

West Yorkshire e-Learning Strategy

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1. Introduction

The West Yorkshire e-Learning Strategy was produced on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council West Yorkshire. Its aim is to provide a draft post-16 e-Learning strategy for the sub-region.

What is e-Learning?

e-Learning is the effective learning process created by combining digitally delivered content with (learning) support and services.

There is however, considerable support for widening the definition so that it includes the importance of communication, self-direction, flexibility and accessibility.

2. Where are we now?

2.1 Strategic Context

The Learning and Skills Council West Yorkshire (LSCWY) Local Strategic Plan 2002-2005 and the supporting Annual Plan 2003-4 were constructed around the need to deliver five national strategic objectives:

1. To extend participation in education, learning and training
2. To increase the engagement of employers in workforce development
3. To raise the achievement of young people
4. To raise the achievement of adults
5. To raise the quality of education, training and user satisfaction

The potential impact of e-Learning on the LSCWY's core strategies is very significant. The following show where e-Learning can contribute in helping to achieve their strategic priorities.

Objective 1 – To extend participation in education, learning and training

- 1. To ensure provision meets the needs of individual learners and employers and is tailored to meet identified needs.*

In this context, e-Learning can contribute to the provision of blended and flexible learning opportunities. It is particularly suited to tailor-made learning packages.

- 2. To increase 16-18 participation, particularly amongst hard-to-reach young people.*

The plan advocates “innovative approaches and use of flexible funding to widen participation and address barriers”. The flexibility of blended and e-Learning can add value here. e-Learning can blur boundaries between formal and informal learning. Young people who have been

brought up in a world of computer technology are particularly open to e-Learning as an alternative to other more traditional delivery methods.

3. *To improve retention across all provision and ensuring that learners are on the right course, at the right level, at the right time and with the right support.*

e-Learning enables individuals to customise learning to their own needs. Its flexibility of delivery and timing enables individuals to learn “at their own pace, in their own time and from a location that suits them best”.

4. *To increase the number of adults in all forms of learning and develop and implement innovative provision to meet the needs of people who have not recently accessed learning opportunities.*

There is evidence that e-Learning’s most significant contribution will be to post-16 learning, due in particular to the part-time nature of much e-Learning. The ongoing investment in ICT skills training opens doors to e-Learning opportunities for those with newly gained e-skills.

Objective 2 – To increase engagement of employers in Workforce Development

1. *To encourage employers to take responsibility for the planning and delivery of learning to meet the needs of their organisation and the economy.*

The Post-16 e-Learning Strategy Task Force Report states that the recommended expansion of the Curriculum Online for School into post-16 learning will initially focus on the 14-19 age group. However, the “greatest audience to benefit will be employees accessing college Online from the workplace”. E-Learning is a particularly powerful tool for smaller businesses, where in-house training programmes are often inappropriate.

Objective 3 – To raise achievement of young people

1. To improve levels of attainment across all learning sectors.

The use of e-Learning will enhance existing approaches to core provision. With appropriate support available for teachers and trainers it will offer a means to extend current capacity and capability of providers.

2. To narrow the gap in achievement which exists between different groups of learners.

The ability of e-Learning to recruit harder-to-reach individuals makes it a powerful tool to target groups of young people whose achievement is significantly below the local average. The inclusion of e-Learning in the learning opportunities portfolio will also help meet some needs of learners that have traditionally been hard to fulfil.

Objective 4 – To raise achievement of adults

1. To raise the achievement in adults.

To use the experience of learndirect as a template for the development of e-Learning opportunities for adults. This will help adults make the right choice of provision and be given adequate support.

The importance of e-skills in the workforce has already been recognised and the continuing dissemination of skills and qualifications is crucial to the effective exploitation of e-Learning.

2. To raise the literacy, numeracy and language (ESOL) skills of adults.

The associated ease of accessibility of e-Learning will increase the percentage of Basic Skills training which is accredited and counts towards national targets.

Objective 5 – To raise the quality of education & training and user satisfaction

1. *To improve the quality of teaching and learning; and management and leadership across all provision.*

Local providers will develop and refine their own e-Learning ICT strategies so that they are effective and include appropriate actions, targets and milestones that are monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.

Flexible local funding is available to support improvement strategies and develop capability through the use of e-Learning to complement and enhance existing learning.

2. *To improve the level of satisfaction of learners and employers*

Providers will have to monitor satisfaction levels of learners and employers through feedback from users.

2.2 Strategic Partnerships

The key players within the sub-region include:

- The West Yorkshire e-skills and e-Learning forum, initiated by the Learning and Skills Council West Yorkshire.
- Learndirect and its learning centres/access points and learning pods within companies
- West Yorkshire Consortium
- The Local Learning Partnerships and their respective strategy groups

2.3 E-Maturity of the sub-region

In order to establish the most effective e-Learning strategy for the learner, an assessment of the e-maturity of the sub-region was carried out.

Environment

Infrastructure investment at national and regional level means that there is a fertile environment for the adoption of e-Learning. In West Yorkshire there is increasing availability of broadband access and a strong educational infrastructure. While online delivery represents only a part of the full extent of e-Learning, internet connectivity is a key element of the environment for e-Learning.

Readiness

It is apparent that a great majority of individuals and employers in West Yorkshire are ready to adopt new e-experiences and skills. Readiness of individuals to adopt e-Learning depends on a wide range of factors. Key to these are the existing level of ICT skills and personal experience of using computers and the Internet.

