

## **Co-operative learning and IT**

Team work is the norm in the IT industry. IT employers value interpersonal and team working skills as much as technical skills. Team members who work too individualistically, or who allow others to do most of the work can threaten the success of projects.

IT practitioners have to cope with constant technological change. Co-operative learning provides many opportunities for learners to develop skills that will make them 'expert learners' who can rise to this challenge.

IT learners may spend long periods working alone, interacting with just a computer. Co-operative learning provides an antidote to this.

### **Co-operation, competition and individualism**

There are three basic ways of setting up learning:

- Learners can compete to see who is 'best'.
- Learners can work towards individual goals, paying no attention to other learners' learning.
- Learners can work co-operatively with a vested interest in each other's learning, as well as their own.

Co-operative learning is one of the best researched of all teaching strategies, with over 900 studies showing that it is more effective than individualistic or competitive methods.

Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R. and Stanne, M. (2000) *Co-operative Learning Methods: A Meta-Analysis*. University of Minnesota

### **It's not just working in groups**

Simply putting learners into groups does not amount to co-operative learning. They may tackle the task individualistically or may leave others to do most of the work.

Learners are often wary of group work because of this. You may need to explain to your learners that co-operative learning is different. Reassure them that co-operation does not mean losing sight of the individual. On the contrary, it is all about the individual's contribution to the team.