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# Online and Blended Learning: incentives for practitioners and learners in the Post- 16 sector

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## Important Note

This report is based on reports, surveys, papers and studies drawn from many different sources, and which cover a period of several years during which time technology, its definitions and use have continued to evolve and develop. In addition to this, policy, strategy and public information documents were reviewed, and interviews were carried out with participants including managers, practitioners and learners from across all four sub-sectors comprising Post-16.

There is a variable use of terminology throughout the sector and the report has sought to choose terms carefully, particularly in respect of e-learning, online learning and blended learning. The contemporary and widely used definitions are that e-learning refers to the general use of ICT in teaching and learning, while online learning refers to learning delivered almost exclusively through the use of online resources and materials, often with online tutorial support. Blended learning generally refers to a combination of resource types, making some use of online resources and face-to-face tutor support, for instance.

At the outset of the research, it was agreed with Becta that the field is broad and that a wide picture of the use of technology was required. Where the report seeks to paint the background picture, “e-learning” is used as an overarching term, but where it focuses on incentives, the focus of the report, the reference to online, or online and blended learning is made clear.

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Further Education, Work Based Learning, Personal and Community Development Learning, and Offender Learning and Skills sectors (“the Post-16 sector” or “sector”) are undergoing a period of significant change, set in motion by the publication of the Leitch report in 2006. A primary driver for change is the move to a demand-led system with the capability and capacity to meet a projected considerable increase in demand as a consequence of the reforms. Simultaneously, significant changes are being made to the way in which the sector is funded. In 2010 the Learning and Skills Council will cease to exist, and funding for the sector will largely be managed by Local Authorities together with new agencies.
- 1.2 If done well, online and blended learning can be effective solutions in increasing capacity to meet demand. The evidence shows that e-learning, when well and appropriately adopted, can produce tangible benefits such as increased retention and learning achievement rates, as well as offering a practical means of increasing output.
- 1.3 This study sought to investigate and understand what factors act as incentives or disincentives to the take up of online and blended learning. This involved a wide scale literature review, interviews with practitioners, managers and learners, and with representatives of key stakeholder agencies in the sector. The study focuses on Further Education (FE), Work Based Learning (WBL), Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) and Offender Learning and Skills (OLAS).
- 1.4 Across all four sectors, common themes emerged from the study:

The support and leadership of senior management is a crucial factor to the take up of e-learning within an organisation, and lack of this can act as significant barrier.

Funding is problematic with all four sectors. These issues refer, for instance, to the complexity of the funding model, and lack of revenue funding to support, maintain and develop technologies used in teaching and learning. In addition, there are issues over the use of core funding to fund the take up of online and blended learning. These are linked to the auditing of provision and Funding Agreements.

A perceived lack of revenue funding impacts on an organisation’s ability to provide IT support and maintenance, and IT upgrades, which in turn impacts on practitioner confidence and IT availability for learners. This is particularly the case in FE and PCDL. In WBL, there is a reluctance to invest in technology when, according to some, the business case for e-learning has not been proven.

There are ongoing concerns over practitioner skills levels with using e-learning in teaching and learning. Lack of time to engage in training, and to practice new methods in using e-learning are commonly cited problems. The use of technology tends to be limited to lesson planning and preparation. Learners tend to take their lead in the use of technology from their teachers and institutions.

Consequently the potential opportunities and benefits of e-learning and technology are not being widely realised and experienced.

Although improvements have been made, access to technology by practitioners and learners remains an issue, with a majority of practitioners in FE, for instance, reporting that technology resources are not sufficient to meet demand. Other restrictions on access are created by lack of technical support, availability of appropriate online resources and tools, and limitations on access to networks and resource management systems (e.g., Virtual Learning Environment), particularly from outside of the institutional network.

In spite of these access issues, the evidence from surveys, literature and interviews shows that learners and practitioners consistently perceive technology as a motivating factor in itself. There is also new evidence to support the notion that e-learning not only motivates learners to learn, but also is associated with increased retention rates.

With particular respect to FE and OLAS, demand for e-learning by both practitioners and learners, is more than the available supply. Demand for special project funding - what we have referred to as the LSC's "designated e-learning support fund" - very much outstrips supply.

There is a widely held positive attitude towards e-learning, based on perceptions of its benefits, and a wealth of anecdotal rather than quantifiable evidence. It is, however, difficult to isolate the "effects" of the use of technology on learner performance from those of other teaching methods.

- 1.5 It is clear from the evidence that funding acts as an incentive to take up e-learning.
- 1.6 This study concludes that providers may not perceive "core funding" as a risk-free source of funding for online and blended learning. This is a complex picture involving many factors. Historically, the LSC funding guidelines in respect of what they refer to as Distributed and Electronic Learning (DEL) may well have confused providers through a less than clear definition of what DEL is. In addition, and compounding this, the LSC's Funding Agreement auditors have not, in the past, been formally or extensively trained in DEL for auditing purposes, and in the interpretation of the guidelines for DEL. There is also the point that core funding is associated with targets which must be met, and consequently there is no incentive to engage in what some might see as experimentation with new ideas, or trial and error. The 2008/09 funding guidelines began to address some of these issues, with, for instance, the LSC's acceptance of electronic as well as paper records. It is predicted that funding guidelines for 2009/10 will address many of the issues around DEL. Auditors are being given relevant training, albeit informally.
- 1.7 This study has found evidence that the LSC's e-learning support fund is seen as "it" so far as available funding for e-learning goes. This fund (£48M in 2008/09, around 25% of which goes to pay for access to JANET) is used to support a wide range of different projects and programmes which are, in the main, heavily over subscribed. This is strongly indicative of the appetite that exists for e-learning. Significantly, funding from this fund is not tied to targets and outcomes in the same way that core

funding is, and consequently may be seen as a more appropriate and less risky source of funding for new initiatives and developments.

- 1.8 Taking these two points together, the drawn implication is that many providers do not see online and blended learning as part of mainstream provision. Yet, there are examples of, for instance, FE colleges which are incorporating online and blended learning into their primary provision: this report contains a description of one college's business model.
- 1.9 Further positive developments to the funding model include the allowance to make teaching and learning provision beyond an organisation's catchment area. E-learning can clearly support the geographic extension of provision. Providers cannot expect to receive funding for more learners than they are contracted to provide for, but according to the LSC, there is considerable room for an increase in the provision of adult education within existing contracted quotas.
- 1.10 The change in learndirect's status in 2011 to that of a purely commercial organisation is likely to impact on learner groups - OLAS, for instance - who have previously benefited from a subsidy on provision. Learndirect has used its core funding to make subsidised provision, and clearly this will no longer be feasible following its change of status and loss of central funding.
- 1.11 New structures for PCDL funding are the subject of current discussions, but it is understood that e-learning does not form part of these, although the use of technology in informal learning has been extensively discussed. Funding for OLAS is unknown beyond 2009.
- 1.12 In general, funding is seen as complex and "difficult" with respect to e-learning, with much time needed to be invested in finding sources of funds and applying for them, with no guarantees of success.
- 1.13 This report makes a number of recommendations, which are summarised here (references to relevant report page numbers are shown in brackets):
  - 1.13.1 Whilst it is important to reach a point where online and blended learning is such an embedded part of teaching and learning that it does not need its own definition, the aim of increasing the incentives for organisations to take this up requires clarity of definition including clear and detailed funding guidance. This will enable organisations to assess the values and benefits that online and blended learning can realise in terms of funded outcomes, and in turn develop local strategies for incentivising practitioners and learners. (Pages 11,15,19,24,27,29,30-32,36,39)
  - 1.13.2 The funding system needs to be more flexible to enable providers to benefit from the potential economies of scale presented by online and blended learning. There needs to be a recognition that online and blended learning can be supported with core funding and thus be part of the mainstream provision, and this will go some way towards addressing issues around the support and maintenance of technology. (Pages as above)

- 1.13.3 Tied to this, there is a strong need for a clear business case for online and blended learning to be developed and publicised widely, targeted at senior management within provider organisations. Becta already has some work in this area underway. (Pages 15,16,17,26,27)
- 1.13.4 Auditors should be given formal training in the application of funding guidelines to online and blended learning and particularly in the use of systems such as Virtual Learning Environments to extract and analyse data in support of provision and outcomes in accordance with an organisation's Funding Agreement. To some extent, this is already in hand. (Pages, 30-31, 39)
- 1.13.5 More research and guidance (including good practice exemplars) is needed on providers' use of technology systems to monitor and track learners' performance, and to make the link between this and auditing. (Pages 12-13, 17,19,31)
- 1.13.6 Variable levels in practitioner skills with e-learning should be addressed: this is key enabler to embedding e-learning in practice. In particular, it is recommended that consideration is given to including the pedagogic-based practice of online and blended learning in teaching and learning as mandatory within continuing professional development. (Pages 11,12,16,19,20,21, 26,27,33)
- 1.13.7 An Innovation Fund should be established for e-learning, separate from core funding and distinct from the LSC's e-learning support fund, to enable practitioners to continue to assess new methods of using technology in teaching and learning and keep up-to-date with technological change. (Pages as above)
- 1.13.8 A cross-sector team of practising staff managing and delivering online and blended learning should be gathered to transfer their knowledge of good practice into a short knowledge transfer training programme for middle management and above to maximise existing good practice. The training should then be delivered through a variety of methods, including online seminars and workshops, perhaps by sector based teams who understand the application of the training programme within their own sector. This should dovetail with existing programmes and initiatives. It is also recommended that programmes which evidence shows to be successful in motivating practitioners in the take up of online and blended learning, such as e-Guides, should be extended. (Page 44)
- 1.13.9 There is limited evidence that learners and practitioners at pre-Level 1 and Level 1 are engaging in online and blended learning activities. It is therefore recommended that a pilot project be undertaken to assess the values and benefits that online and blended learning can particularly afford for these groups, with the aim of producing evidence and practice that can be used to incentivise others. (Pages 20,25)
- 1.13.10 Finally, it is very apparent from the research that senior management within organisations have a critical role in determining the take up of online

and blended learning. Without their endorsement, support and buy in, none of the recommendations made here are likely to have much impact. Consequently we recommend that a programme be established for senior managers to provide e-learning business and management training, and that a focused network be set up to enable managers to communicate and share practice, between institutions and between sectors. (Pages 13,14,18,24,27)

## 2. Introduction

*“For teachers it (technology) can be the difference between learners who are unmotivated and a class that wants to participate”<sup>1</sup>*

*“eLearning is the learner-focused approach to the use of multimedia technologies and the internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services, as well as remote exchanges and collaboration.”<sup>2</sup>*

The launch of the DfES *Harnessing Technology* (“e-Learning Strategy”) not only established a clear direction and focus for the use of technology in teaching and learning, but also acted as a catalyst for a considerable ramp up in activities and initiatives designed to encourage the take up and “embedding” of e-learning within the Post-16 sector. The e-Learning Strategy formally recognised, for the first time, the values and benefits of e-learning.

Around the same time, the Leitch Report<sup>3</sup> stressed the need to increase skills and qualifications across the nation, the fulfilment of which anticipates a considerable increase in the volumes of learners attending Further Education, Work Based Learning, Adult and Community Learning and Offender Learning and Skills programmes and institutions. Key subsequent strategy, policy and white papers have paved the way for increased entitlement to funded learning and skills development<sup>4</sup>, new initiatives such as the Skills Pledge, and a significant increase in the Train to Gain offering turning it into the primary channel for supporting employers in reaping the benefits of skills development.<sup>5</sup>

The background against which this reports sets its context is of a sector which is undergoing a period of significant change. The Leitch Report set in train what has become an unstoppable push for reform. Transformation in the way the sector is funded is likely to have the most significant and wide ranging impact, with three new funding models proposed for 2008/09 - the 16-18 provision model, adult learner-responsive provision and employer-responsive provision indicative of the fundamental change to a demand-led paradigm. With the closure of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) by 2010, much of the future funding will be managed by local authorities. A new Skills Funding Agency will be responsible for funding for 19+ learners at Further Education colleges and providers, based on sector demands. These and other reforms have the aim of transforming the Post-16 sector to accommodate for an anticipated considerable increase in demand as a consequence of new entitlements and targets.

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<sup>1</sup> *Harnessing Technology*: DfES, 2005, p 8

<sup>2</sup> Author unknown, (2008). *The use of ICT to support innovation and lifelong learning for all – a report on progress*. Commission of the European Communities: p 5

<sup>3</sup> *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills*, 2006, HM Treasury

<sup>4</sup> *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances*; DfES, 2006

<sup>5</sup> *World Class Skills: implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England*; DIUS, 2007.

What is the link between the drive to increase skills and qualifications in the Post-16 sector and e-learning? We propose that there are two. First, e-learning (in the form of “do anywhere and anytime”) offers the practical advantage of being able to increase capacity to accommodate for increased numbers of learners without them having to be physically present in a learning centre, or for tutors to travel to a learner’s workplace in the case of WBL. We are not, however, assuming that e-learning represents a “low cost” option. Secondly, whilst many claims have been made for e-learning which have proven difficult to quantify and validate, there is one benefit which can be evidenced, and that is its positive impact on retention levels (e.g., JISC, 2008; LSC, 2006). From a business perspective, both of these tangible and practical advantages should prove attractive to providers.

Becta’s technology strategy for the Post-16 sector<sup>6</sup> set the agenda for transforming the teaching and learning experience, and for delivering on the goals of increased skills and qualifications across the nation.

On the face of it, considerable investment has been made in e-learning throughout the sector. However, there is a perception that the pace of change in terms of take up and embedding of e-learning in mainstream practice is not happening quickly enough to meet the requirements for reform and of increased demand. The present study sought to identify and understand the motivations and disincentives to the take up of e-learning and blended learning from the perspectives of practitioner and learner: what works, and what does not? The focus of investigation is Further Education, Work Based Learning, Personal and Community Development Learning, and Offender Learning and Skills.