Experience of computers and the Internet

Readiness to adopt e-Learning depends upon positive personal experience of computers. Research shows that experience of computers and the Internet has become widespread. Use of the Internet is becoming part of everyday life for individuals, with domestic use dominating.

ICT skills

The effectiveness of e-Learning will depend on the level of ICT skills available to individuals and employees. A comparison of employers' and individuals' responses to ICT skills levels showed that individuals see a greater need for improvement than employers.

Relatively low levels of business use ICT for education and training. This shows the potential for e-Learning to transform learning patterns. There is also an underlining need for a strategic approach to increasing delivery of training and education by ICT.

e-skills: Training Providers

In West Yorkshire there is a wide range of ICT skills provision. This ranges from small community centres to comprehensive Further and Higher Education resources and specialist training businesses. Recent research (LSC West Yorkshire "ICT Skills Survey", MRS Consultancy, February 2003) showed that of the ICT courses available, the main providers were FE institutions delivering 48% of the courses, and private providers delivering 42%.

ICT skills at NVQ levels 2 & 3 are vital to businesses and individuals alike. Progressing a learner from Entry and Level 1 to these middle levels is the challenge faced by both the public and private sector. This is the key ICT skill level needed by individuals to access the benefits of e-Learning. It is clear that until a significant minority of the population reaches these ICT skill levels, e-Learning will not be able to achieve its potential contribution to learning in the sub-region.

This key strategic area and the delivery of ICT skills at NVQ Levels 2 & 3 is led by the private sector (53% share compared to the FE sector's 39%). This indicates that the private sector is reading and reacting to market demand more efficiently in this area. It also indicates an opportunity for public provision to improve its share of this key area of ICT skills delivery.

Uptake

Once a fertile environment and learner readiness are in place, then there will be uptake and a greater use of e-Learning.

Encouraging uptake and use

Organisations and individuals have wide-ranging training needs, but e-Learning will have to compete with other, longer-established delivery methods to satisfy these needs. The improvement of skills gap awareness is crucial to optimising the uptake of e-Learning, as well as other skills training delivery methods.

Marketing the uptake and use of e-Learning

Part of any e-Learning strategy must be the effective communication of its benefits. The message must make it clear that the most effective use of e-Learning is in a blended learning context. The potential benefits include:

- Reaching new learners and, in particular, hard-to-reach learners
- Flexibility of learning delivery
- Blurring boundaries between informal and formal learning
- Adding value in the learning process.

The communication of the benefits of e-Learning to employers in the region will be of particular importance in order to encourage take-up. An appropriate marketing strategy is therefore vital. In medium and large companies where there are higher levels of training investment a “switching” strategy is possible, where users move from traditional delivery methods to blended learning.

Since over half of small businesses make no investment in training at all, the most effective way to improve the skills of these employees is via the individuals themselves. As employees of non-training companies, they are potential beneficiaries of the flexibility of e-Learning accessed from outside the workplace.

2.4 Content and Learning Systems

Considerable progress has been made towards the development of e-Learning content and learning management systems (LMS). However we are still a long way from experiencing seamless integration and operability across the many products and systems that exist.

The industry has also been working towards educating learning professionals about learning standards so that they can become “de facto” standards (voluntarily used by a critical mass).

Standards help to ensure the five “abilities” desirable to protect and even nurture e-Learning investments. These are:

- Interoperability – can the system work with any other system?
- Re-usability – can courseware (Learning Objects or “chunks”) be re-used?
- Manageability – can the system track the appropriate information about the learner and the content?
- Accessibility – can a learner access the appropriate content at the appropriate time?
- Durability – will the technology evolve with the standards to avoid obsolescence?

The key issue of standards is addressed in the Government’s report on the post 16 e-Learning Strategy “Get ON with IT” and the LSC’s DELG (Distributed and Electronic Learning Group).

2.5 Learner Support

Learner Support Personnel

The DELG report clearly indicates that the adoption of e-Learning deconstructs the traditional roles of tutors and other learner support personnel. There is evidence to suggest that the various components can be undertaken by different people with different skills, even working in different organisations.

Lack of integrated support has been responsible for some of the disappointing outcomes in terms of completion, success rates and added value to businesses. Therefore learner support personnel should be given the necessary training and support to use e-Learning as a tool. Many traditional trainers avoid engaging with e-Learning often due to:

- lack of basic ICT skills
- misconceptions about e-Learning itself

- the changing roles of staff, and
- the lack of knowledge about the resources currently available.

New training requirements for FE tutors introduced in 2001 will ensure that all tutors have undergone some ICT training. However, the “Get on with IT” report indicates that more work is needed to ensure that different learner support roles acquire the necessary skill sets.

There are already other National FE initiatives in the sub-region. These include the Learning Champions initiative and the National Mentoring Scheme for tutors.

Learners

Lack of basic ICT skills is a fundamental barrier to e-Learning. Although much progress has been made in the sub-region, there is still a long way to go in ensuring that the lack of ICT skills is not an initial barrier.

True e-Learning requires additional skills in order to learn more effectively. These include self-direction and communication. Universities of the sub-region have done much work in leading the way on collaborative learning environments.

