

Postgraduate Professional IT & Computing awards at a distance? The case of Brazil

Leonor Barroca
Itana Gimenes



**The Open University has a large experience on distance education at postgraduate level in Computing & IT.
How can that experience be transferred across boundaries to a country like Brazil?**

Brazil is a country:

- with large geographical and social divides;
- in a reasonable quickly growing economic situation;
- with a high demand of trained professionals in IT & Computing;
- where distance education is growing at a fast speed in the public sector;
- where distance education still generates a heated debate around quality and comparability;
- with strong inflexible regulation of postgraduate qualifications (mostly research-based);
- with a keen interest in the development of professional masters, declared in the national plan for postgraduate programs 2011-2020.

What needs to be taken into account in the expansion of postgraduate professional masters at a distance in the context of Brazil?

Distance education requires planning ahead with learning design support.

Best pedagogic practices for distance education that are skills-centred, involve reflection, and collaboration need to be taken into account.

Support for skills development with Web 2.0 technologies with a need for more postgraduate Computing domain-specific evidence for the application of these technologies.

Tool support requires strategies and the right balance between maintaining control over data and tools vs. open source adoption.

Resources and supporting materials available as Open Educational Resources (OERs) should be considered.

The role of the digital educator needs to be recognised by institutions and nationally.

Training of digital educators to be promoted and workloads should take into account the effort required with distance education.

Quality of distance education can compete in equal terms with quality of face-to-face education.

Greater flexibility of regulations for postgraduate education allowing for professional programmes at a distance independent of research programmes.

The social dimension of distance education programmes is an important step for democratisation of education, and a means to achieve social and economical benefits for the nation. This requires recognition of the context of the profession and an understanding that professional masters will develop different skills to those leading to a research career.

Factors for success for distance education initiatives and adoption of Web 2.0 technologies depend of the support at different levels: institutional, professional, and governmental.