Following a summary of the research methods used, the report considers the evidence from each of the four sub-sectors comprising Post-16 (Further Education, Work Based Learning, Personal and Community Development Learning and Offender Learning and Skills) based on extensive literature reviews, and interviews. The full literature reviews can be found in the report’s Appendix. Next, the report focuses on the funding mechanisms, asking to what extent funding acts as an incentive to take up e-learning, and the impact this has on each of the sub-sectors. Two business model case studies are included as illustrations of how organisations make significant e-learning offerings. The report concludes with a set of recommendations based on the analysis of the evidence.

### 3. Methods

Eight core themes were developed to form a framework for the lines of investigation: barriers (and enablers), funding, attitude and behaviour, skills, evidence, exemplars, supply v. demand, and innovation in technology.

An extensive review of the literature covered the period from 2006 onwards including some earlier documents in some cases. This resulted in an initial set of reports, one for each of the sub-sectors, which revealed a number of key findings as well as gaps based on our thematic framework. The full literature reviews are contained in the Appendix of this report.

The study used an opportunity sample of managers, practitioners and learners for telephone and face-to-face semi-structured interviews based on the thematic framework. It must be stressed that the participants who took part in these interviews

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<sup>6</sup> Technology strategy for Further Education, skills and regeneration; Becta, 2008

were those responding most readily to our interview request, and may be biased. The objective of the interviews was to validate the findings of the literature review and to address any gaps that had been identified.

Representatives of some of the key stakeholder agencies involved in the Post-16 sector were interviewed, with a particular focus on the funding paradigms. Key policy and strategy documentation was also reviewed.

The overall research method is one of iterative analysis with the results of one leg of the research being used to direct the next, combined with a reverse corroboration of findings.

The next section of this report summarises the findings of the literature review and interviews with participants from the four sectors.

## **4. The Sectoral Landscape**

### **4.1 Further Education**

#### **Context**

The DfES Reform White Paper (2006)<sup>7</sup> states the defining purpose of Further Education (FE): “to equip young people and adults with the skills, competencies and qualifications that employers want, and which will prepare them for productive, rewarding, high-value employment in a modern economy” (p 5). The themes for reform introduced by this White Paper touch every level of FE - the institutions themselves, the workforce and the learners. The subsequent DIUS Models for Success (2008) policy sets its main emphasis on expanding capacity of provision to accommodate an anticipated large scale increase in demand as a consequence of these reforms and other related initiatives. The DIUS policy stresses the need for collaboration not only to build capacity, but also to change delivery methods to better meet demand, and to deploy technology more effectively. Technology will play a key role in driving reform and change, a notion which is at the heart of Becta’s Technology Strategy<sup>8</sup> for the sector: “Technology has the potential to transform Further Education in practically every dimension” (p 8).

Bearing in mind the importance placed on technology and the proposal that e-learning can support the delivery of the personalised learning agenda, what are the motivational and influencing factors in its take up within FE? The study focused on eight themes, each of which is considered here in summary.

#### **Barriers**

According to two key surveys from 2006 (Golden, McCrone, Walker & Rudd) and 2008 (LSN), the intervening period between the two has seen barriers preventing access to ICT and the internet being eroded but not entirely removed. While the current provision for full-time learners satisfies the government’s target of five students per computer, the evidence from the literature (e.g., LSN, 2008) and from interviews with practitioners and managers suggests that this target is not adequate. More significantly, access to computers outside of normal working hours is severely restricted (27:1, LSN, 2008).

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<sup>7</sup> Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances (2006), DfES

<sup>8</sup> Technology Strategy for Further Education, Skills and Regeneration: implementation plan for 2008 - 2011

Contrary to this, one commentator argued that it is not about the numbers of students per computer, but rather it is about having access to a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and broadband in the classroom.

The reports raise other issues such as lack of technical support and restrictions on file size used on intranets, all of which are reiterated and supported by the interview commentaries. The most urgent finding is that nearly 100% of institutions surveyed in 2008 have operational capacities that are either just enough or insufficient to meet the current demands of teaching and learning, a situation which LSN (2008) warns will compromise the growth of personalised and remote learning if not addressed.

Other barriers and issues raised in the literature and in the commentaries include skills levels and lack of ICT confidence amongst practitioners. These are addressed in more detail later in this section. In the main, the study found that technology is not being used to its full potential, and that there is “little sign that education has changed in any fundamental way at the level of teacher practice,” (Falconer & Littlejohn, 2007: p 42). This suggests a resistance to change (e.g., Connolly, Jones & Jones, 2007). Arguably resistance to change can be linked to lack of confidence with technology, and this, in turn, can be linked to another key finding from both the literature and commentaries - lack of time to train, and lack of time to put new skills into practice.

This latter point is important: technology is, in itself, a motivator. Commentators and the literature support the notion that the use of technology motivates learners, and that once practitioners have insight into the use of technology - and the time to practice their skills - they also become motivated.

## Funding

There is surprisingly little in the literature concerning funding and e-learning, with the one exception of a report by JISC, ALT and HEA which documents tangible benefits of e-learning and in particular how e-learning can lead to cost savings (JISC, ALT & HEA, 2008).

One commentator raised the issue that funding must always be competed for, resulting in a situation where some people are “miles ahead” of others, and questions the fairness of this system. Another believes that the funding system is too complicated and that funds obtained through one stream cannot be moved to support another. Several commentaries indicate that while funding is available for investing in new “start up” equipment, the lack of subsequent technical support and maintenance is due to a lack of revenue, and that sustainability is an issue. The impact of this can be seen in the anecdotal case where one college’s Local Authority plans to introduce Windows Vista shortly, compelling the college to upgrade as well. It is noted that the lack of technical support is not a universal problem, but this underlines the variability throughout the sector between one provider and another.

An example of targeted and effective funding acting as a direct incentive can be seen in the anecdotal evidence from one commentator who praised the fact that the E-Guides support grant (which is related to his PCDL work, rather than FE work) was available to the teacher (as opposed to the finance manager, etc.) who, in this case, used it to purchase a portable projection system which solved the problem of limited numbers of classroom projectors. The E-Guide’s equipment grant stipulates that the funds should be spent on equipment to facilitate cascade training, in which participants are required

to share skills and knowledge acquired through the programme with their colleagues. In this case, the fund benefited learners as well as practitioners.

## Attitude and Behaviour

There is a general belief in the benefits of online and blended learning amongst practitioners (LSN, 2008). E-learning is believed to provide a useful support tool. This helps to meet learner needs more effectively, enabling the personalised provision of support. Moreover, e-learning is generally believed to help students to learn more effectively, leading to improved outcomes. This strong, positive attitude was also noted in the earlier 2006 survey (Golden, McCrone, Walker & Rudd, 2006). Despite this positive view, the proportion of “e-enabled” institutions has remained constant from 2006 with only a small increase in “late adoptors” (LSN).

Various studies have found evidence that tutors welcome the opportunity to become involved in innovative projects, and to learn more skills (e.g., Connolly, Jones & Jones, 2007). Students also have positive attitudes towards technologies in education (e.g., Deepwell & Malik, 2008). This conclusion is supported by the commentaries, with one reporting that knowledge and confidence in the use of technology acts as an incentive for practitioners. Being able to tap into networks which share best practice is also seen as an incentive. A group of students with learning difficulties agreed that they would all like to use more e-learning and their teacher confirmed that the internet is particularly effective in encouraging search and discovery practice.

The LSN (2008) concludes that the attitude is generally and widely positive towards technologies in learning, but that behaviour is slow to change: some 95% of practitioners state that lack of time for training prevents the effective use of ICT and e-learning.

## Skills

The skills picture is a complex one. Taking a simple view, one could conclude that practitioner skills in respect of using ICT are improving but that, according to the 2008 survey, less than half of practitioners consider that they have intermediate level skills in the use of ICT with learners.

The predominant use of technology still remains in the domain of planning and preparation for lessons rather than in the facilitation and management of personalised learning, collaboration and communications with learners. The LSN notes a lack of a common understanding of the term “personalisation”. It is also clear that while there are plenty of general ICT skills courses available for practitioners, there are fewer on topics such as “Teaching and facilitating online” (LSN, 2008). Commentary from the interviews observes that there is a practical skills v. pedagogic skills issue with technology, and that there is a need for more training on the use of technology in a teaching environment.

Affecting factors include time to train, leading to the observation that perhaps training in ICT and e-learning skills ought to be included in Continuous Professional Development (LSN, 2008). However, Salmon (no date) argues that if best practice in ICT means student-centred, personalised, constructivist teaching and learning then providing practitioners with a course in how to use the VLE is unlikely to result in this being achieved.

Apprehension and confidence are other affecting factors according to both the literature and commentators (e.g., Condie & Livingston, 2007). Lack of training, practice and difficulties with technical support can all impact on practitioners' use of technology.

One commentator observes that students also need to be trained - particularly in the use of the institutional VLE. Another comments that part-time teachers are least likely to be able to engage in training. This notion is supported in the literature where it is found that part-time staff is more likely to self-rate ICT skills as being low (LSN, 2008).

Numerous studies and surveys emphasise the importance of senior level management commitment (e.g., LSN, 2008; Cooke & Greenwood, 2007).

### **Evidence, Exemplars and Innovations**

Evidence from the literature of successful use of incentives tends to be split between the practical (e.g., instant feedback for learners, opportunities for online discussion and collaborative learning; payments to staff in lieu of time spent training, home loan laptops for practitioners) and the philosophical (e.g., self-efficacy as a good predictor of learner satisfaction, according to Cocea and Neibelzakh (no date)).

The QIA and ALT have published a number of case studies which demonstrate success in the use of technology in teaching and learning, including the innovative use of technology. A selection of these are detailed in the full literature review in this document's Appendix. One is a 3-year project using mobile and PDA technologies in learning which, according to the LSN, resulted in increased enthusiasm for learning, self-esteem and confidence in learners. Another involves the innovative use of an e-Portfolio system to enable FE students to gain experience in the discipline of reflective and self-directed learning, which resulted in an above average number of students being offered places at university.

### **Supply v. Demand**

Whilst it can be shown that there have been improvements in the supply of computer equipment between the earlier 2006 (Golden, McCrone, Walker & Rudd) survey and that published in 2008 (LSN), more than half of those surveyed in 2008 consider that the present stock is not sufficient to meet the demands of teaching and learning. This is supported by the commentaries from providers. The situation is compounded by issues associated with networks, IT support and technical support, and restrictions on access to college intranets from off campus.

There are also anomalies in the use of freely available materials, such as take up of the National Learning Network (NLN) resources which is shown to be surprisingly low (LSN, 2008).

On this issue, as with several others, the variation between different providers is quite stark with some commentators stating that their institution has sufficient resources to satisfy the needs of practitioners and learners, while others are quite forthright about this not being the case at all.

## 4.2 Work Based Learning

### Context

As is the case with Further Education, the strategies and policy for the Work Based Learning (WBL) sector are being driven by the Leitch Review of Skills<sup>9</sup>. This calls for urgent action to address the weak skills base within the UK, which is seen as having negative consequences for growth, productivity and social justice. The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) has developed an implementation plan to meet these issues head on<sup>10</sup>. Collectively, these strategies and policies call for a revolution and culture change within the workplace with a focus on skills. A host of new initiatives have since been introduced including the Skills Pledge and Skills Account, and new legislation has been proposed to strengthen training funding entitlement for adults. According to the 2007 National Employer Skills Survey, some 67% of companies in the UK provide training for staff.

Becta's technology strategy for the Post-16 sector<sup>11</sup> aims to stimulate innovation and drive up standards for digital learning content, and to establish a network to encourage the sharing of best practice, mentoring and championing.

The WBL sector is characterised by a large number of small providers who have little interest in e-learning approaches according to Crisp, Crawford and Daar (2006), and a small number of very large providers who do.

A fundamental problem with the WBL sector is the variation in its definition (e.g., Scottish Executive<sup>12</sup>; Mackinnon Partnership, 2008). The present study chose to define WBL in the broadest terms to mean learning engagement as a consequence of work, funded by, or with access provided and managed by employers.

The most recent statistics would appear to support the idea of the nation's workforce being up-skilled, and that training is very firmly on the executive agenda. We would reasonably expect, therefore, to see an equally strong and increasing use of e-learning. The picture that emerges from the literature is a complex one, and very much reflective of the many different components which constitute the WBL sector.

The research sought to understand the motivational and influencing factors in the take up of e-learning and blended learning by the sector, focusing on eight themes, each of which is considered here in summary.

### Barriers

The study reviewed 9 surveys, each of which focuses on a different sub-set of WBL constituents. Whilst the profile of each of these constituents is quite different (e.g., micro-businesses, apprentices, large corporates, training providers), there are many issues common to all.

Leadership from senior management is widely acknowledged as a critical factor to success - not just in taking up e-learning, but in the general recognition of the

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<sup>9</sup> Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills, 2006, HM Treasury

<sup>10</sup> World Class Skills: implementing the Leitch Review of skills in England, 2007, DIUS

<sup>11</sup> Technology strategy for further education, skills and regeneration, 2008, Becta

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2002/06/14558/3246>, Accessed 18 August 2008

importance of any form of learning and skills development (e.g., Jennings, Kay, Schmoller, Umar & Wallis, 2005; CEL, 2007; Hill, 2007) Most also stress the importance of developing a learning culture within any organisation. On a more practical note, Hill argues that the relationship between an employee and their line manager is a vital influencing factor in developing this learning culture.

