

Strategic Area Reviews and E-Learning

Support Notes for Local Learning and Skills Councils in the Assessment of Opportunities for the Use of E-Learning

Summary

This report is a contribution to the strategic area review (StAR) process of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). It suggests approaches and resources that local Learning and Skills Councils (local LSCs) can use to assess the opportunities for e-learning in their areas. E-learning can enhance the quality and efficiency of the learning process, using electronic delivery of text, and audio and visual images.

The report provides case studies and suggestions that may help in planning and delivery. It summarises the elements necessary for successful e-learning, and provides checklists, process suggestions, Internet resources and case studies to help local LSCs.

This report is of interest to strategic planning managers involved in post-16 education and training.

August 2003

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Executive Summary

August 2003

Strategic Area Reviews and E-Learning

This report supports the arrangements made by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for strategic area reviews (StARs). It outlines approaches and resources that local Learning and Skills Councils (local LSCs) can use to assess the opportunities for e-learning in their area, and provides case studies and concrete suggestions that may help at the planning and delivery stages.

After an outline of the background to the StAR process, the report examines the potential role of e-learning and how it can relate to that process. E-learning presents considerable opportunities for enhancing the quality and efficiency of the learning process, using electronic delivery of text, audio and visual images, particularly in order to:

- reach new learners;
- meet the learning needs of key LSC groups;
- provide flexibility of delivery;
- blur the boundaries between formal and informal learning; and
- enhance value throughout the learning process.

Six elements are essential for e-learning to be successful:

- commitment from the organisation (senior managers, other staff and learners);
- adequate network capacity (bandwidth and connectivity);
- appropriate equipment and technical support;
- appropriate learning materials;
- good support for learners; and
- staff who understand how to use technology to support learning.

The report provides suggestions for how to review the existing provision of e-learning in various areas and sectors. It encourages a consideration of how such provision could be extended and improved with the above aims in mind, perhaps in co-operation with other organisations.

Annex A contains the checklists, a wealth of organised material to help in the local LSC's work: specifically, checklists, process suggestions, Internet resources and case studies covering the following topics:

- forms that e-learning can take;
- characteristics of successful e-learning;
- identifying existing provision;
- recognising opportunities for e-learning;
- physical locations where learning and training are being taking place;

- planning and working with other organisations;
- results of other reviews; and
- guidance for the implementation of e-learning.

Intended recipients

This report is of interest to strategic planning managers involved in post-16 education and training.

Further information

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Strategic Area Reviews and e-Learning

Support Notes for Local Learning and Skills Councils in the Assessment of Opportunities for the Use of e-Learning

Introduction

- 1 This document supports the arrangements made by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for strategic area reviews (StARs). Each local Learning and Skills Council (local LSC) will be considering how e-learning can help to meet the current needs and future priorities of the learners, employers and communities in its area. The document suggests approaches that local LSCs can use in their assessment, and offers a high-level way forward that may help them consider the strategic contribution that e-learning can make to meeting those needs and priorities.
- 2 The document contains three sections, outlined below.

Background

- 3 This reviews some of the background to StARs and considers the context of e-learning within the StAR process.

Defining a role for e-learning

- 4 This provides a brief description of the potential role of e-learning, the LSC's definition of e-learning, and the elements that must be present for e-learning to be successful.

Reviewing provision

- 5 This section describes activities that could be undertaken as part of a StAR when considering how e-learning can help to meet needs and offer an improved choice.
- 6 The activities listed in the section are supported by a number of checklists (in Annex A) and in other materials (in annexes B to D). The checklists are more wide-ranging than the term would normally imply, as they may also include suggestions, Internet resources and case studies. They provide additional information or describe how the activities might be achieved or undertaken. The checklists and other annexes cover the following topics:
 - forms that e-learning can take;

- characteristics of successful e-learning;
 - identifying existing provision;
 - recognising opportunities for e-learning;
 - physical locations where learning and training are being delivered;
 - planning and working with other organisations;
 - results of other reviews: describing typical review findings and providing a commentary on the more significant implications of these findings; and
 - guidance for the implementation of e-learning: an outline of issues to be addressed when considering the use of e-learning.
- 7 In addition, case studies have been developed to provide practical examples of the strategic role of e-learning. They can be found in the annexes and checklists, or on the [Success for All](#) website.

