Student Research Centre

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Providing keyboard skill tuition for OU students: An evaluation of the use of *KAZ* typing tutor software by S103 *Discovering science* students

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The **Student Research Centre** is part of the Open University's Institute of Educational Technology. The main work of the Centre is, firstly, to evaluate the Open University's courses and learning materials, and secondly, to carry out research into all aspects of students' experiences of learning as adult distance learners. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are used in these areas.

The aim of the Centre's work is to improve the quality of the Open University's teaching materials and teaching system, and to raise awareness of the effects on students of university policy decisions and of different forms of course provision.

A listing of the Student Research Centre Reports is given at the back of this paper.

Providing keyboard skill tuition for OU students: an evaluation of the use of *KAZ* typing tutor software by S103 *Discovering science* students

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Summary

The *KAZ* typing tutor is a commercially produced program for developing and practising keyboard skills. It was provided to all students studying S103 *Discovering science* in 1999. It was also provided for students taking the pilot presentation of T171.

Surveys of samples of S103 students indicated that:

- 40% of students used the software.

- Users had significantly lower keyboard skills before starting the course than Non-users.

- At the times the two surveys were conducted (in February and May) Users' skills had improved so that they were not significantly different from those of Non-Users.

- Users found the software easy to use, reliable and effective.

- A large majority of students would recommend the software to family, friends and other students, and thought that the software should be provided for S103 students in future years.

The positive results of the surveys lead us to recommend that:

- The *KAZ* software should he provided for S103 students in future presentations of the course. The benefits in terms of improved keyboard skills for those who were initially less experienced appear to justify the relatively small cost to the University for licensing the software for distribution on one of the course CD-ROMs.

- Consideration should be given to sending the CD-ROM that includes the *KAZ* software earlier so that students have plenty of time to use it before the workload on the course builds up.

- Other units and course teams consider whether the *KAZ* software should be sent to students studying other entry-level courses.