2.6 Quality

Although traditional measures of quality can be applied to some e-Learning, especially where it contributes to blended learning in “traditional” courses, it is often bite-sized and not linked to traditional qualifications. Unitisation of the curriculum is key to workforce development.

For LSC funded provision, the key elements for provider QA are:

- self assessment
- LSC’s performance review process
- inspection

- use of benchmarking and external quality kite-marks

3. Recent Policy Developments in e-Learning

The Department for Education and Skills' three part e-Learning strategy serves as a benchmark to creating a framework for exploring approaches to e-Learning strategy:

- To create an accessible **infrastructure** which makes ICT universally available to learners
- To make ICT integral to our learning processes (**content**) and to stimulate the development and acceptance of new ways of learning
- To create, implement and support a dynamic framework for ICT skills and a corresponding framework for teachers (learner and teacher **skills**)

Report of the Learning and Skills Council's Distributed and Electronic Learning Group (DELG Report)

The DELG report concludes that e-Learning can make a major contribution to the delivery of LSC targets by enriching and extending post-16 learning provision. This contribution will be in the form of blended learning, rather than in isolation. It is vital that the e-Learning contribution is "well-planned, of high quality and supported by expert training".

Post-16 e-Learning Strategy Task Force Report (Post-16 Task Force Report)

The Post-16 Task Force report identifies four key recommendations. Taken together they "provide a coherent contribution to enabling all learners, whatever their circumstances, to have the chance to use e-Learning as another tool at their disposal".

The report recognises that, "despite considerable investment in technology, the use of e-Learning remains fragmented". Most investment has concentrated on hardware and infrastructure with relatively little spent on

content and skill development. To improve the effectiveness of funding, links between initiatives need to be stronger. The delivery of wider access and high quality e-Learning depends upon the integration of e-Learning into mainstream programmes.

The report recognises the potential of e-Learning to “radically improve participation and achievement rates in education”. The key benefits of e-Learning in this respect are its ability to customise learning to the individual’s needs and its flexibility of delivery and timing.

ICT as a Basic Skill

There is a strong case for treating the need for ICT and e-Learning skills as seriously as the need for literacy and numeracy. The report recommends that by 2010 everyone should have access to ICT as a basic skill as an entitlement. The National Skills Strategy (July 2003) states that basic ICT skills will become a third area of the Skills for Life programme, alongside literacy and numeracy.

College Online

The expansion of the Curriculum Online for Schools into post-16 learning is recommended, with initial focus placed on the 14-19 age group, bearing in mind that the greatest audience to benefit will be employees accessing College Online from the workplace.

Taking the College to the Company

E-Learning can play a central role in work-based learning and College Online can become a key workplace tool. SMEs tend to lag behind larger companies in learning up-take so there is a need for highly focused, occupational learning that is tailor-made to a company’s needs and accessible from the workplace.

National Tutor Mentoring Network

The role of e-Learning in ‘blended learning’ will not reach its potential without confident, well-trained tutors. In the absence of a core ICT curriculum for FE tutors, the use of high quality mentoring could provide responsible, flexible

support. Funding for an initial 5,000 mentors is proposed as the first step, together with a single on-line National Mentoring Programme database, accessible by tutors and ICT champions.

The DfES Report “Towards a Unified e-Learning Strategy” (July 2003)

This strategy consultation document outlines a set of proposals for how education leaders, teachers, learners, employers and commercial suppliers might contribute to the process of change. The report makes it clear that the process of embedding e-Learning will not be quick. It is a long-term strategy that looks ahead, anticipating further technological evolution, but with an emphasis on preparing ourselves, through our education system, to cope with an ever-changing world.

Although e-Learning strategies are being developed at every level, national and regional, in public and private sectors, e-Learning itself does not recognise these physical boundaries. All partners will benefit from coming together to consider how best to blend e-Learning with existing systems.

Research Results in e-Learning

Research undertaken in the area of e-Learning is not yet comprehensive but evidence with varying levels of confidence has already been established. There is strong evidence of the effectiveness of e-Learning in extending the reach of learning opportunities and in increasing the motivation of learners, particularly among those groups that are otherwise hard to attract.

The BECT review of the funding of post-16 ICT initiatives between 1999 and 2002 found that funding for staff development and spending on content lagged behind investment in infrastructure. To achieve the benefits that e-Learning offers, funds for content and training must be available to exploit the investment in infrastructure.

4. Creating a Local e-Learning Strategy

Recommended Strategic Framework

The DELG report recommended to the Learning and Skills Council a strategic framework within which local strategic plans for e-Learning provision should be created. The key elements of the framework are:

- a) focus on the learner and learning;
- b) harnessing DEL in promoting social inclusion and equity, and in supporting diversity;
- c) promoting the benefits of e-Learning as well as securing its provision and maximising its accessibility;
- d) a recognition of the fundamental role of strategic partners and the establishment of structures within which they can collaborate with each other;
- e) clear planning and quality assurance processes and systems; and
- f) that e-Learning must be explicitly reflected in every strategic initiative taken forward by the Council locally and internationally.