Other influencing factors include practitioner skills and training, and lack of significant evidence of the impact of e-learning on learner outcomes (Crisp, Crawford & Daar, 2006), which remains something of a perception rather than a fact. This is an important underpinning contributor to the view that the business case for e-learning has not been adequately expressed. The commentaries provided through interview offer an ambivalent view on this with no real consensus of opinion.

Studies have found that technical problems, cost, time, support, personal motivation, technical skills, social interaction and tutor issues are all contributing barriers to the take up of e-learning (e.g., Tyler-Smith, 2006). The anecdotal evidence provided in the commentaries consistently points to lack of computer resources and IT support as being a restricting barrier.

The take up of e-learning seems to have been hampered by early and exaggerated promises and expectations of e-learning. A key driver was the (incorrect) perception that e-learning would realise important cost savings in training (Hamburg & Lindecke, 2005). Small to medium sized enterprises, which comprise 99% of businesses throughout Europe, have particularly failed to capitalise on the benefits and flexibilities which e-learning could offer (European Commission, 2008).

On a positive note, there are many examples of successful e-learning implementations within organisations. Common attributes include taking an approach that has e-learning as an integrated component of the business, merging learning with performance (Howarth, 2008), and in involving tutors in the design and development of e-learning courses (QIA & ALT, 2007). In its set of guidelines for training in general, BERR, CBI, TUC and DIUS (2008) note the importance of having formalised structures to support and sustain organisational learning within the context of a learning culture.

## Funding

Mackinnon (2008) reports that WBL businesses experience limited gains from using e-learning. There is also the perceived imbalance between the business provider who must fund their own technology and the college provider which receives grant funding to purchase new equipment (Bell, Gulati & Hooker, 2006).

A persistent attitude amongst companies which provide their staff with training relies on the notion that e-learning will reduce training costs (Overton, Hills & Dixon, 2007). Overton and her colleagues go on to report that cost will be a main driver for e-learning adoption over the next three years.

The overall conclusion from the literature is that investment in new technologies and working practices will only follow once the business case and values of e-learning have been evidenced. Arguably, this evidence already exists, and this demonstrates a positive impact on retention rates, as well as in other measurable areas (JISC InfoNet, ALT & HEA, 2008).

According to interview commentaries, issues around funding include the overly complex nature of the system, lack of enthusiasm for investment in new or replacement

technology and knowing where to find funding. It should be noted, however, that according to the LSC, WBL providers have had access to the dedicated Learning Innovation Grant, funded through the Technology for Learning Programme, for several years and that this grant supports the purchase of new technology.

From a learner perspective, adult learners are expected to fund their own computer equipment for use at home. Where that is not possible, the risk is that a social divide is created. There are, at the time of writing, no grants or special funds for adults (without families) to get help with the purchase of such equipment, even if they are enrolled on a course leading to formal qualifications.

### Attitude and Behaviour

A recent survey of apprentices and E2E participants elicited a very strong, positive attitude towards e-learning, with the majority expressing the view that technology motivated them. Additionally, they felt that the use of technology would make the completion of their course more likely. This attitude is starkly different from those expressed by other constituents in the WBL sector.

Some surveys present a reasonably positive picture in terms of attitudes towards e-learning (e.g., Skillsoft, 2007; Overton, Hills & Dixon, 2007): up to one-half of those surveyed state that e-learning will be a main training channel in the future, and that it is making a positive difference to job performance. One commentator notes that attitudes amongst practitioners are becoming more positive - mainly because the technology is “there”, but also because of the availability of courses such as the E-Guides training programme which was first piloted with WBL providers in 2006. Contrary to this, another comments that some practitioners see technology as a replacement for tutors.

A core problem elicited by CIPD in its recent survey (2008) is the perception that e-learning not only requires a new attitude to learning, but that it also requires a new set of skills on the part of the learner. The inference is that both of these could act as “brakes” to the use of e-learning. One of the commentators observes that many tutors are “stuck in their own rut” and that they are not keen on adopting change.

Mackinnon (2008) points to the need for practitioners to change their attitudes toward e-learning so that they may feel (or be) encouraged to change their work practices and to learn new skills. Whilst practitioners and managers recognise some merits in e-learning, such as improving the range of learning opportunities for learners, the lack of tangible evidence on the impact of e-learning on learning outcomes leads to uncertainty.

### Skills

Based on the literature, IT skills levels amongst learners are no longer perceived as being such a barrier as they might once have been. For instance, the CIPD (2008) found that only 6% of employers believe that new staff are lacking in appropriate IT skills.

With practitioners, there is a recurring theme of “resistance to change”. One survey uncovered an interesting contrast in perception: on the one hand, based on the survey data, the authors predict that a majority of practitioners have competent or advanced ICT skills, while at the same time reporting that majority of employers believe that practitioners do not have the required skills to deliver and support ICT-based learning effectively (Mackinnon, 2008).

Concerns over the level of practitioners' skills, plus time to engage in training and practice, are reported in several studies (e.g., Bell, Gulati & Hooker, 2006; Crisp, Crawford & Daar, 2006). At the same time, another emphasises the importance that learners place on tutors who are fully engaged in e-learning (JISC, 2007).

There are, however, success stories (e.g., CEL programmes, Union learn), and opportunity and accessibility appear to be key incentives.

### **Evidence and exemplars**

Within the WBL sector, there is scant evidence to support the benefits of e-learning. Studies have found that the business case for e-learning has not been proven (e.g., Mackinnon Partnership, 2008; CIPD, 2008), with the commentaries offering a mixed view. Opinion on this tends to be based on perception rather than quantifiable evidence. One commentator notes that "there is lots of evidence out there", and that she has set up a Wiki with colleagues she met through the E-Guides training programme so that they can share best practice and ideas. This desire for the ability to share practice amongst practitioners is frequently repeated in the commentaries.

According to the CIPD (2008) survey, the picture of e-learning take up is rather static. On the other hand, a European survey found high levels of satisfaction and significant cost reductions amongst companies that had invested in e-learning (European Commission, 2008).

### **Supply versus demand**

Supply and demand in respect of computers are touched on in the earlier section on "Barriers". In addition to this, studies note that remote access does not meet learner demand (Overton, Hills & Dixon, 2007), and that only around one-third of providers offer learners and practitioners access to a VLE (Mackinnon Partnership, 2008).

In terms of content, providers are generally satisfied with the quality and availability of resources, but there is a concern that practitioners do not have enough time to seek out the best available resources (Mackinnon). This point is touched on by one of the commentators who states that it is not easy to find resources, particularly free ones and that time invested on searching for these can often end in a dead end.

### **Innovations in Technology**

The review of the literature found a surprising lack of evidence of the innovative use of technology within the sector. In fact, the surveys show that there has been no increase - or in some cases, a decrease - in the use of what might be considered to be innovative uses of technology such as discussion forums (Mackinnon Partnership, 2008) and collaborative learning opportunities (Crisp, Crawford & Daar, 2006). Even the enthusiastic apprentices noted earlier show surprisingly little use of chat rooms and discussion forums (Cooper, 2007).

Successful innovative practices include grounding e-learning in actual work practices (Howarth, 2008), packing in other online activities such as marketing (elearn2work, 2007), involving practitioners in the development of materials (QIA & ALT, 2007) and preparing the learner prior to engaging in e-learning (Tyler-Smith, 2006).

## 4.3 Personal and Community Development Learning

### Context

For the purposes of this report we have drawn on literature and interviews with providers and practitioners in the wider field of Adult and Community Learning (ACL), rather than confining our review to the narrower activity funded by the Personal and Community Learning Development (PCDL) funds. We refer to the sector as ACL\PCDL.

It is a complex and diverse sector, accounting for less than a million learners, with a wide range of provider types including colleges, local authorities and some small voluntary and community sector organisations. The curriculum offer is wide and, in some cases, directly negotiated with the learner.

One defining factor identified in the literature, and commented upon repeatedly in interviews, is the “extremely part-time” nature of the environment, “for learners, tutors and even managers”.<sup>13</sup> Historically, the ACL\PCDL sector has utilised outreach and community-facing settings which are often not managed by the organisation providing the learning, leading to a lack of control over the learning environment. This factor is also a common theme in interviews.

The SERO E-maturity review (2008) describes the history of e-learning investment and development, (p9-10). It suggests that there have been three phases of e-learning development and that ‘much of the current e-learning provision can be attributed to the second phase’. This refers to the period of investment funded by the LSC, managed by NIACE, and driven by the ACL NLN Strategic Working Group’s plan (2003 - 2006). This ‘articulated the need for ACL provision to be appropriate to the needs of the sector’ (p9).

Incentives to take up e-learning in this sector include the drive for digital inclusion. That is, to take the use of ICT and the internet to those who are not currently ‘connected’. Widening participation is another key driver, and it is a widely-held view that the use of technology is an attraction to learners whose prior, often unsuccessful, learning experiences did not include the use of technology. This study focuses on eight themes to investigate the influences and motivational factors on the take-up of e-learning, each of which is summarised here.

### Barriers

The study draws on three main sources: a NIACE survey which compared data from 2003 and 2005, the e-maturity report into PCDL carried out by SERO Consulting (2008) on behalf of Becta, and a survey that formed part of a NIACE research report into the potential of introducing online and blended learning undertaken in 2007.

Compared with FE colleges, the sector started from a low baseline but significant improvements have been recorded in computer access, connectivity, bandwidth, and availability of equipment. Awareness of the potential of e-learning and of VLEs was high, but the SERO report found that the majority of providers were in the ‘developing’ stages of e-maturity and that managers had found it difficult to turn vision into reality. In our interviews, commentators suggested that access to a range of equipment had greatly improved, but the one-off nature of grant funding made it difficult to plan

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<sup>13</sup> *E-maturity in personal and community development learning: Review Report*. (2008) SERO Consulting

effectively and there are concerns about the ongoing maintenance and replacement cycle for equipment.

The SERO report found strong ‘technical infrastructure and adequate connectivity’ (p11). Smaller local authorities and those delivering in rural settings were found to have been less able to exploit e-learning effectively. Our interviews found that problems with equipment and connectivity are still a feature where provision takes place on premises not owned or controlled by the provider. The difficulty of working with contracted providers is also mentioned by some commentators in this respect.

There is little evidence of online learning taking place, and consequently few opportunities for staff to develop skills in online tutoring and moderation, or online course development. All the surveys reported positive beliefs from staff and that online resources and materials, such as BBC sites and NLN materials are widely known and well used. Some commentators qualified this, suggesting that this may depend on curriculum area, with ICT and Skills for Life tutors being the most likely to have this knowledge and use such resources.

Access to staff development is a recurring theme in the literature and our interviews, and is regarded as an essential enabler. The E-Guides training programme is mentioned in both literature and interviews as having had considerable impact. One commentator suggested that small organisations need enthusiasts and early adopters to help an organisation ‘look ahead and be imaginative’.

## Funding

Funding for ACL\PCDL has changed many times in the last five years, seeing the end of the Adult and Community Learning Fund, and the introduction of PCDL, First Steps, and Train to Gain. Many ACL\PCDL providers had also had access to local funds such as Wired Up Communities, or UK online centre funds. Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) funds have also been used in e-learning initiatives. External funding sources, including the targeted LSC investment of 2003-2006, have driven most e-learning initiatives, with the exception of learndirect which attracts mainstream LSC funding. The SERO report (2008) identified instability of funding as a systemic weakness for this sector, and pointed to ‘reliance on external funding for e-learning developments’ as an issue (p46) commenting: “Local funding has helped development of e-maturity; but many adult learning providers report that a relative lack of recurrent funding means that investment in capital and equipment may be less effective than hoped for” (SERO, 2008: p47). This view is echoed by commentators whose concern is maintenance and replacement of the equipment they had been able to buy through recent LSC funds managed by NIACE (known as Capital Motivating e-learning (CaMeL).

In interviews, funding for technical support was raised as an issue which affects this sector in particular as a result of the range of delivery venues with different equipment and technical support arrangements. As one commentator points out, ‘defining the role’ and persuading management to commit resources to employing suitably qualified staff is difficult, because there is a lack of understanding about how ‘time-consuming and demanding’ effective support can be. The same commentator points out that the use of VLEs raises expectations of fast responses to learner requests for help (both from technical support and tutors), and current systems are not set up to provide this, nor are resources allocated to establish them. Commentators point out that while capital funds have been available, revenue funds have not.

## Attitude and Behaviour

### Learners

The literature review found very little evidence of ACL\PCDL online learning, but drew on discussions of the attitudes and behaviour of successful distance learners and Open University (OU) online learners. The key success factor was found to be learner independence, an attribute often accorded only to learners with above Level two competence. This view is borne out by the experience of the Sheffield College.

Although 'self-efficacy, self-regulation and motivation' (Semmar, 2006) are considered to be essential skills for successful distance and online learning (Clarke, 2007; Hedberg, 2006), it is also felt that appropriate learning activities, good support mechanisms, opportunities for early success, and effective feedback can enable learners to develop these qualities.

Knightley's (2007) study of OU learners found evidence of perceived advantages of online learning. A number of disabled students reported on the convenience of studying from home and one commented that the anonymity of the online world was a positive, with some questions being 'easier to ask' (p280).

Learner views reported captured in interview are in complete contrast, with one learner very happy to use computers in the classroom and the other against it because of the time taken up, away from the subject. This latter issue is mentioned by nearly all interviewees.

### Practitioners

For tutors working in the range of environments described above, and under constraints of inspection regimes and new quality standards, motivation to adopt new practices such as online teaching is context dependent. The incentive to acquire skills in online course design and delivery is limited because there is little opportunity to develop expertise through practice, and it is unlikely that promotion, job-security or rewards will be affected by gaining such expertise.

The NIACE survey (2006) into the impact of the E-Guides training programme indicated that few staff were allocated time to carry out the role of promoter of 'e-learning'.

