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Introducing NLP into Higher Education

NLP is one of the most exciting innovations in our understanding of ourselves and the world we live in. As a growth area with many varied applications, it is slowly finding its way into both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in universities and colleges throughout the world, and playing an increasing role in the training of many professions. There has been a small number of successfully completed Master's degrees in the application of NLP at what was formerly the Polytechnic of East London (now the University of East London). It has also been introduced into undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses. This report is based on my experience there since 1988.

It was largely thanks to a remarkable educational innovation, the School for Independent Study (SIS) at the then Polytechnic, that NLP was first introduced as an academic subject in Britain. In this department, students could design their own course, follow it, and then present their work for a degree award. Under this system, it was possible for interested individuals to register for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in areas relating to NLP.

SIS had staff whose full-time work was the guidance and supervision of students taking the independent study route towards a degree. Independent study degrees were originally validated by the Council for National Academic Awards, the degree-awarding body which validated hundreds of more orthodox degree courses in both arts and science subjects in Polytechnics and Tertiary Education Colleges throughout the UK. The philosophy of SIS was that a student should be free to study whatever he or she liked, provided

that their study plan was accepted by the board of studies, and that there was a suitably-qualified tutor available within the institution.

This venture was short lived: the School for Independent Study was closed down in 1991 after hundreds of students had successfully obtained their qualifications there. It was partly the victim of major changes in the funding of higher education. It also suffered from changes in the perception of the usefulness of independent study. Nevertheless, the small number of students who obtained their Master's qualifications in NLP demonstrated that it could be used successfully as a basis for degree-level work.