Local LSCs should develop and refine their own e-Learning/ICT strategies within the national policy framework and guidance. These strategies should include:

- a) an appraisal of the contribution DEL could make to delivering the Council's objectives at local level;
- b) the mapping of existing provision and an assessment of the fit between local need and local provision;
- c) consideration of the most effective means of developing a sustainable ICT infrastructure;
- d) taking account of the research and other evidence on the effectiveness of DEL in different circumstances;
- e) alignment with LSC approved national and international standards in content, delivery and learner support;

- f) appropriate liaison and collaboration arrangements between agencies and providers;
- g) suitable provision for effective learner support;
- h) recognition of the role of the home, the workplace and the community as venues for learning;
- i) consideration of the balance of local and national learning materials creation and procurement;
- j) arrangements for the continuing professional development of all staff;
- k) the mapping of connectivity barriers to e-Learning in the locality;
- l) consideration of relevant quality assurance issues;
- m) the contribution that learndirect will make to the local LSC's targets;
- n) arrangements for co-ordinating digital divide strategies to ensure ICT is promoted and made accessible to all citizens, not least those facing social exclusion in its various forms; and
- o) alignment with local approaches being taken in schools, higher education and other educational providers to facilitate learning transfer.

Integration of e-Learning and ICT into local planning and workforce development strategies is vital. The use of UK online centres for learning delivery also allows synergistic benefits.

Applying e-Learning in the Post-16 Learning Sector

The diversity of the post-16 sector, with learning in colleges, school sixth forms, workplace and homes, means that the benefits of e-Learning can be many and various. The increases in motivation observed in e-Learning contexts can be a tool to improve completion rates and the ability of e-Learning to recruit harder-to-reach individuals make it a potentially powerful tool in addressing issues of social inclusion.

The challenges facing the Post-16 Learning Sector are well-known:

- the basic skills gap, now augmented by the ICT skills gap

- the range of teaching standards from excellent to, in some cases, unsatisfactory provision
- improvement of completion rates
- social inclusion issues; and
- a long term funding shortfall in infrastructure investment in buildings and facilities.

There is evidence that e-Learning can provide a significant contribution to post-16 learning, due in particular to the part-time nature of much of e-Learning. Its flexibility makes it a useful tool for learning providers as long as consistent standards can be achieved.

5. West Yorkshire e-Learning Strategic Plan

1. Strategic Partnerships

- 1.1 A dynamic e-Learning strategy steering group made up of both the supply and demand side whose primary role will be to accelerate the growth of e-Learning in the sub-region will be put in place and will link to other key players as indicated below:

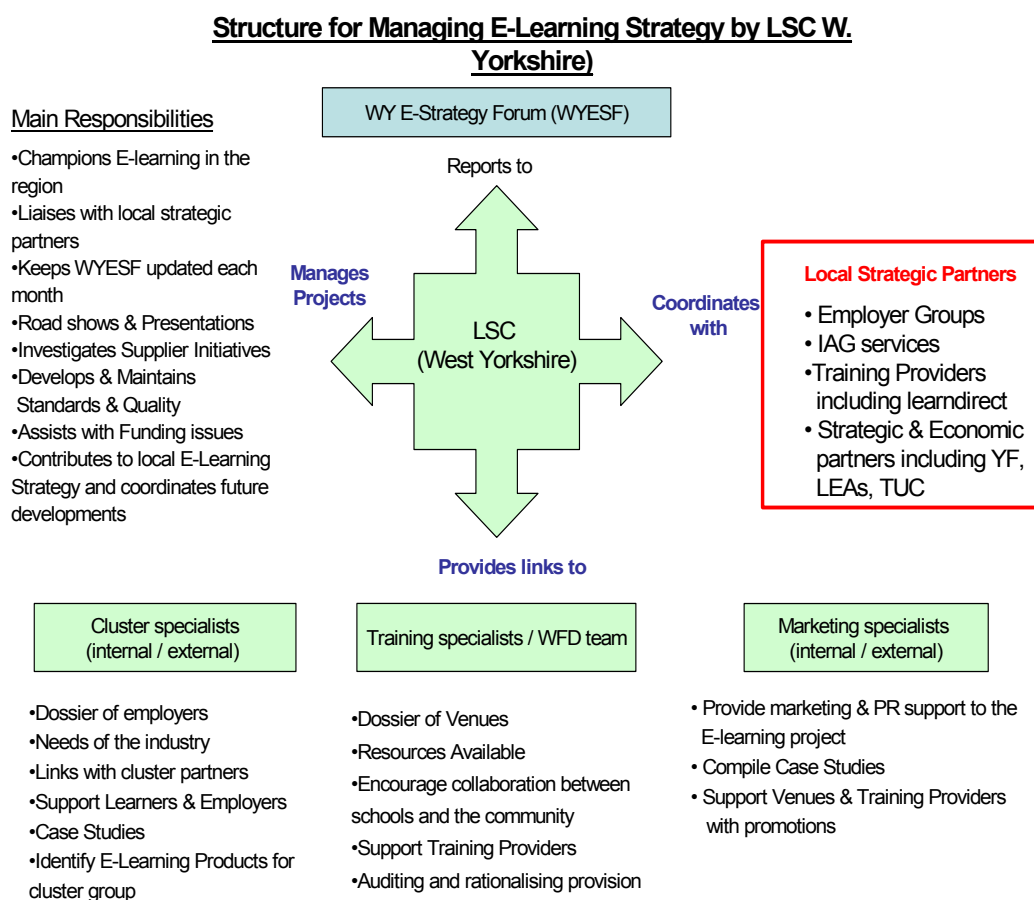
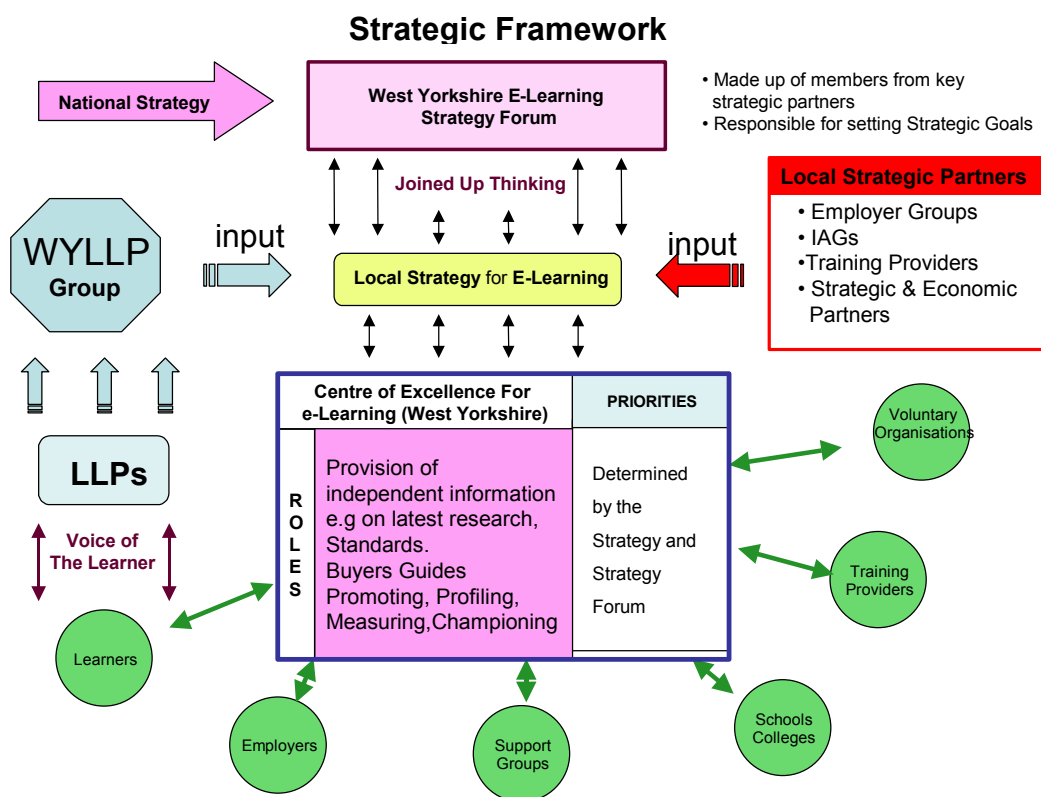