The SERO e-maturity review and the NIACE survey (2006) reported positive beliefs amongst practitioners. For example, '87% believed that ICT and e-learning had allowed learners greater choice in learning opportunities' (SERO, 2008: p71) and fewer than 2% reported that personal motivation was low (NIACE, 2006: p70).

Commentators felt that many tutors are now enthusiastic about e-learning.

## Skills

### Learners

ACL\PCDL learners are mainly studying below Level 3. 'The relatively low level of learner capability in using technology reflects the continuing high demand for entry and low level courses in the sector, both in ICT and other subjects' (SERO, 2008: p93).

Basic skills in ICT, reading and writing are essential. Online learning environments may require learners to have competence with Web 2.0 tools in order to engage effectively in the online environment. Clarke (2007) argues that learners can acquire these skills through appropriate learning activities. He lists 'collaborating with others', 'searching for information' and assessing the quality of information' as 'skills required by the e-learner' (p28).

Commentators referred to learners' lack of IT skills, especially among older learners, and to the difficulty of taking up class time with ICT tuition, especially within the ten-week, two hours per week course model. One tutor however, described how access to resources on the VLE had very much improved retention amongst her language learners.

## Practitioners

Staff development was self-assessed as the most fundamental problem for ACL\PCDL providers in the E-maturity review (SERO, 2008: p23). The factor identified by most respondents in the NIACE 2006 survey that would enable them to incorporate online learning into their delivery was 'staff/training or development in online learning design (44%)' (NIACE, 2006: p71). Although 80% practitioners rated their skills as good or very good and over 60% rated their skills as 'OK' in 'using ICT with learners, knowledge of specialist software and managing workload with ICT' (SERO, 2008: p69-70), significant weakness appears in 'skills in teaching and facilitating online'(p22).

Commentators report that while many staff are quite 'IT savvy', and some are using a VLE in their own teacher training, there are still some with limited skills. Some may have no access to a computer at home, or may have dial-up rather than broadband connections. One learning provider described the success of offering digital cameras rather than pay as an incentive to attend e-learning training. Loan schemes are problematic. Another commentator reports that the original E-Guides support grant funding, which stipulated the purchase of a laptop and projector, had been a good incentive.

## Evidence, Exemplars and Innovation

Some local authorities have reported developments in online learning in the offer of professional development to staff, and in the offer of ITQ throughout the local authority. There are many examples of the use of VLEs (Moodle in particular) to support traditional learning. Video, vodcasting, podcasting, use of mobile devices and video-conferencing are reported to be in use throughout the sector, but they are not embedded practice.

Good practice in e-learning is reported by the E-maturity review and includes examples such as using the learning platform to provide resources for learners, and using e-learning to support 'assessment and record-keeping in woodturning'. No examples of online communications are given (SERO, 2008: p79)

No ACL\PCDL providers are among the ten providers selected as Becta's technology exemplars, although some have been selected to be part of this initiative as developing providers.

## Supply v. Demand

The 'smallness overall' of the sector and 'low critical mass' in some subject areas (SERO, 2008: p46) means demand will always be less visible than that from other sectors.

Although SERO (2008: p15) reports good staff access (67%) to a computer at work, it is unlikely that this would be found across wider ACL provision. Within this small sample, figures for access to the internet (58%), to a learning platform (43%) drop to only 31% with access to a wireless network.

Commentators suggest that access to equipment has been very much improved.

## 4.4 Offender Learning and Skills

### Context

The offender learning and skills sector is complex, with a prison population that currently numbers over 80,000 in England and Wales, and a further 200,000 under the supervision of the Probation Service. Many resettlement and rehabilitation services for ex-offenders are provided by voluntary and community sector organisations. Concerns about rising prison numbers and overcrowding in prisons are regularly reported; the cycle of re-offending is a major social problem. Men comprise approximately 95% of the prison population; 85% are over 21 years old.

Until recently, there was very little use of ICT but recent government initiatives have sought to raise the quality of offender learning and encourage the effective use of technology.

Education is seen to be a major force in breaking the cycle of re-offending (Offender Learning Journey 2005; Powell, 2008; Potter, 2008). The publication of the Offender Learning Journey (OLJ) (DfES, 2005a) demonstrated a policy-level understanding and commitment to make learning work for offenders because 'learning activities contribute to the delivery of a 'humane and constructive prison regime', and because for 'offenders in the community, learning is a core intervention towards rehabilitation' (DfES, 2005a : p4). 'The right learning and skills' will help the individual find work, and help them to remain in work - sustained employment is recognised as a major factor in reducing re-offending (DfES, 2005a: p4).

Since the start up of the OLJ, new arrangements for learning in prisons have been established, and the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) went live in 2006. There are eighteen OLASS providers subject to Ofsted inspection. This development in education for offenders has had significant impact on opportunities for e-learning and blended learning because of the commitment to integrate with mainstream education.

The OLJ outlines a commitment to 'altering and expanding' e-learning which it claims 'has already been successful in engaging offenders who are not willing to take part in traditional learning' (DfES, 2005a : p34). Reasons given for the adoption of e-learning include continuity of learning between prisons, and between prison and the community, flexibility, the ability to empower learners to achieve their learning goals, and to engage learners who are 'demotivated' by paper-based traditional learning, as well as achieving value for money by 'maximising the availability of resources'. Ufl learndirect provision is considered to be 'successful', 'interactive' and 'engaging' (DfES, 2005a

p34). Commentators in our interviews agreed that e-learning offered offenders ‘a new way to learn’, that is ‘exciting and interesting’.

Over the last five years, initiatives have been implemented that have provided opportunities to develop ICT skills and to use technology in wider learning. These initiatives include:

- Prisons ICT Academy (PICTA)
- Open University courses
- learndirect
- Programme for Offender Learning and Resettlement Information Services (POLARIS)

PICTA is a National Offender Management Services (NOMS) Offender Employment, Skills & Services Group, which is a managed and funded project that aims to promote IT training within prisons. It offers a range of courses and delivers using workshops that are required to simulate a real office environment. PICTA established its first workshop in 2004 and now has 24 sites<sup>14</sup>.

Pike estimates that the Open University (OU) registered approximately 1500 courses to prisoners in 2006-7<sup>15</sup>. OU courses were previously available via paper-based distance learning, but now require internet access for full participation.

Ufl and learndirect deliver in a number of prisons subject to the agreement of each individual Governor. In 2007, there were 25 prisons with full internet based delivery (Powell, 2008).

The POLARIS project involves seven prisons. It is a ‘proof of concept’ project. The primary objective is to deliver a joined up offender network with a managed and secure environment. The infrastructure provides safe, filtered internet access through a system of ‘dumb’ clients, and content is carefully accredited (Potter, 2008). The term ‘dumb’ clients is used to describe terminals that do not process data or execute user programs locally, meaning they cannot be hacked into.

E-learning initiatives are in the early stages in this sector and therefore only a limited amount of research exists.

### Barriers

Lack of equipment with limited or no connectivity are two major barriers for learners in prison, but also for those under supervision in the community. This issue is beginning to be addressed with LSC investment in equipment and infrastructure amounting to £2.18 million in 2006-2008, with a further investment of £5.7 million committed for 2007-2008 (LSC, 2006). According to the LSC, the actual investment in equipment and infrastructure in 2007-08 was £11.4 M. However, many staff cannot access the internet at work and are therefore unable to make use of online resources.

Access to the internet is severely restricted and usually only found in Category D (open) prisons. Mobile devices are banned. Equipment is often of low quality, old and poorly maintained. This is a common theme in our interviews. For those under supervision,

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.picta.co.uk/> Accessed September 5<sup>th</sup> 2008

<sup>15</sup> <http://pet.netefficiency.co.uk/index.php?id=103> Accessed September 5<sup>th</sup> 2008

the lack of home access to equipment, and to an internet connection, are also reported as being issues.

The security regime is a barrier as risks must be carefully identified; learner movement within prisons to learning centres is also dependent on security staff. There are low levels of awareness of the benefits of using technology among prison staff and some regard computers with suspicion.

Learning programmes may be disrupted by security actions and are regularly interrupted by repeated movement between prisons (a phenomenon known as 'churn'). Release can also cause disruption (DfES, 2005a; Powell, 2008).

Prison staff and learning practitioners have different priorities leading to a tension that can adversely affect the climate for learning. Both groups of staff have difficulty accessing training.

Learners are likely to have low levels of basic skills, including ICT skills, and previously negative learning experiences leading to low motivation to engage in learning. One commentator suggests that 'learning may not be a priority'.

## Funding

Currently offender education is mainly funded by the LSC through contracts awarded under OLASS which run until end of July 2009. Private prisons, of which there are eleven currently operating, have different arrangements.

The relationship between OLASS and learndirect is said to be a 'mutually supportive one' with one provider contracting learndirect (Powell, 2008; p14).

The E-enabling offender learning and skills (EEOLS) project funding (LSC, managed by NIACE) was available to contracted providers of offender learning, including prisons and probation services, private training providers and voluntary sector organisations. There were forty-nine successful projects which received a total of just over a million pounds for capital and revenue.

Funding streams for capital and the EEOLS projects were over-subscribed (NIACE data) indicating that discrete funding has been an incentive for providers to explore uses of e-learning. Commentators indicated that there are many funding-related problems with core funds being target driven and limiting, and not enough funding available to deliver the intensive support needed for this group of learners.

## Attitude and Behaviour

### Learners

Englebright (2007a) describes the profile of offenders: likely to have poor previous learning experiences, few qualifications and a history of truancy. They have 'low self image and see themselves as failures' (p11). Powell (2008) adds that behaviour patterns such as 'inability to see intentions through to completion', 'short term enthusiasm, which collapses without immediate reward', and 'short concentration span' (p35) are also part of this profile. One commentator describes the learning style of offenders as 'activist, not passive'

and suggests that working at your own pace and being able to recap at will was 'very important for offenders'.

Respondents to Englebright's survey (2007a) also identified lack of confidence with computers, lack of confidence in asking questions and understanding learning material, and lack of 'push' from a tutor as being issues.

The survey indicates that offenders experience a sense of achievement when skills and confidence improve, and that education (especially computer related) is a way to improve employment prospects. They are concerned 'not to get left behind' and perceived that online learning offers unique opportunities of 'time, place and pace' (Englebright, 2007a: p9). Other motivating factors identified are that it is 'up to date', 'provides access to a wide range of information', 'cuts down on paper' and 'enables you to ask daft questions without embarrassment' (Englebright, 2007a: p62).

Commentators remarked on the negative effects of poor previous learning experiences and one suggests that 'a positive attitude' is as important as 'an increased skill set'.

## Practitioners

This review found very little information that related directly to the perceptions of practitioners working within prisons. Over a hundred staff working in offender learning have accessed the E-Guides training programme. Some commentators report a resistance to change and little motivation to explore the benefits of e-learning. There are several comments relating to the need for more training as 'e-learning is an area that is constantly moving forward'.

The role of prison staff is significant in ensuring offenders have access to learning opportunities. Powell (2008) identifies 'two deeply ingrained views held by many prison officers': firstly that computers are 'a form of entertainment', and secondly that skilled users may be able to 'sidestep the inbuilt safeguards' and compromise security, viewing the internet as a tool of the trade for paedophiles and other sexual predators' (p28). Braggins and Talbot (2005) encountered only a small number of prison officers who were positive about the use of technology.

## Skills

### Learners

Offenders very often have poor levels of language, literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, which are collectively termed 'basic skills' needs (OLJ, 2005; Englebright, 2004; Englebright, 2007; Powell, 2008; Taylor, 2005). These may prevent offenders from being able to use computers effectively for learning.

Clarke (2007) includes reading and writing in a list of skills required by the e-learner (p28). He argues that as 'email is the dominant method of communication' between tutor and learner, good writing skills are required to communicate the learner's needs 'clearly and concisely' (p28). This may prevent offenders from engaging in discussions about online learning in environments where there is no face-to-face support.

Clarke (2007) lists other study skills, such as planning, collaborating with others and problem-solving as requisite for the e-learner (p28). Powell (2008) describes offender learners as having ‘no capability for rational planning’ and ‘no awareness of the consequences of their actions’ (p35) which would limit their abilities to work with others and work through a problem. Clarke argues that activities that encourage the development of these skills should be introduced into online learning (p29).

### Practitioners

The literature review found little specific reference to the skills of practitioners in this sector. However, it can be inferred that this part-time workforce are likely to encounter similar skills issues as seen in PCDL with almost no opportunity to develop any online teaching, course design or facilitation skills. One interviewee from a Probation Service commented that it would be ‘fantastic’ to deliver ‘real online learning’, running group sessions with video and overcoming the barriers in the rural setting of having to travel to learning centres.

Most commentators felt that practitioners made use of the available opportunities to use technology but one notes it was ‘too time-consuming’. It was also felt that new models of delivery are needed, such as increasing the amount of time for learning sessions. One interviewee said that some staff equated the use of e-learning with ‘lazy teaching.’

### Evidence, Exemplars and Innovation

Evidence of successful incentives and benefits of online learning in this sector has been found in reports of learndirect provision. The benefits include thorough individual initial assessment leading to personalised courses of learning, regular review points, and effective support. Commentators also refer to the suitability and success of learndirect in offender learning.

There is evidence in the case studies and elsewhere that learners respond well to learning in realistic work environments and working to deadlines (e.g., Youth Offenders DVD production project; PICTA reports; Englebright, 2007c)

Potter (2008)<sup>16</sup> claims POLARIS ‘is viewed as successful not only by prison staff, but also by senior members of the Prison Service, offenders who use it and other stakeholders in the education and resettlement areas’. The LSC (2007) expects to draw lessons from POLARIS that will ‘demonstrate the potential for e-learning activity in custodial establishments, and that lessons from that project will be incorporated in plans for the future’ (p50). Pettit and Hussain (2008) report that the POLARIS pilot will inform ‘a business case ahead of a potential national rollout’ (p4).