Background

- 8 Success for All, the Government's reform strategy for further education and training, outlines the rationale for StARs. Circular 03/06 *Strategic Area Reviews* confirms the arrangements made by the LSC in response to Success for All, for StARs of all LSC-funded provision across England for post-16 learning and skills.
- 9 StARs will cover every provider in the LSC-funded learning and skills sector. The aim is to ensure that the learning provided in an area best meets the local, regional, national and sectoral skill needs. StARs will support the raising of standards and will ensure that learners have a wide choice of high-quality local provision.
- 10 The purpose of StARs is to make a fundamental examination of learning provision, both that which is currently offered and that which is likely to be required, in each part of the country. They will consider:
- the priorities and needs of learners, employers and local communities;
 - the need to drive up quality and increase success rates in many areas of provision and to improve its cost-effectiveness; and
 - the volume and type of education and training needed to meet the LSC's targets.
- 11 StARs will also take account of the key priority areas outlined in the strategies for:
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 14–19;
 - Success for All;
 - Higher Education;

- Skills;
 - LSC Basic Skills;
 - Widening Adult Participation; and
 - Equality and Diversity.
- 12 The StAR process comprises seven activities. They may be carried out in part or in full, consecutively or concurrently. Local LSCs may choose to discharge the StAR in a variety of planned ways (geographical, sectoral or thematic), as long as the process as a whole covers the entire local area. The activities are:
- preparing and planning;
 - gathering and analysing information;
 - developing and appraising strategic options;
 - consulting locally as appropriate;
 - publishing outcomes;
 - implementing outcomes; and
 - evaluating the process and outcomes.

Defining a Role for E-Learning

E-learning and strategic area reviews

- 13 E-learning presents considerable opportunities for enhancing the quality and efficiency of learning delivery, particularly to:
- reach new learners;
 - meet the learning needs of key LSC groups;
 - provide flexibility of delivery: learning at a time, place and pace that suits the learner;
 - blur the boundaries between formal and informal learning; and
 - enhance value throughout the learning process: diagnostics, curriculum delivery, communication, tutor and peer support, and assessment.
- 14 Some of the LSC's aims may not be attained using existing approaches alone. Such aims include:
- increasing the participation and achievement by 16–19-year-olds;
 - raising demand from adults;
 - improving retention;
 - raising skill levels and improving national competitiveness;
 - improving quality of delivery; and

- improving effectiveness and efficiency.
- 15 Achieving these is likely to require high-quality, well-designed, distributed and electronic learning material that can be delivered in small extracts at times and in places convenient to the learner.
- 16 This learning material will make effective use of appropriate media (text, audio and visual images) and be supported by appropriately qualified staff. It will usually supplement existing provision and be blended with traditional tools and approaches. This will add variety to these approaches while also extending and enriching them. As Circular 03/06 *Strategic Area Reviews* remarks:

the LSC recognises that new and innovative forms of delivery such as e-learning should be an integral part of the post-16 learning and skills sector... it is vital that the potential of new and 'tried and tested' forms of delivery and e-learning are exploited and included in the StAR process to maximise the effectiveness of provision and the learning experience.

Circular 03/06 *Strategic Area Reviews* para. 55.

- 17 This document outlines possible ways in which e-learning can help to make the delivery of learning materials more efficient and effective. It may also assist local LSCs as they implement their e-learning strategies or action plans.
- 18 Finally, this document should also help local LSCs and their partners and stakeholders as they consider the important strategic contribution of e-learning in:
- delivering the right mix of high-quality provision to meet the existing and future needs of learners, employers and the community;
 - raising standards and success rates;
 - meeting the LSC's vision for 2010; and
 - delivering the Government's education and training priorities.

What is meant by e-learning?

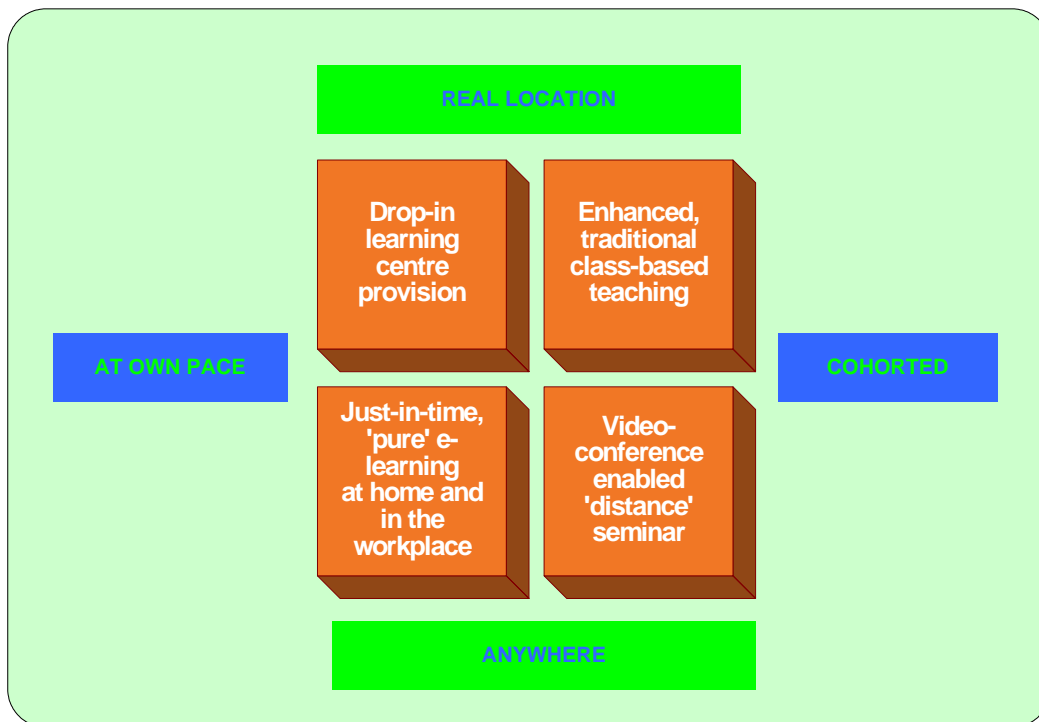
- 19 The LSC's Distributed and Electronic Learning Group (DELG) defines e-learning as:

an approach to learning delivery in which part of the learning resources used are made available to the learner via a computer, television or other electronic communications device, or a combination of these with printed materials.

E-learning ranges from Internet-supported distance learning in which the learner has limited face-to-face contact with the tutor or other learners, to teacher-led, classroom-based activity which is interspersed with occasional computer-delivered or facilitated assignments.

DELG Report, LSC, Coventry, 2002.

Figure 1: Various ways in which learning can be delivered.



- 20 E-learning can take many forms. Checklist 1 (in Annex A) describes some of these. Managing such diversity of access can be problematic, but there are techniques and tools (often called virtual learning environments or VLEs) that can help. For more information on VLEs, see www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=mle_related_vle

What is needed for effective e-learning?

- 21 Six elements are essential for e-learning to be successful:
- commitment from the organisation (senior managers, other staff and learners);
 - adequate network capacity (bandwidth and connectivity);
 - appropriate equipment and technical support;
 - appropriate learning materials;
 - good support for learners; and
 - staff who understand how to use technology to support learning.
- 22 Checklist 2 provides more information about each of these elements. They apply as much to a small voluntary or community outlet as to a large college. If e-learning is to be successful, all these elements must be present. In addition, planning for e-learning should be an integral part of the providers' business planning. However, this may take some time to achieve, not least because of its novelty for some providers.

Reviewing Provision

- 23 The local LSC will need to assess where and how e-learning can help to ensure that the pattern and mix of provision in the LSC's area meets the current needs and future priorities for all learners, employers and communities. Such an assessment might typically involve carrying out some of the activities listed below, some of which will be consecutive while others may be concurrent.
- 24 When considering undertaking any of these activities, or when using the checklists, note that Circular 03/06 *Strategic Area Reviews* stresses that wherever possible information that is readily available should be used to inform StARs to avoid additional burdens for data collection on the LSC and providers.
- a Determine where e-learning activities exist that already contribute to, or might be adapted to meet, identified needs. See Checklist 3 for suggestions about how this might be achieved.
 - b Determine where e-learning is likely to be introduced in the near future, and the contribution it can make. See Checklist 3.
 - c Decide where else e-learning could contribute. See Checklist 4.
 - d Identify other physical locations where learning and training are being delivered, and establish whether these outlets can provide or support e-learning. See Checklist 5.
 - e Establish priorities and timescales for action (such as focusing on key skills, basic skills or industry sectors). Itemise them by industry sector if possible.
 - f Develop programmes or action plans for the use of e-learning. A fundamental element here will be to identify and agree the roles and responsibilities of all partners (the LSC, the local education authorities, local authorities, providers, and so on) in developing and implementing the programmes. Checklist 6 may be useful here.
 - g Determine the resource implications. These include places of delivery, connectivity, infrastructure, equipment, learning materials, technical support, staffing, management and staff development. Do not overlook requirements for personnel, management and staff development within the sponsoring or overseeing organisations. (Annex C has a more detailed description of likely resource implications.)
 - h Assess what resources exist and therefore what else is needed.
 - i Determine how any deficits in resources can be addressed.
 - j Assess opportunities for collaboration between providers.
 - k Implement the programmes, incorporating those elements of the checklists that are relevant.
- 25 This approach ensures that a solution is based on the identified needs of learners and employers, and removes the focus on technology. It may well reveal that

separate programmes will be needed for the various categories of provision (further education, work-based learning, adult and community learning, and so on).

- 26 Annex B describes findings from previous reviews of e-learning. Further and more detailed evidence can be found in the *Report of the Learning and Skills Council's Distributed and Electronic Learning Group*, or the LSDA report, *Distributed and Electronic Learning: A review of the literature* (See Annex D: Further Reading)