Figure 13: Structure for managing the e-Learning strategy by LSC West Yorkshire

- 1.2 A one-day strategy development workshop to take place as soon as possible with WY e-pioneers to create a plan of action.

- 1.3 West Yorkshire to accelerate the growth of e-Learning in the sub-region. This should be based around the West Yorkshire e-Learning strategy forum.
- 1.4 A Virtual Centre of Excellence for e-Learning to be established which would act as an impartial advice centre with a particular emphasis on employer support. Initially this would be part-funded under the SEEL project (Supporting Excellence in e-Learning).



Strategic Framework for the implementation of the West Yorkshire e-Learning Strategy (MRS Consultancy 2003)

- 1.5 A key priority to be the building of strategic partnerships with the SME business sector.

2. The Learner

2.1 Extend participation in education, learning & training

Everyone in West Yorkshire should have access to ICT as a Skill for Life. User skills required include the ICT skills needed to use the appropriate technology and the e-Learning skills required to access multiple formats and hybrid methodologies.

Ensuring universal access to ICT skills will address the issue of the digital divide and remove the social exclusion caused by those without access, who risk becoming marginalised in employment and within the community. Consideration should be given to learners' individual needs and learning styles.

Innovative resources and methodologies will increase the numbers of adults engaged in learning.

2.1.1 Internet Connectivity

Extension of the existing broadband coverage of West Yorkshire is critical in ensuring universal access. While online delivery represents only a part of the full extent of e-Learning, internet connectivity is an essential part of a fertile environment for e-Learning.

2.1.2 Communication

Exploitation of businesses' and individuals' enthusiasm for the Internet can be maximised by the use of a coherent and consistent approach to marketing e-Learning. It is at this point that the e-Learning strategy has an essential part to play in the communication of the benefits of e-Learning, as a part of blended learning, to potential learners.

Communication is a crucial part of the e-Learning strategy and the LSC is well-placed to disseminate this message.

2.1.3 Innovative ways to attract participation

Consideration should be given to developing innovative ways of attracting people to participate. The establishment of training centres does not solve the problem of getting people through the door.

2.1.4 New technologies

The sub-region will be at the forefront of piloting new technologies such as handheld devices and digital television.

2.1.5 ICT as a Skill for Life

Everyone in West Yorkshire should have access to ICT as a Skill for Life, as an entitlement. The user skills required include the ICT skills needed to use the technology and the e-skills needed to access multiple formats and hybrid methodologies.

2.1.6 ICT skills and e-skills

The readiness of individuals and businesses to embrace e-Learning depends on the existence of appropriate levels of ICT skills and e-skills. Building on the high levels of ongoing investment in this area is critical, as is a focus on the quality of the provision. A fuller set of recommendations can be found in the West Yorkshire ICT Skills Survey (MRS, February 2003).