A number of small-scale projects have demonstrated that investment in technology has had a significant impact on this learner group, not least because it is perceived as an investment in their future.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk> Accessed September 8<sup>th</sup> 2008

## Supply v Demand

The literature review identified a demand for safe web access as a solution to many of the barriers previously identified. The experience of innovative developments such as POLARIS, and separate secure lines of connectivity for learndirect, suggest that this is possible.

Commentators report that there is high demand and that this is not being met. This accords with evidence of over subscription to e-learning funds.

### 4.5 Synthesis and conclusions

Despite the enormous variation within the constituents of the Post-16 sector, there are a number of common major influencing factors for e-learning. These can be summarised as:

- The **support and leadership from Senior Management** is a critical factor which can either act as an incentive and motivator, or as a significant disincentive. Within the OLAS environment, senior management would equate directly to Governor and Senior security staff, or to senior managers within the learning contractor organisation. In the WBL environment, management support and leadership is particularly critical and is linked strongly to the development of a “learning culture” within the organisation. Take up of online and blended learning by Small to Medium Sized Enterprises is very limited, but, arguably, this is true of any form of training or skills development. This is not unique to England, but is a typical response from SMEs across Europe.
- **Funding** is problematic in all four sectors. In WBL, funding in the form of investment is strongly linked to the need to have a recognised and evidence-based business plan which states the values and benefits of e-learning.
- Both the FE and PCDL sectors have issues with a **lack of revenue** to provide IT support and maintenance, which in turn, impacts on practitioner confidence and IT availability for learners. Both the WBL and OLAS sectors also evidence issues with a lack of support and maintenance, although this is less directly linked to revenue. Within WBL, this is more an issue related to investment, and a reluctance to invest in technologies that have - according to some - not been proven.
- Concerns over **practitioner skills levels** appear to be a significant affecting factor in all sectors, which is linked to a resistance to change in OLAS, FE and WBL. The impact of this could be linked to the fact that technologies are not being used to their full potential, with consequences for realising the opportunity and benefits that e-learning online and blended learning can offer. Skills levels have a further impact on practitioner confidence and opportunity to practice new skills in the case of FE, PCDL and OLAS.
- **Access to technologies**, including internet access and remote access to networks - all four sub-sectors report problems, although it is acknowledged that some significant progress has been made in recent years, particularly in FE (which will

have a knock-on effect to WBL and PCDL, and OLAS in line with the LSC's policy of parity with mainstream education and skills).

- Despite this limitation, **technology is widely seen as a motivational factor** in its own right, for both practitioners and learners.
- In the case of FE and OLAS in particular, **demand outstrips supply**. There is a potential major weakness in the system if FE colleges are not able to leverage higher levels of capacity through the use of technologies and e-learning.
- There is a widely held **positive attitude towards e-learning**, particularly in FE and OLAS, with slightly more mixed views in WBL and PCDL. This positive attitude appears to be based more on a perceptual understanding of the benefits and values of e-learning as opposed to an evidence-based one. Within FE, there is a higher awareness of examples of good practice and that “the evidence is out there”.

Our conclusion is a question rather than an answer: if there is a widespread positive attitude towards technology and e-learning, and that technology is seen as a motivational factor (and indeed the available evidence suggests that technology use in learning leads to higher rates of retention and achievement), surely e-learning should be more advanced in terms of take up than it currently is? In essence, all of the issues and barriers point to funding, and it is to this domain that we turn our attention next. Does the funding paradigm in Post -16 act as an incentive for e-learning?

## 5. Funding and e-learning

### 5.1 Introduction

According to the literature and evidence gathered through interview, the drive to take up and embed e-learning across the Post-16 sector is not happening as quickly as central strategies and policies would demand. In this section of our report, we specifically focus on funding. Does the funding paradigm support the take up of e-learning? Does it act as an incentive?

To provide a brief snapshot of this landscape, the research team interviewed a number of representatives of the key stakeholder agencies, and undertook a review of the available policy and strategy literature.

### 5.2 The push for e-learning

It is clear from our research that the primary incentive adopted and used by stakeholders to encourage take up of online and blended learning is financial support. The main source of funding in the form of core funding for the sector is managed by the LSC. In addition to this, the LSC has a designated budget of £48 M (in 2008/2009) allocated to funding specific e-learning and technology projects and initiatives across all four sectors, although it should be noted that some 25% of this budget is allocated to fund access to JANET. In the main, this funding and the projects it is used to support have been managed by other stakeholders including LSN, ALP, NIACE, CEL and the QIA (now LSIS).

It is stressed that, in interviews with representatives of stakeholder agencies and indeed with those with providers, when contributors referred to funding for e-learning, it is this designated budget to which they referred, not core funding. In interviews with contributors from provider organisations, the only reference to core funding and e-learning was in the context of technology maintenance, support and upgrading - all of which are seen as problematic and not supported because of a lack of revenue funding. This is an important point: in the general perception, while core funding (£11.4B in 2008/09) is “delivery mode free”, it is not associated with online and blended learning provision by all providers. Whilst the methods used to deliver learning are not determined by the funders, the funding is seen as complex and subject to detailed rules and regulations. There is a risk involved in delivery methods such as online and blended learning where it may be more difficult to evidence hours spent learning, or teaching and support provided. Is it, therefore, the view that e-learning must be supported through the innovative but prudent allocation of additional funding? So, does the current funding paradigm act as an incentive to e-learning take up?

In the next part of this section, we trace the history behind the current approach to e-learning funding.

### 5.3 A bit of history

In 2002, the LSC’s Distributed and Electronic Learning Group (DELG) produced a report<sup>17</sup> that has remained influential in determining the LSC’s strategy and approach to e-learning and funding guidelines. This report makes a number of recommendations concerning core funding and e-learning, as distinct from the Technology for Learning Programme.

A recommendation which was adopted and which persists today is that the LSC’s funding should remain “mode free”. Funding guidance for “distance learning” (not e-learning or technology supported learning) for 2008/09 is contained in Section 7 of the LSC’s *Principles, Rules and Regulations, 2008/09*. As core-funded delivery is mode free, there is no direct or explicit incentive to opt for e-learning or blended learning. That is not to say that this acts as a disincentive. According to one contributor, it is not the LSC’s role to tell providers *how* to make learning and skills provision. Despite this recommendation, the report does state that electronic lifelong learning “implies a need for more sophisticated assessment and monitoring systems....as well as new funding models” (p 55).

A recommendation which did not get taken forward relates to setting up a professional development programme for inspectors to familiarise them with Distributed Electronic Learning. This is one of the earliest instances of the need for a “joined up” approach: if it is to be used as a tool for teaching and learning, then those that inspect and judge the provision should be knowledgeable about its use and value. Some interviewees comment that the use of technology has been identified and reported favourably in inspection. Others believe it is important that inspectors judge e-learning in a context of what is achievable in the learning environment, not by a cross-sector set of standards. However, this type of judgement assumes both specialist sectoral knowledge and knowledge and understanding of the e-learning environment.

The report also recognises the need for systematic staff training and development in e-learning including a need to establish new posts designed to support learners, and a high

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<sup>17</sup> Report of the Learning and Skills Council’s Distributed and Electronic Learning Group; LSC, 2002

quality learner support provision. As demonstrated elsewhere through interviewees' comments and the literature review, insufficient workforce training and development remains a contributory factor to the slow take up of e-learning, and in particular, the full and appropriate use of available technology resources.

While a comprehensive review of the DELG report and the evidence for e-learning was produced in 2006 (Burgess & Butler, 2006), this was never officially published. This being the case, it would not be appropriate to rely too heavily on this document. It is worth noting, however, that it did emphasise the need for "further work with the inspectorate to ensure that proper recognition is given to ICT and e-learning by inspectors as part of the Common Inspection Framework" (p 7). One of the contributors to the present research points out that if online and blended learning were promoted as something which would help colleges to meet the targets of the Inspection Framework, this is likely to be seen as a considerable incentive to e-learning take up.

Neither the DELG report nor the later draft report make mention of a need to provide professional development opportunities for auditors in respect of e-learning and technology. This has implications which are discussed in the following section. To be clear, inspectors are managed by Ofsted with a remit to inspect providers for the quality of teaching and learning, learning outcomes and value for money, whereas the LSC auditors' remit is to audit organisations' expenditure of LSC funds as being appropriate and in compliance with their contracts.

On funding, this report (2006, LSC) acknowledges that funding methods need to be "changed to support priorities as simply as possible.." (p 2).

Of additional interest, the report recommended that e-learning components should be included in Provider 3-year plans, and that funds should be capital *and* revenue to ensure sustainability.

As this review and set of recommendations was never published, the original DELG report has remained the main source of input and recommendation to the LSC's core funding paradigm with respect to Distributed and Electronic Learning. While funding models and formulae have been amended in response to skills priorities, little attention has been given to investigating the issues around the funding of e-learning since the DELG report. Those providers who have implemented online and blended learning provision have arguably done so despite the guidelines, rather than because of them.

## 5.4 The present picture – the model in general

### *Key issues*

A key rationale behind the formation of the LSC was to bring together all forms of funding for the Post-16 sector with the aim of tackling "artificial and organisational barriers between different parts of the system" (p 2).<sup>18</sup>

With online and blended learning, a main source of confusion seems to emanate from two factors: first, the current core funding model contains no concrete and pragmatic guidelines that would remove providers' anxieties about the auditing of e-learning provision. There is therefore a perception that providers see e-learning as a risky endeavour, and that they may be subject to funding clawback if the provision of e-

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<sup>18</sup> Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Changes; DfES, 2006

learning cannot readily be proven. In fact, there is no clear definition of what the LSC will fund as there is no definition of e-learning beyond: “e-learning is learning that involves a substantial amount of information and communications technology, such as using computers and the Internet.”<sup>19</sup> As one contributor comments, there are no direct links between (core) funding and e-learning. Without explicit guidelines describing online and blended learning, there is no incentive to take it up. The implications of this are:

- As there is no detailed definition of online and blended learning, and e-learning is even less specified, how can it be audited?
- We already know that many providers are not using their existing technology systems to their full potential, as evidenced in the literature and in interview. Consequently there is a perception that these systems are not being leveraged to help provide evidence in respect of auditing. For instance, the learning tracking features of Virtual Learning Environments can be a source of valuable information.
- If a provider cannot prove that learning has taken place, then the auditor has the right to claw funding back.

However, it can be reported that the LSC recognises the concerns of providers in respect of e-learning and auditing, and is working to resolve the problem. It is expected that the funding guidelines for 2009/10 will address many of the historic issues around what the LSC refers to as Distributed and Electronic Learning. There is also an indication of informal training in guidelines for DEL taking place with auditors.

Secondly, the designated e-learning budget is seen by many - by implication as well as through direct reference - as “it” in terms of funding for e-learning. There are no guarantees that this special fund will continue to be available. A further point to draw here is that while core funding can be considered to be “high stakes” funding in that it is audited against targets, whereas this project funding is not and is therefore more readily identified as funding for new initiatives and developments that may contain elements of trial and error.

These two issues, and the evidence which supports their existence lends credence to our hypothesis that providers do not consider core funding to be a risk free expenditure on online and blended learning, but that e-learning should be funded through special budgets and grants which are not linked to high stakes targets. If one accepts this interpretation, this would suggest that providers do not see online learning and blended learning as mainstream. This is something which requires separate funding.

### *Changes to the model*

In the last year, funding arrangements have been simplified, with the previous multiple funding streams reduced down to three. Despite this, one participant comments that their college receives nine separate funding streams from their regional LSC, none of which can be used to cross-fund areas other than their specific allocation. According to the LSC, an organisation can make an application to the LSC for cross-fertilisation of funding but this is not something that is generally allowed in practice.

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<sup>19</sup> Funding Guidance for Further Education in 2008/09, LSC: p49

The guidelines for Distance and Electronic Learning (DEL) funding remain more or less the same as in previous years, and are based on the earlier recommendations by the DELG.

A fundamental recent change in the funding model allows FE providers to target learners outside of their catchment area, although for now this has to be done by negotiating individual contracts with the regional LSCs. The intention is that, from 2009, there will only be one contract for provision anywhere in the country. This clearly opens up opportunities for those providers intent on leveraging the “do anywhere, anytime” benefits of online and blended learning.

Providers do not, however, have flexibility in the numbers of learners they make provision for. College contracts with the LSC specify a target number of learners with, in some cases, plans for growth in certain subject areas. Contract holders are not allowed to exceed these numbers, although they can apply to the LSC to do so, but cannot expect to receive any additional funding. The volume of funded learners is therefore capped.

A significant change to the DEL guidelines in 2008/09<sup>20</sup> is that “the LSC is now prepared to allow providers to make the case to their LSC partnership team for permission to claim funding for NVQs delivered entirely by distance learning provided that the provider has the support of the relevant sector skills council (SSC)...”. This requirement for SSC support must surely act as an additional disincentive. Additionally, because the LSC guidelines define NVQs delivered by distance learning as not being delivered fully or partly at the premises of the provider, the lowest Standard Learner Rates (SLN) rates apply.

The future of all funding for the Post-16 sector - particularly that relating to e-learning - is liable to major change in the next couple of years, as the LSC prepares to cease operation by 2010, to be replaced by what one commentator describes as a “myriad of smaller funding agencies”. This potentially jeopardises, for instance, the introduction of the single contract to cover all provision irrespective of geographic coverage. This coming major change also has implications for the future of the auditing inspection and the current lack of clarity with respect to online and blended learning provision.

