due to the special demands of this type of instruction with regard to the study administrative systems and the levels of service and communication.

The study also shows that the didactic methods represent an efficient and appropriate design for distance learning courses. The model comprises a number of didactic points of focus, which appear to explain the observed high grades, low drop-out rates, high levels of activity and high degree of satisfaction among students, and, consequently, the increased quality of the teaching. The primary points of focus are: socialisation and a sense of community, the combination of online discussions and tests and the teaching structure and teaching framework.

The distance learning courses have contributed to achieving LIFE's strategic sub-objectives regarding internationalisation, study efficiency, interdisciplinary initiatives and well-being and flexibility in the workplace. Furthermore, distance learning has another as yet unexploited potential as an activity which can contribute to expanding the University's earnings base, primarily via continuing and further education.

The overall findings of the study demonstrate that distance learning is more than just an IT project; it is a complex structure involving interaction between organisational, technical and educational factors. The study shows that these elements cannot be thought of in isolation, but must be combined from the outset when developing a university e-learning strategy.

The Danish National IT and Telecom Agency (ITST) under the auspices of the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (VTU) has found that LIFE's distance learning model could lend itself to widespread use at Danish universities. As a result, the Agency decided that LIFE's experiences should be studied and the results of the study disseminated.