2.1.7 The digital divide

Ensuring universal access to ICT skills will address the issue of the digital divide and remove the social exclusion experienced by those without access. These people risk becoming marginalised in employment and within the community.

2.1.8 Improvement of availability

Learners should be offered the flexibility to learn at home or at work and so improvement of availability of e-Learning courses is recommended. This might involve supporting the development of infrastructure to particular community and SME venues.

2.2 Increase the engagement of employers in workforce development

2.2.1 Delivery of training and education by ICT

There is a need for a strategic approach to increasing delivery of training and education by ICT. The e-Learning strategy should be developed in the context of “business benefits” and address workplace learners’ needs, particularly in the development of small, focused learning elements.

2.2.2 Communication plan

The benefits of e-Learning applied to SMEs’ business needs are considerable and a targeted communication plan should be developed. Communications must be tailored to the receptivity of the market segments and the most effective methods of reaching groups of learners should be used.

2.2.3 Case studies

The use of sub-regional e-Learning case studies to present successful approaches will be a powerful tool, particularly in industrial clusters. They will demonstrate further benefits of investing in training, such as those published in November 2001 by the Confederation of British Industry/Trades Union Congress, “The UK Productivity Challenge”.

2.2.4 Support systems

Support systems are essential to the successful implementation of e-Learning and there are many models available: virtual employer networks, availability of broadband connectivity for employer-based learning centres, working in partnership with the TUC, exploitation of learndirect resources, mentoring for formal and informal learning in the workplace, online assessment and accreditation and strategic e-Learning partnerships with the Sector Skills Councils.

2.2.5 Taking the college to the company

As noted in the DELG Report, e-Learning should be an effective 'route to market' for the LSC in achieving its workforce development ambitions. The national initiative of "Taking the College to the Company" will be delivered in the sub-region.

2.2.6 e-Learning accessed from outside the workplace

For many SMEs, there are cost and time obstacles to investment in training. It would be unrealistic to expect to convert these businesses to e-Learning in a single transforming leap. Thus, in addition to the initiatives above, employees of non-training companies can be targeted as potential beneficiaries of the flexibility of e-Learning accessed from outside the workplace.

2.3 Raise the achievement of young people

E-Learning can be used to make the progression from informal to formal learning amongst young people.

2.3.1 Under-performing ethnic groups

The achievement of young people in under-performing ethnic groups needs to be addressed. Particular issues in this area include availability of access and appropriate content where English is a second language.

2.3.2 Integration of e-Learning into mainstream programmes

The delivery of wider access to high quality e-Learning depends upon the integration of e-Learning into mainstream programmes. In the medium term, e-Learning should be applied in particular in the following areas: improving choice and meeting needs in minority and shortage skills subjects; widening the range of options through **collaborative projects** and creating links with Connexions agencies.

2.4 Raise the achievement of adults

E-Learning is a potentially far-reaching resource available to the LSC to help achieve learning targets.

2.4.1 Customised Learning

The contribution of e-Learning to improve achievement among adult learners will be most effective when it is responsive to individual needs. The emphasis should be on customised learning, allowing a learner to choose the level and pace of learning. The benefits of flexible access, both in time and place, and increased motivation, should be reflected in retention and achievement rates.

2.4.2 Community locations

It is important that community locations, previously operating as UK online centres, should be exploited to extend learning opportunities beyond the communities currently using traditional institutions. There should be particular emphasis on disadvantaged groups, for whom availability of access is paramount.

2.5 Raise the quality of education and training and user satisfaction

e-Learning will be an important factor in the development of new education and training resources, using new technology and media. The inherent flexibility of e-Learning will provide greater levels of user satisfaction, as will the delivery of easily customised learning packages.

2.5.1 Quality

The quality of e-Learning resources will be controlled, leading to coherent, high-quality delivery (see item 5 - Quality).

2.5.2 Enhanced user satisfaction

Support requirements such as information advice and guidance appropriate for adult e-learners, proximity of learner support staff, peer group support and mentors will be key to enhanced user satisfaction (see item 4 - Learner Support).

3 Encourage the development of quality content

The LSC's DELG take the view that the adoption of global standards and specifications is vital to the development of a sound market for e-Learning systems and content.

3.1 Tailoring to learner needs

Any developments should be aimed at customising the learning method towards the needs of the individual learner with a focus on “blended learning” and “embedding skills” to make them of relevance to the learner's everyday lives. This may require the development of some new materials with a focus on bite-sized provision. Consideration should be given to pump priming the building of e-Learning courses, including staff development.

3.2 Access to quality resources

A repository of learning content should be created for the sub-region that makes the wealth of learning materials already created available for other sectors.

Common specifications and interoperability standards should underpin any such development. All newly commissioned materials should adopt production of learning content in “object” form, where possible, in order to enhance values for money and create content targeting.

3.3 Accessibility

There should be promotion of the adoption of best practice in terms of accessibility eg the Bobby standards should be considered in some cases to enable access to those with certain disabilities.

3.4 Conformation

Any e-Learning environment should conform to national / international specifications and standards.

3.5 e-Learning vouchers or credits

A system of e-Learning vouchers or credits could be made available for use by community organisations and SMEs to promote the adoption of e-Learning.