### *Progress with inspection*

On a more positive note, it can be reported that Becta and Ofsted are jointly working on investigating the future policy for inspection in relation to technology. Interim changes have already been made to the current Policy and Guidance concerning e-learning and technology. References to technology are also incorporated into the 2009 (Common Inspection) Framework, with ongoing consultation on the extent to which e-learning and technology should be included. These are complex issues to debate: the Ofsted position is that technology should not be seen as a “must have / must do”, but rather as a means of enhancing teaching and learning. None-the-less, progress is being made in addressing this particular area - through investigating the required remit, as well as the skills and resources needed.

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<sup>20</sup> Funding Guidelines for Further Education 2008/09: LSC; p 51

## 5.5 The changing face of Further Education and Work Based Learning

During the last few years, the face of FE has been changing quite dramatically. For instance, as a result of a policy change in 2004, according to one commentator, the WBL provision of FE has moved from a model in which the employers were expected to work within a college's normal term schedule, with learners receiving learning at the college's premises, to one where the provision is made at the employers' premises. This has resulted in a considerable increase in part time staff - assessors - who spend much time off college site. Arguably it is precisely those part-time staff who are referred to in the literature and through interview as being most excluded in terms of opportunities to take up training in the use of e-learning, and access to resources. For instance, unlike full time college staff, part time staff generally do not have access to their own computer at work. If part time staff are part of the solution, then they ought to benefit from the same opportunities and resources as their full time colleagues.

Added to this, according to one contributor, the role of the assessor is changing. Originally assessors did just that - they assessed the existing skills and aptitudes of already skilled employees against set criteria. Now, with increasing demands for training in the workplace, the role of the assessor is evolving to that of tutor.

### *Train to Gain*

A major channel of financial support, predominantly focused on WBL, is Train to Gain, which will see its funding rise to £900 M by 2010/11. Train to Gain is focused on workforce skills in the workplace: as such, its strategy<sup>21</sup> does not make any direct reference to the use of technology or any form of e-learning. The service offers full or partial funding for the take up of specific qualifications through colleges or training providers, plus Apprenticeship funding. The core mechanism is the network of Skills Brokers (to be passed to Business Link in 2009), who assess and advise businesses on training needs, funding and providers. Skills Brokers have the target of generating 30% of all learners in the Train to Gain service, with providers generating the balance. According to one contributor, the Skills Brokers offer employers the opportunity to take impartial, independent advice on skills and training provision and needs. However, it is not clear to what extent Skills Advisors are in a position to advise on e-learning including online and blended learning.

A significant change to the Train to Gain model for 2009/10 will see less emphasis on funded hours with the introduction of single rate funding which opens greater potential for online and blended learning.

Of interest, Train to Gain also undertakes to make a contribution towards covering wage costs of staff when they spend time away from work in training, but there is no reference to alternative learning approaches, such as e-learning, which would reduce time spent travelling to and from training centres, for instance.

### *Ufl / learndirect*

Ufl/learndirect is a significant learning provision channel to all sectors in Post-16, although in recent years, less so to FE. It has made some important inroads into making e-learning, including online and blended learning provision available in 15 prisons

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<sup>21</sup> Train to Gain: a Plan for Growth; LSC, 2007

(Powell, 2008, reports a total of 25 prisons have access to e-learning<sup>22</sup>) which, according to commentators, took almost two years to achieve because of the bureaucracy involved. In some cases, learndirect funded the installation of computer equipment and internet access through their core funding.

In another initiative, learndirect has teamed with BrightHouse<sup>23</sup>, a credit agency, where individuals who take out a loan agreement to fund their learndirect courses will have their first month's repayment paid by learndirect itself. According to a commentator, learndirect is encouraged to target people who cannot or will not, for various reasons, attend a college.

We include these small-scale (by comparison with the overall operating costs of learndirect, which have been estimated as being £145 M this year) yet important funding support initiatives here because these sorts of activities could well cease in 2011 when learndirect loses its core funding and must operate as a purely commercial entity. As one contributor comments, the current learndirect business model would not survive without core funding.

It is also worth noting that learndirect operates a tender process every two years for those providers who wish to become learndirect providers. They receive "hundreds" of applicants, but turn down some 80%. Amongst other reasons such as quality of provision, a primary decision factor is the size of the would-be provider: learndirect prefers to work with a small number of large providers than many smaller ones. In this case then, there is demand from the providers, but the supply (of learndirect provider contracts) is not sufficient to meet demand, placing a restriction on the provision of learndirect services.

## 5.6 Personal and Community Development Learning – where now?

Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL) has a budget of £210 million that is safeguarded until 2010. This budget includes funds for Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL), Family Learning and Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities. "PCDL is learning for personal development, cultural enrichment, intellectual or creative stimulation and for enjoyment. It is also learning developed with local residents and other learners to build the skills, knowledge and understanding for social and community action" (LSC, 2007: p26). Changes to the way PCDL is planned and funded are under discussion and local PCDL partnerships, formed in 2007, will play a key role. The LSC reaffirms the principle that this funding will be used for those who have benefitted least from the education system, or are in most financial need (LSC, 2006: p26). Online and blended learning are not under discussion in this context.

Current government initiatives are focussed on meeting priority Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets that direct public funding to raising the numbers of adults with first full level 2 qualifications and improving basic skills. Linford (2008) describes the

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<sup>22</sup> Powell, B (2008) *A best practice guide for learndirect centres in prisons* [online]. Sheffield:Ufi Ltd. [http://www.ufi.com/home/section1/6\\_projects/PrisonsPracticeGuide.pdf](http://www.ufi.com/home/section1/6_projects/PrisonsPracticeGuide.pdf) Accessed September 5<sup>th</sup> 2008

<sup>23</sup> [www.brighthouse.info](http://www.brighthouse.info)

new adult learner-responsive model (which excludes ASL) stating: “the adult model includes provision above Level 1 which neither contributes to, nor has the potential to contribute to, Government targets. This ‘developmental learning’ is being cut, year on year,” (p24). Projections show a decrease from £386 m in 2008/9 to £106m in 2010/11 (p18). The LSC adult learner-responsive model will be subject to the rules and regulations described above. Adult learning providers are also able to apply for Train to Gain.

Earlier this year, DIUS invited responses to a consultation document concerning Informal Adult Learning. This made substantial reference to the use of technology in learning. The Department have recently published their response to the 5,500 contributions they received and comment:

*“It is absolutely not the case that we want online learning to be the only option. But we do want to make sure that informal learning is not left behind in the technology stakes. The world is changing and technology is playing an increasingly significant role in our lives - we want informal adult learning to be leading the way rather than playing catch-up later. And technology can open the doors for the many adults who do not want, or are unable, to attend traditional venues. To widen participation we need to be more innovative in what we offer. There are many ways, as your responses suggest, that technology can support learning – through blending technology with taught learning to enhance the learning experience; as a first step into learning through a website; as a channel for sharing information and by offering opportunities for two-way communication via TV and mobile phone technology.”<sup>24</sup>*

## 5.7 Offender Learning and Skills

The LSC has responsibility for offender learning ‘encompassing learning within custodial and community settings’ (LSC, 2007: p28). Its intention is to continue to build on the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) and ensure that offenders have “(within the constraints of the criminal justice system) .. access to the entire range of provision which would be available to any other member of the community.” For offenders in the community, the guidance relating to mainstream provision applies, although there is recognition that additional funds are needed to address the basic skills needs of this group and some provision (£9.4m) is made for this. Existing OLASS contracts end in 2009. No information is currently publicly available regarding future funding beyond that date.

Learndirect provision in prisons will be affected by the changes described above.

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<sup>24</sup> DIUS, 2008 *Informal Adult Learning - DIUS response to the consultation*  
[http://www.adultlearningconsultation.org.uk/upload/file/DIUS\\_response\\_to\\_IAL\\_consultation.pdf](http://www.adultlearningconsultation.org.uk/upload/file/DIUS_response_to_IAL_consultation.pdf)

Accessed October 31<sup>st</sup> 2008

## 5.8 The Designated e-Learning Support Fund

*“Thus, e-learning should be seen as a developing and increasingly useful addition to the repertoire of learning and teaching provision at Post-16 levels..” (DELG Report, 2002: p 2)*

*“Lurching headlong into e-learning, driven more by sheer enthusiasm than clarity of purpose would...risk far more harm than good.” (DELG Report, 2002: p 2)*

As evidence of the confusion over funding, when asked about issues with e-learning and funding, one contributor comments that funding rules and regulations can discourage people from applying, while another emphasises the difficulty in identifying where to get funding. Similarly, another questions how people find out about all the available grants and funding opportunities, particularly when communications with the grass roots level of the sector are so difficult. It is quite clear that - in these comments - they are referring to the designated e-learning budget. How is this funding being used? Is it the case that this relatively small parcel of funding is the major incentive to the take up of online and blended learning, and is this the fund to which people look when considering an investment in this area? The designated e-learning funds have not included any initiative exclusively focussed on the development and delivery of online and blended learning, although a number of providers have utilised funding to do this.

The LSC has continued to fund e-learning in the Post-16 sector in the order of some £40 M plus each year, with around 25% of this allocated to the funding of JANET connections. Often, projects are operated through other agencies including the QIA, NIACE, CEL and ALP. Projects can range from small individual grants to enable a practitioner, for instance, to purchase technology, to funding of up to £0.5 M for a mobile learning initiative managed by a single consortium or provider.

### *How effective is this fund in supporting the take up of e-learning?*

But do these financial incentives work? In 2005/06, the LSC listed 33 technology related funded activities, each linked to an e-Learning Strategy priority<sup>25</sup>. Current initiatives include:

- The **Learning Innovation Grant**, operated by the ALP. This is a capital funding programme designed to embed effective use of e-learning and technology within WBL programmes. To date some £10 M in grants has been distributed to support around 300 projects. The present grant round introduces, for the first time, the requirement for bidders to make a financial contribution (6.9%). The part-contribution approach was originally brought in by the MoLeNET project (see below). Despite this, the programme has been **phenomenally over-subscribed** receiving a total of around £14 M worth of bids from 118 bidders competing for a grant total of £4M. One commentator criticises the LIG in that the outcomes and benefits are not clear and are not linked to employers' feedback and learners' actual performances. A similar scheme, Capital Motivating e-learning (CaMeL), targets Adult and Community Learning with, again, a

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<sup>25</sup> Harnessing Technology, DfES, 2005

**reported heavy over-subscription:** a total of £8 M of bids have been received in 2008 for a grant total of £3 M.

- The **Mobile Learning Network (MoLeNET)** has, according to one contributor, been overwhelmingly successful, with 32 projects funded in 2007/08. The LSC has made a further £4 M available for 2008/09. As with the LIG, applicants have to make a contribution, in this case, 20%. Although specifically aimed at FE, consortia can include other types of organisation. One of the research contributors comments that whilst MoLeNET has produced some evidence to support a positive impact on retention and completion rates, it is extremely difficult to disaggregate the effects of e-learning from other forms of teaching and learning. Another wonders to what extent the outcomes of a MoLeNET project will influence the day to day operations of their institution. A third commentator raises questions over the level of innovation being exemplified in the MoLeNET projects.

### *Other funding paradigms at work*

The **Practitioner Training Grant**, operated by the QIA, provides grants of up to £2,500 for practitioners to purchase equipment. These grants are attached to the take up of training programmes, such as Subject Learning Coaches, CEL leadership programmes and the E-Guides training programme. There is a limit to the number of grants any one organisation can claim. An example of this is the E-Guides training programme for practitioners which receives universal praise from commentators who had engaged in this. One contributor has stayed in touch with other participants in an E-Guides course by setting up their own Wiki to share practice and ideas.

The **CEL Leadership Toolkit** is another subsidised service which is seen as being widely successful, with the high level of take up suggesting that people are in need of support.

The **National Skills Academies**, while not directly incentivised to take up e-learning, have turned to technology in order to comply with the requirement to produce innovative bids for funding. As one commentator states, survival is a good incentive to take up technology!

The **QIA** has an e-learning workforce development strategy which relates to the wider FE sector, and which contains incentives which are grant-based. The funding model which the QIA is moving towards is based on grant-banding. This will see small grants of £1000 available for individuals, with larger grants for organisations. The primary commitment on the part of the grant-holder is to develop transferable outcomes, and undertake to share these. The need to make provision for best practice sharing is picked up by several contributors. There is, however, a question over the amount of overhead involved in bidding for small grants, although the QIA is concerned with reducing the administration burden as far as possible. QIA and CEL are now merged and form the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).

On promoting the take up of e-assessment, the QCA has taken the lead. Whilst the QCA policy on e-assessment refers to schools, it identifies e-assessment as the strongest tool to encourage e-learning, and that learners are motivated by e-assessment.<sup>26</sup> According to the QCA “Proposed Blueprint for delivering e-assessment”, by 2010 all new qualifications will include an onscreen assessment, awarding bodies will be set up to accept and assess e-Portfolios and there will be 10 new qualifications specifically designed for electronic delivery and assessment. In the available documentation, these are not specified.

It is also worth noting that the new Qualifications and Credit Framework recognises, for the first time, the high quality in-house training alongside academic and vocational qualifications. This allows employers to become awarding bodies in their own right: Network Rail, Flybe and McDonalds have all taken on this status. Whilst this makes no reference to e-learning per se, it is known that larger corporations tend to make high use of e-learning, as can be seen in the literature review.

## 5.9 Pulling the pieces together

*From the perspective of the designated e-learning Fund ...*

For the last few years, financial incentives have seen money pumped into the Post-16 sector under the guise of a variety of different initiatives. In the main, the use of such funds as an incentive has worked on the basis that the majority of these grants are heavily over-subscribed, even where the applicant has to make as much as 20% financial contribution. As a contributor from the LSC states - the LSC could spend its budget 10 times over based on the response to programme calls. Another way of looking at this would be to see this type of funding as an enabler and that the real incentive is the desire to use e-learning. We have seen repeatedly, both in literature and in commentary, that technology itself - and all that it affords - is the motivational factor.

