

Flexible Learning – Opportunities for Mature Students to get an Online Degree.

Returning to education as a mature student can be a daunting prospect. Many people are concerned about being in a classroom with much younger fellow students, or are worried their study skills are rusty or non-existent.

However, the range of distance learning courses now available now makes it much easier to return to education. Online degrees give a flexibility conventional universities are unable to provide – meaning students can study in a way fitting with their lifestyles. It is this flexibility that has been the key to their success in attracting older students.

Charlotte, who is currently studying for a degree in computer science, explained how the flexibility benefited her.

“With online [distance learning](#) you are not confined to a classroom. I'm in my thirties, I have a nine year old and I work part time. There is no way I'd have been able to study even part time at my local university. I need to be able to fit my degree around what is an already busy schedule, and the best way to do this was through online learning.”

One of the problems often associated with online learning, especially with older students, is lack of support.

“I was really worried before the course started,” Charlotte told me, “I hadn't studied since I left school fifteen years ago, and I was worried I wouldn't be able to keep up with the work. However, I've found the environment very supportive, and have been encouraged to ask questions if I don't understand anything.”

This is true of most distant learning programmes. Most organisations recognise the majority of their students are older and their skills might be rustier. There is regular contact with tutors via email, and most places also offer some face-to-face sessions. Furthermore, many courses offer study skills options for those who feel they need a bit of extra help.

Returning to education can also be a good option for those who want a career change, or to further their existing career. Retraining now no longer means having a break from work – something not financially possible for many – and there is a huge range of courses from film studies to business degrees and marketing courses.

If there is a course related to your existing area of work, it is worth asking your company whether they would be prepared to pay the course fees. Most larger businesses have funds available to support employees undertaking further training, and are very encouraging as they will benefit in the long run.

“I work as a classroom assistant,” Charlotte told me, “I'm doing a computer degree which will help my students, so I managed to get a bursary from the school to pay the course fees.”

The flexibility of these courses, combined with the level of support, means further studying is now a real option for people of all ages. Whatever the reasons for wanting to return to education, there are many opportunities for mature students, and very few barriers.

About the Author

Charlotte is with [Kaplan Open Learning](#) and is taking [Online Management Courses](#)