The installation of a solution for a large-scale project requires specific features. Here is a list for which the change of scale requires specific features:

- **Populating a platform with learners:** while a small number of learners can be registered manually, large numbers will require synchronisation with personnel directories.
- **Managing learning material:** while 50 learning modules can be managed manually, managing thousands of learning materials will require specific features such as rights management and meta-tagging.
- **Content contextualisation:** if the same content is used under different contexts, it will be necessary to distinguish contents from the interface (languages, appearance) and the internal management of data (adapted to a country or to a situation).
- **Organisation modelling:** if the platform is populated with a large number of learners, learning activities and resources, the automation of certain administrative tasks, such as registration, module assignment and rights management will be facilitated if the platform provides the ability to model the organisation.
- **Development strategies:** large scale implementations probably mean that different parts of the organisations will use different approaches, from providing a catalogue of training programmes to the subscription to information services; provision must be diversified.
- **Measuring efficiency:** large-scale implementation can benefit from technologies such as knowledge management and data analysis (data mining) in order to collect the data required to measure the return on investment.
- **Learner support:** supporting a small group of learners progressing simultaneously in the same course does not require the same tools as supporting learners registered in different courses, progressing individually while working in small groups.
- **Learning planning:** depending on organisational policy (and sometimes the nature of the learning programme), learning planning can be either centralised or decentralised, at different levels of management, up to the learner him/herself. Competency database and delegation of responsibilities are some of the components provided for this task.
- **Learner empowerment:** if the policy of the organisation is to empower learners and to facilitate the management of their own learning and their own development plan, this can best be achieved if the platform provides specific features such as the 'learner desk' or 'personal portal.'

Volumes, work management, diversity, complexity and policies should be taken into account when assessing a solution. Changing scope, moving from a small scale to a large-scale project, will require reviewing and probably changing the criteria used to evaluate the different solutions. This may well be why many projects fail when moving from a pilot to the generalisation phase.

The technical integration of platforms

Openness is at the heart of the technical integration of platforms. Two dimensions characterize openness: the possibilities of personalisation and interoperability with the other applications of an organisation's information system.

The possibilities of personalisation form a continuum ranging from the possibility of modifying the home page; adding a logo or using the organisation's graphic specification, up to modifying the source code.

Different levels of personalisation include:

- **interfaces** – from superficial change (choosing 'skins') to 'adaptive' to learning style
- **vocabulary** – from specific (to organization) to multilingual support
- **reports** and interactive forms – from predefined to fully customized
- **data model** – from adding new tables to changing the processes
- **source code** – changing the application's engine – this is one major advantage of open software over some commercial ones

As important as it can be, an e-learning platform is one among many products of the organisation's information system. It has to interact with other programmes. Standardisation (IMS, EML, AICC, SCORM) is the foundation of interoperability.

One of the challenges we face is the design of standards flexible enough to leave space for innovation that do not restrict but expand the space for innovation.

4. Learner Support

4.1 National Mentoring Scheme

The National Mentoring Scheme for tutors will be supported and publicised.

4.2 Skill sets for learner support personnel

The differing skill sets for learner support personnel will be identified publicised, promoted and supported. If there is no action nationally then this will be undertaken at a sub-regional level.

4.3 Strategically designed roles

In the short term, there is a need to identify strategically designed roles and functions and to apply these as part of an assessment process to individual centres and programmes. Results from this would then indicate further support required from the LSC and other resources in terms of infrastructure developments, technical support and staff development.

4.4 Integration

A long-term consistent approach to funding of modern equipment and the creation of a supportive technical infrastructure in centres, involving closer integration between technical and teaching staff and potentially the creation of on-site support centres for staff to overcome any skills gaps.

4.5 Social inclusion

To enhance the amount of ICT training available which promotes social inclusion, for example within ethnic minority groups with language issues or those with Skills for Life needs. This is likely to require more effective ongoing and monitored training for staff/ trainers in ICT Skills

and specific pedagogical approaches relating to the integration of ICT into Skills for Life provision and the impact of ICT on the nature of learning.

4.6 **Case Studies**

Case Studies illustrating good practice will be collected from the sub-region (e.g. from learndirect centres) and promoted to e-Learning providers in both the public and private sector.

4.7 **BLA Quality Mark**

The use of the BLA Quality Mark for learner support will be encouraged.

4.8 **CPD initiatives**

Learner support CPD initiatives outside the FE Sector will be based on the European Institute for e-Learning's competency statements.

4.9 **Unique Learner Number (ULN)**

West Yorkshire will actively seek to pilot the introduction of the Unique Learner Number (ULN) and its extension into non-FE areas.

4.10 **Co-operation**

The Sub-region will seek to encourage further co-operation between learndirect, Connexions and UCAS to maximise their effectiveness in working together and will identify any gaps in provision of effective online advice, support and diagnostics for individual learners, employees and employers.

4.11 **Pilot activities**

Pilot activities will be put in place to encourage the development of e-portfolios for bite-sized accredited and non-accredited formal and non-formal learning.

5. Quality

5.1 Quality standards

West Yorkshire would take the lead in developing comprehensive quality standards for all aspects of e-Learning. The basis would be the Standards of Competence developed by the European Institute for e-Learning as well as any national standards put in place by the LSC.

5.2 New standards

Initially the sub-region would work to develop and then pilot new standards being co-ordinated by the British Learning Association as part of DG Education and Culture's Quality Call.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2004- 2005.