As well as over-subscribed programme calls, the contributor also cites the fact that training courses run by CEL and NIACE are already full for this year (2008 - 09) as evidence that there “is no lack of appetite” and that “the response to e-learning is massive”. It should be noted that according to a commentator from NIACE, the E-Guides programme, which is now available across the whole of Post-16, has a relatively small number of places available. A new eCPD training programme, managed by LSIS and sub-contracted to BDP media group will be rolled out in 2009. One could indeed conclude from this evidence that:

- Financial incentives work - although one contributor comments that any e-learning programme with financial incentives is going to attract the “willing” and the “keen”.
- There is demand.
- There is supply - but it cannot meet demand and this is likely to be compounded when learndirect transforms into a commercial organisation.

It is a complex landscape in which aspiring beneficiaries of the funding grants have to know where to look, and be prepared to invest considerable time and effort into identifying and leveraging the most appropriate opportunity. And, as reported, there

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<sup>26</sup> QCA Leading the way in e-assessment, 6929 Factsheet

are no guarantees of success whether the bidder is a college seeking funding for an e-learning initiative or a training provider who wishes to become a learndirect provider.

If it is the case that financial incentives work in that they create far more demand than there is supply (of funding), this raises a fundamental question:

*How long can government continue to subsidise e-learning in this way? What is the exit strategy, and what are the indicators to show us when we have reached the door?*

*Where does core funding fit within this landscape?*

Clearly, the real progress with the take up of e-learning is being supported by the LSC's designated e-learning fund within the Post-16 sector. With the exception of the take up of VLEs and other specific technologies such as Interactive Whiteboards, we find little if any evidence of initiatives leading to the mainstream delivery of online and blended learning, such as the one at Sheffield College, being undertaken using core funding. It is possible that such initiatives are happening - they are just not being reported in the same way as projects such as MoLeNET are. Arguably, if online and blended learning is mainstream to an organisation's teaching and learning, then it is not likely to be reported. Projects, by their nature short term and focused on certain measurable outcomes, have perhaps set a certain expectation when it comes to showcasing e-learning.

While the e-learning fund is acting as an incentive to take up of online and blended learning, core funding is, arguably, not. The fundamental reason for this is that online and blended learning are not well defined within the LSC guidelines for funding, nor is there an agreed framework for the auditing process to be able to acknowledge their use in teaching and learning. As mentioned earlier, the situation with inspection and technology is in the early stages of being proactively and pragmatically addressed, but, none-the-less, has a long way to go.

## **6. Business Model case studies**

The following two business models case studies demonstrate how two organisations, one in FE and the other in WBL, have used core funding to offer online and blended learning provision.

### **6.1 Vision2Learn**

*The following business model case study is based on an interview with Jonathan Ovenden, Creating Careers.*

#### **Background and context**

Creating Careers develops and provides accredited e-learning courses - delivered by colleges as blended learning - for the Further Education sector through its brand name, Vision2learn. These consist of vocational qualifications aimed at learners aged 16 plus. The company has deliberately focused on learning that leads to vocational qualifications because these are eligible for government funding (i.e., LSC

funding). This means that the company can, in effect, advertise its courses as being “free”. On its website<sup>27</sup>, the company claims to be the UK’s leading company in this field, and the provider of the first and only complete, integrated and accredited e-learning service for the Further Education sector.

The business was formed in 1999 by a group of former Newcastle College staff members who had been responsible for operating the college’s paper-based distance learning offering. Originally, the model consisted of two other partners: a technology company which had developed an online learning environment, and the NCFE awarding body, who could also help with marketing the concept to colleges. Despite setting up in the middle of what became known as the “Dot.Com Crisis”, the directors were able to raise a small amount of investment funding, and the company was able to spend its first two years of operations writing and developing course content. Since then, Creating Careers has bought out the technology company in a bid to bring as much of the operation as possible in-house, and the organisation now works with several awarding bodies.

### **What were the drivers and incentives to create the online offering?**

The key drivers were an early recognition of the potential of the internet as a channel to deliver distance learning, and which would be “slicker” than a paper-based distance learning paradigm, coupled with the entrepreneurs’ understanding of the Further Education model.

### **What is the business model?**

The company offers a range of VRQ and NVQ courses leading to accreditation, as well as a range of e-learning courses designed to support the new Edexcel WorkSkills Employability Framework.

The model is actually quite simple. Creating Careers does not offer Vision2Learn courses directly to individual learners. Instead, Vision2Learn is offered to colleges who in turn can offer it to existing or new learners. The college pays a fee to Creating Careers for each learner who takes up one of their courses. The college is also responsible for providing tutor support to Vision2Learn learners, so this is not 100% e-learning solution, but rather a blended one.

In most cases, the process is that would-be learners register with the Vision2Learn website, then Creating Careers endeavour to match the learner with a college in their area. This is, in reality, the first part of a three-stage screening process. As well as identifying a suitable college provider, the learner is also screened to ensure that their job role and employment are a suitable match for the qualification they have registered interest in.

Assuming that a college host can be found, the learner is given an in depth telephone interview to ensure eligibility and that they have the support of their employer. The learner’s expectations and ability to devote sufficient time to the course are also assessed.

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<sup>27</sup> [www.vision2learn.com](http://www.vision2learn.com)

Once a learner is assigned to an appropriate college, a college assessor will visit the learner in their workplace for a final assessment prior to formalising the enrolment and enabling the learner to begin the online course.

Another version of this model would be where, for instance, Creating Careers identifies a number of learners through their website registration system and can approach an existing or new college with what is, in effect, a ready made class.

When a new college signs up to take Vision2Learn, tutors are given a half-day training in how to use the learning platform, with some consideration given on to how to meet audit requirements and support on quality issues. Whilst the responsibility for meeting auditing requirements belongs with the college, Creating Careers makes a point of sharing best practice, as well as providing colleges with documentation to help with the management of the funding audit trail, such as tutor logs used to record guided learning hours spent with students. Another example is where the company provided colleges with compliance guidance in respect of the Train to Gain “15 hour” rule which had been causing some difficulty for some colleges.

### **What are the barriers?**

According to Creating Careers, there is a commonly held perception that, with online learning, retention and achievement rates will be low. The company’s position is that this is simply not the case where the e-learning provision is of a high quality standard and is well managed. A vital component in this is the provision of good quality online tutoring. Creating Careers sees their relationship with colleges as a partnership, and, accordingly, puts much effort into working with colleges to ensure that high standards are maintained, and that the “popular myth” about e-learning’s poor results is seen as just that - a myth.

There is not always a college available to match with a learner who has registered interest. For example, at present only 6 colleges offer the Vision2Learn VRQ courses, and this is mainly because the LSC has cut funding for adult learning with VRQs in favour of NVQs. Also, the funding rules for eligibility are “difficult”, and many find that they are not eligible for funding. Creating Careers claims to receive some 160,000 applications each year, but actually make provision for only 12,000 learners mainly because of funding limitations and lack of colleges.

It is also true that many applicants drop out during the initial screening process. Colleges are very much target driven, which is likely to influence this process in terms of who is accepted on a course or not.

Of note, the LSC’s decision to clamp down on the use of the franchising model within colleges led to many colleges dropping their Vision2Learn contracts.

### **What are the key benefits for teachers and learners?**

In addition to those benefits widely associated with online and blended learning (e.g., learn anywhere, anytime, higher retention rates etc.), Creating Careers notes that this is a cost effective model. For instance, where traditional methods are used, an NVQ assessor might expect to have to pay up to 20 site visits to each learner

in their workplace. With Vision2Learn, that is reduced to between 3 and 5 site visits. This has a particular impact on those learners with “difficult to reach” workplaces such as an oil rig worker, for example. It is also likely that the employer benefits through having less disruption in the workplace. A reduction in the number of required site visits also saves on travel and brings “green benefits”.

### **Does supply meet demand?**

At present, supply - in terms of funding eligibility, colleges willing to take on the offering and assessors capable of delivering it - does not meet demand. According to Creating Careers, if they have received 160,000 would-be registrants each year, then in the last 4 years alone, there would have been 640,000 new qualifications gained if all applicants had proven eligible for funding, or been able to be matched to a college, compared with the 48,000 that are estimated to have been awarded. These figures are presented here as an illustration and are not intended to represent an accurate picture. It is unlikely that the LSC would have sanctioned funding for that number of learners! However, it does illustrate the level of interest and demand from the WBL sector in the convenience of e-learning based courses.

### **Is the model transferable?**

The model is transferable in that it represents a ready made e-learning provision that can be taken up by colleges without the need for any investment outlay.

## **6.2 Sheffield College**

*The following business model case study is based on an interview with the e-Communications Manager, Julie Hooper and the Business Strategy and Partnerships Manager, Peter Harrison which took place on October 17th 2008.*

### **Background and Context**

Sheffield College has over ten years of experience in delivering online learning. In 2007, the Online College was established, and now a range of tutor training and accredited courses for learners are offered, including two GCSEs (English and Psychology), an A-level and a Foundation degree in eCommunications.

There are two strands of activity. The eProfessional strand includes Learning to Teach Online (LeTTOL), which has been running since 1997 and is accredited by the Open College Network. Other tutor training courses include E-Tutor, The Effective Mentor’s toolkit, Net Trainers, and Getting to Grips with Moodle, a short course offered at full cost recovery.

The second strand includes English GCSE, Psychology GCSE, English AS and English A2. The eCommunications foundation degree straddles the two strands and there is an online International English Language Testing System (IELTS) preparation course. The GCSE course developed from, and adheres to the pedagogy taught in LeTTOL.

The courses are part LSC funded and are fee-bearing; development costs were often supplemented by external funding (European Social Fund, JISC, South Yorkshire

Learning partnership) and contract work. The college has committed its own resources throughout the development. Since 2006, the courses have been running without any significant long term delivery contract.

### **What is the business model?**

The business model is fundamentally the same as all colleges in that funding is drawn down from both the LSC and HEFCE and fees are charged to learners. It is more expensive, 'by a significant degree', to develop e-learning courses; however, there are costs which do not apply to online courses such as overheads for buildings and use of physical facilities, such as the refectory.

Online delivery is efficient in the use of teaching time as it is more flexible. In face-to-face delivery, a teacher is tied to the timetable hours regardless of how many learners are in attendance. Online, resources can be more easily directed to where they are needed. Some savings gained are hard to quantify, but overall, a larger number of learners can be accommodated with a smaller physical resource and a consequent reduction in the required size of the estate.

It is 'cost neutral', and the benefits to the college are immense. Primarily, it has enabled widening participation, but it has also benefitted the wider college community in terms of ILT development for face-to-face students and staff.

The development pathway was from online courses to the blended offer which has now greatly influenced the face-to-face classroom. The blended approach reaches all GCSE programmes and all vocational areas although it has been less successful in some fields than others, for instance numeracy and Maths.

### **What were the drivers and incentives to create the online offering?**

The primary driver was widening participation. However, a specific set of circumstances led to the initial online development of GCSE English when in 1998, changes were made to the syllabus which caused a higher drop-out rate. Coinciding with other developments in staff training in online learning, it was suggested that placing resources on the internet and using email to communicate with learners might address the poor retention issue.

There was an immediate example of success for a learner who worked away and could only attend face-to-face intermittently; the online method enabled this learner to achieve the qualification. Some doubts remained regarding access to the courses as a significant number of learners did not have access to computers or connectivity at home but evaluation undertaken by Sheffield University in 2002 found consistent evidence of access by hard-to-reach learners. This prompted a drive to seek further external funding and develop the offer more widely.

Courses are monitored for evidence of widening participation. One blind student took the course and was able to study Shakespeare through the use of sound files, enabling control over the text. Evidence shows emerging themes amongst the learners attracted to the course; approximately 25 -30% of learners declare disabilities and/or requirements for additional support. Within this group there are a significant number of people with ME.

A significant number of learners progress from a Level 2 course onto a Level 5 course, perhaps because online is the only medium of study available to them, or

perhaps they remain on online courses because the quality of the learner experience is very high. Retention rates are equivalent to national benchmarks, but achievement is always higher.

Ofsted inspections have reported the college offer favourably although it has sometimes been necessary to demonstrate the e-learning components.

### **What are/were the barriers to take up?**

The main barrier was the initial layout costs.

*“There doesn’t seem to be any incentive, in fact there’s no incentive for online delivery - a GCSE online student doesn’t generate any more income or equipment. Some incentive would make all the difference.”*

There has been considerable national investment in the development of online learning objects, but not on whole course development.

### **Do practitioners want to use technology?**

All of the staff of the Online college has been trained in online learning (LeTTOL) so they are enthusiastic and committed, and success motivates staff to get involved.

Many college staff across the country has undertaken the LeTTOL course and the kind of development that has taken place at Sheffield is replicable in terms of staff skills development at any other college. However, because the course was ‘home-grown’, the staff may have found this professional development pathway more the ‘norm’ than elsewhere.

### **What are the incentives that motivate other schools to subscribe?**

The team have developed courses for others, in particular the blended GCSE English. The DfES supported this development so that Sheffield could present the resources for use in other colleges. Also, some schools in South Yorkshire have taken up the model and recently, in Sheffield, where the local authority has covered the college’s costs. The college sees this as part of a collaborative partnership which enables learners to achieve GCSE at school, then progress to further courses at the college.

The course is presented as a CD ROM of materials and schools use it in different ways; for instance, one school has put it onto their VLE. This model has worked because people are attracted to hard copy, which attracts practitioners and providers. The learners like the electronic materials and the fact that they can access them as e-books. It takes one to two years before the electronic resource is fully adopted. College staff trains others in how to use a blended learning environment - a mixture of group work, and individual work on the computer or using the workbooks. The resources provide the school with everything they need, including training and sample activities.