AIM	OBJECTIVE	SMART TARGET	LEAD PARTNER
To put in place Strategic Partnerships to accelerate the growth of e-Learning in West Yorkshire			
	Internal managers within LSC WY to recognise the importance of the Strategy in relation to their areas of responsibility	Delivery partners in co-financing projects and mainstream activities to be engaged with the Strategy	LSC West Yorkshire
	An e-Learning strategy group to be in place for the sub-region (e-Learning strategy forum)	Operational by May 2004 Quarterly meetings	LSC West Yorkshire
	To build strategic partnerships within the SME business sector	A lead partner to be established by June 2004 A formal network of SMEs to be in place by September 2004	LSC West Yorkshire To be determined as a result of the action above
	To ensure key players have access to up-to date information on quality in e-Learning	Virtual Centre of Excellence to be established April 2004 and then incorporated into the West Yorkshire e-Learning portal	The MRS Consultancy Ltd

Increase the engagement and achievement of individuals			
	To communicate the benefits of e-Learning	Marketing plan in place by June 2004 Dissemination activities to take place in September 2004 and January 2005	LSC West Yorkshire
	<p>Increase participation through innovative delivery methods with a focus on community outlets</p> <p>Work with organisations at provider and client level to develop appropriate learning materials, addressing issues of appropriate content and language</p> <p>Identification of minority and shortage skill areas in mainstream programmes which require development of resources</p>	<p>Development of community mentor network. (++)</p> <p>Identification of needs not being met in communities (+++)</p> <p>Development of resources.(+++)</p> <p>Structure in place identifying partner roles and mechanisms for this activity. September 2004.</p> <p>Report back on identification activities to inform next commissioning round. January 2005</p>	<p>Contract holder for LSC Theme Chest e-Learning and ICT in the community</p> <p>As above</p> <p>Provider network including West Yorkshire Consortium</p>
	ICT skill entitlement for all	Promotion of National Standards once confirmed	LSC WY

	Improving the infrastructure to particular community venues	Identification of e-Learning infrastructure requirements for named venues in order to deliver innovative engagement and delivery methods. Provision of requirements.	Contract holder for LSC Flagship Learning Zone
	Ensure all providers integrate e-Learning into mainstream programmes. A Significant % of provider programmes to demonstrate a blended learning approach.	A mapping exercise in which providers will forward information to the LSC the % of programmes which demonstrate a blended learning approach. Definitions and scope determined by July 2004 Information to LSC by September 2004. Information collated by LSC December 2004	LSC West Yorkshire with provider network

<p>Increase the engagement of employers by the development of a business benefits approach to e-Learning</p>			
	<p>Development of appropriate business-focused learning packages</p>	<p>Skills gap analyses to determine need</p> <p>Repository development to focus on bite-sized business focused provision</p> <p>A number of learning packages in place by specific dates (+++.)</p>	<p>Sector and Cluster brokers Business Link PBAs and as a result of Research Chest activities</p> <p>Holder of ESF Co-financing contract for Flagship e-Learning portal</p>
	<p>Communicate the benefits of e-Learning to businesses</p>	<p>Production of a business-focused e-Learning strategy. April 2004</p> <p>Collection and collation of Case Studies of good practice which demonstrate the business benefits of e-Learning to company performance.</p>	<p>LSC West Yorkshire</p> <p>Collection: Sector and Cluster brokers / BLINK (TBA)</p> <p>Collation : TBA (Link to Flagship e-Learning and the workforce)</p>

	<p>Put e-Learning support systems in place for businesses</p>	<p>Further develop Union Learning Representatives in terms of e-Learning support (ESF Co-financing)</p> <p>Promote learndirect activities with SMEs</p> <p>Development of a virtual employers network</p>	<p>Contract holders ESF Objective 3 Project Union Learning Representatives</p> <p>West Yorkshire learndirect hub</p> <p>Holder of ESF Co-financing contract for Flagship e-Learning portal</p>
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Encourage the development of quality content			
	Pump prime the development of e-Learning courses including staff development	Incorporate the development of new e-Learning provision into the Commissioning Document 2004	LSC West Yorkshire
	Put in place access to quality learning resources	Develop a West Yorkshire e-Learning portal	Holder of ESF Co-financing contract for Flagship e-Learning portal
		Populate a repository with appropriate bite-sized content to meet the learning requirements of the workforce	Holder of ESF Co-financing contract for Flagship e-Learning portal + Sector and Cluster brokers
		The capacity to develop content in "learning object" format should be considered for any newly commissioned materials funded through the public purse	All public sector funders
	All materials placed on the sub-regional repository to conform to common specification and interoperability standards	All material to be evaluated independently before incorporation.	

To ensure appropriate and effective Learner Support			
	Support the National Mentoring Scheme for tutors		LSC West Yorkshire
	Support development of staff resources both technical and pedagogic	<p>Identify roles and functions for learner support personnel and associated skill sets by September 2004</p> <p>With a view to supporting further development, skill gap audits to be carried out in LSC funded centres. March 2004</p> <p>Case Studies illustrating good practice to be collected from the sub-region and promoted to e-Learning providers in public and private sector</p>	<p>LSC West Yorkshire</p> <p>West Yorkshire Consortium</p>

Key : +++ = Specific target to be identified after contract agreed as part of the ESF Objective 3 Commissioning process