This model provides maximum choice, and thus empowerment, for learners who can move from electronic to hard copy as and when they need to. The course enables them to learn typing and practise handwriting as well. The teacher can change method in mid- class, moving from group activity to individual computer use which gives them great flexibility. Teachers find that some students prefer the privacy of

individual work on a computer; some students are embarrassed by their hand writing so prefer on-screen work.

### **What are/were the chief success factors?**

One success factor is support from the senior management team including the Chief Executive and the Finance department.

Within the department, there has been a very strong team ethos. Regular meetings take place to discuss individual students' work, leading to a strong sense of personalisation for each learner. The team demand very high standards of themselves and the rewards are a high degree of satisfaction and opportunities to 'do something creative'. Stability has been a success factor in the English courses - or conversely, the success of online delivery has led to the stability of the team.

A further significant factor is that the medium of reading and writing is the delivery method for courses which test and assess reading and writing. Even keeping in touch with the teacher requires the learner to engage in reading and writing.

The role of the Business and Strategic Partnerships Manager was singled out as a factor for success. 'Seeking and gaining external resources has enabled the development to continue.' There is a need to take risks as it takes one to two years to see the fruition of new development.

External funding secured infrastructure and enabled appointments to development posts. It also enabled staff to be released from teaching to contribute to course development.

There has been a strategic plan for developing the online offer which has been implemented since 2001 and led to a pathway of blended learning from Entry 2 to Level 5.

### **Is the model transferable?**

Although there were perhaps a unique set of circumstances that led to success in online and blended learning, it is believed that this is replicable as long as some support is offered in the early stages when the costs seem high.

*"There's no reason why any college could not achieve the same."*

The LeTTOL course is undertaken by teachers across the country so similar staff development can take place in any college.

What is required is a funded knowledge transfer process. The College is currently carrying out that process with schools and it is working despite having few resources. This could be expanded with some investment.

The online offer is successful with learners at Level 2 and above because of the learner independence required. Digital and media literacy skills are needed on top of basic IT skills. The team has been willing to try the approach with learners at Level 1 and below, but it is difficult for learners who are neither confident readers nor problem solvers - if they found themselves at home with a technical problem they may be inclined to blame themselves. This is consistent with the research findings presented in our literature reviews.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the evidence, the following recommendations are offered. (References to relevant page numbers are shown in brackets):

- 7.1.1 Whilst it is important to reach a point where online and blended learning is such an embedded part of teaching and learning that it does not need its own definition, the aim of increasing the incentives for organisations to take this up requires clarity of definition including clear and detailed funding guidance. This will enable organisations to assess the values and benefits that online and blended learning can realise in terms of funded outcomes, and in turn develop local strategies for incentivising practitioners and learners. (Pages 11, 15,19,24,27,29,30-32,36,39)
- 7.1.2 The funding system needs to be more flexible to enable providers to benefit from the potential economies of scale presented by online and blended learning. There needs to be a recognition that online and blended learning can be supported with core funding and thus be part of the mainstream provision, and this will go some way towards addressing issues around the support and maintenance of technology. If it is government policy that all adults in the Post-16 sector should have access and opportunity to acquire new qualifications and skills, the existing system needs to have the ability and flexibility to be able to increase its provision. Online and blended learning represent one practical method of achieving this. The emphasis now is on a demand-led sector, with learner choice at the forefront. (Pages as above)
- 7.1.3 Tied to this, there is a strong need for a clear business case for online and blended learning to be developed and publicised widely, targeted at senior management within provider organisations. Becta already has some work in this area underway. (Pages 15,16,17,26,27)
- 7.1.4 Auditors should be given formal training in the application of funding guidelines to online and blended learning and particularly in the use of systems such as Virtual Learning Environments to extract and analyse data in support of provision and outcomes in accordance with an organisation's Funding Agreement. To some extent, this is already in hand. (Pages 30,31,39)
- 7.1.5 More research and guidance (including good practice exemplars) is needed on providers' use of technology systems to monitor and track learners' performance, and to make the link between this and auditing. (Pages 12-13, 17,19,31)
- 7.1.6 Variable levels in practitioner skills with e-learning should be addressed: this is key enabler to embedding online and blended learning in practice. In particular, it is recommended that consideration is given to including the pedagogic-based practice of online and blended learning in teaching and learning as mandatory within continuing professional development. It is not

enough to provide courses in how to use technology: practitioners must be helped to see, understand, apply and evolve the pedagogic practice of online and blended learning. It is also recommended that programmes which evidence shows to be successful in motivating practitioners in the take up of online and blended learning, such as the E-Guides, should be extended. (Pages 11,12,16,19,20,21,26,27,33)

7.1.7 An Innovation Fund should be established for e-learning, separate from core funding and distinct from the LSC's e-learning support fund, to enable practitioners to continue to assess new methods of using technology in teaching and learning and keep up-to-date with technological change. (Pages as above)

7.1.8 A cross-sector team of practising staff managing and delivering online and blended learning should be gathered to transfer their knowledge of good practice into a short knowledge transfer training programme for middle management and above to maximise existing good practice. The training should then be delivered through a variety of methods, including online seminars and workshops, perhaps by sector based teams who understand the application of the training programme within their own sector. This should dovetail with existing programmes and initiatives. It is also recommended that programmes which evidence shows to be successful in motivating practitioners in the take up of online and blended learning, such as e-Guides, should be extended. (Page 44)

7.1.9 There is limited evidence that learners and practitioners at pre-Level 1 and Level 1 are engaging in online and blended learning activities. It is therefore recommended that a pilot project be undertaken to assess the values and benefits that online and blended learning can particularly afford for these groups, with the aim of producing evidence and practice that can be used to incentivise others. (Pages 20,25)

7.1.10 Finally, it is very apparent from the research that senior management within organisations have a critical role in determining the take up of online and blended learning. Without their endorsement, support and buy in, none of the recommendations made here are likely to have much impact. Consequently we recommend that a programme be established for senior managers to provide e-learning business and management training, and that a focused network be set up to enable managers to communicate and share practice, between institutions and between sectors. (Pages 13,14,18,24,27)

# Further Education: Literature Review Final Report

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### Introduction and context

The Further Education sector in England is a diverse one comprising General Further Education Colleges, Sixth Form Colleges, Specialist Colleges and Local Education Authority funded independent institutions. In 2004/06 (the most recent period for which statistics are publicly available) some 6 million learners, including adult learners, were enrolled, with General Further Education and Tertiary Colleges providing for 3.4 million students. This represents a 50% increase on students numbers recorded for 1997/98. Students aged over 19 years in part time education constitute the largest population in FE institutions at 74% of the total, with students under 19 in full-time education making up 13% of the whole.<sup>28</sup> The adult learning and teaching community is therefore a vital one within the Further Education sector.

The DfES Reform White Paper of 2006<sup>29</sup> set the defining purpose for FE as being: “to equip young people and adults with the skills, competencies and qualifications that employers want, and which will prepare them for productive, rewarding, high-value employment in a modern economy” (p5). The White Paper, coming in the wake of the Leitch Report on Skills (2006) and the independent review of the future role of FE Colleges by Sir Andrew Foster in 2005, represents both a call to accelerated action and a pathway to sweeping reform. The three principle themes for reform are:

- Institutional - colleges must develop one or more areas of specialist excellence and develop closer links with Higher Education, plus a sweeping change to funding arrangements;
- Workforce - the introduction of Continuous Professional Development for practitioners, with new College Principals required to gain a new Leadership qualification;
- Learner - the introduction of new entitlements for young people up to Level 3.

The DIUS Models for Success (2008) summarises expectations for the future landscape of FE institutions and providers with the primary emphasis on achieving a considerable expansion of capacity and provision to meet growing demand. This increase in demand is being fuelled by the expansion in Apprenticeship places (up from 250,000 per annum to 500,000), the rise in participation age, an increase in the delivery of Higher Education within the FE environment and an increase in Train to Gain. Whilst ensuring that choice

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<sup>28</sup> Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chance – Technical supplement to the White Paper, DfES.

<sup>29</sup> Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances (2006), DfES

and quality remain core, colleges are expected to review their structures and capacities to ensure that they are ready for the market expansion. “Collaboration is necessary in order to deliver the FE strategy and to meet the demands of a changing environment” (DIUS, 2008: p 19). The policy stresses the need for collaboration not only to build capacity, but also to change delivery methods to better meet demand and to **deploy technology more effectively**.

An interesting yet very practical reform highlighted by “Models for Success” is the “Power to Innovate” provision. Under the 2006 Education and Inspections Act, colleges may be empowered to take an innovative approach that might otherwise be held back by educational legislation.

Flowing from the FE Reform White Paper, the QIA’s Quality Improvement Strategy<sup>30</sup> has the aim of ensuring equal access to high quality education and training, and promoting an environment in which the FE system continuously improves and aspires to excellence. An interesting point to note is that all of the improvements in FE outcomes mentioned on page 6 of this document were achieved *before* the QIA’s Strategy and the DfES White Paper. The strategy sets out the principles by which continuous improvement can be assured: embedding self-improvement, sharing effective practice, developing effective partnerships and increasing coherence.

Clearly, changing organisational structure, collaborating and introducing CPD are not going to be enough to enable colleges to meet the anticipated boom in FE demand. Colleges are already operating at near capacity<sup>31</sup>. This is why Becta’s Technology strategy<sup>32</sup> for the sector is both timely and vital: “Technology has the potential to transform Further Education in practically every dimension” (p 8). This strategy sees technology as the enabler, not just an “add on”, and calls for investment in building capacity and capability as well as a sector wide digital infrastructure, setting out the case for using technology effectively in order to leverage the potential for benefit.

There is a plethora of initiatives targeted at FE, including:

- NLN Content
- E-Guides
- ITQ
- Excellence Gateway
- National Teaching and Learning Exchange
- CEL programmes
- JISC programmes
- Technology Exemplar Network.

The present research seeks to identify and explore incentives in e-learning and blended learning, basing our research questions around eight themes: barriers, funding, attitude

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<sup>30</sup> Pursuing Excellence: the National Improvement Strategy for the further education system, QIA, 2007

<sup>31</sup> Measuring e-Maturity in the Further Education Sector”, LSN, 2008

<sup>32</sup> Technology Strategy for Further Education, Skills and Regeneration: implementation plan for 2008 - 2011

and behaviour, skills, evidence, exemplars, supply v. demand and innovation in technology.

The research used two cornerstone surveys - one from 2006 and one from 2008 - to provide a snapshot of development across time during the period when it could have been expected that these policies and strategies started to have impact. A number of case studies of innovation and best practice provide windows on pockets of intense activity and achievement. Reports and papers from the UK and beyond provide context, colour and dimension. Our research took 2006 as the cut off year for literature, but kept options open to reach back to 2005 for significant papers or surveys.

In the main, the quality of the literature is good, but produced a dearth of information specifically about incentives to take up e-learning. Also, apart from surveys and case studies, there is also surprisingly little focused purely on FE. Consequently, a significant amount of our evidence is derived from Higher Education.

The following sections present the findings from the literature for each thematic question.

### **Barriers**

According to a recent survey by the European Commission, while the Nordic countries and the UK took an “early lead” in the adoption of ICT in education, its impact on education and training has not risen to expectations, despite “wide political and social endorsement,” (European Commission, 2008: p. 4).

Using the two surveys as a benchmark, we begin by considering the barriers and enablers which might prevent or facilitate the use of effective e-learning and blended learning within the sector. The 2006 Survey used a self-report questionnaire method and attracted 2,295 participants representing some 90% of the FE and Sixth Form institutions in England. Notably, only 109 participants made online responses (Goldern, McCrone, Walker & Rudd, 2006). The 2008 survey also used self-report methods as well as a review of the literature (LSN, 2008). Participants responding online and by post included 104 providers and 775 practitioners. Telephone interviews were also undertaken with 38 providers and 18 practitioners. The latter is therefore based on a much smaller sample than the earlier survey. Table 1, included at the end of this paper, summaries the barriers and enablers extracted from the data, and offers a comparison between the two periods.

Note that the terminology used in the tabulated summaries is taken from the surveys themselves. So, for instance, the 2006 survey uses the term “e-learning” to mean what we would now refer to as “ICT”.

It is quite clear from a comparison of these two surveys that, in the space of some two years, the barrier relating to lack of access to ICT equipment has been eroded considerably albeit not entirely removed. Added to this, however, are apparent bandwidth restrictions with almost 2 in 5 participants stating that media rich files are not encouraged on the network (LSN, 2008). In addition, out of hours access remains severely restricted with only one computer available for 27 students on average (LSN). Whilst the current provision for full-time students satisfies the government target for computer student ratio (1:5), the 2008 findings suggests that this target is inadequate. It is not clear from the survey why the ratio for part-time evening students (by far the largest percentage of FE provision users) is so poor. There is a particular concern over

lack of adequate technical support for specialised technology. Perhaps the most urgent finding is that almost 100% of institutions surveyed in 2008 have operational capacities that are sufficient or insufficient to meet the demands of teaching and learning, suggesting that there is limited spare capacity for growth. The LSN warns that if greater capacity is not developed - particularly wireless networking - this situation will constrain the growth of personalised and remote learning. This also raises consequences in terms of meeting the requirements of the reform agenda.

The ICT and e-learning skills levels of practitioners also appear to have witnessed an improvement, although the majority use of technology still lies in the domain of planning and preparation for lessons, rather than being used in the facilitation and management of personalised learning, collaboration and communications with learners. In fact, the LSN found there is no single clear understanding of “personalisation” amongst practitioners. The volume provision of technology training has improved, yet take up of training in what could be considered to be the more innovative aspects of technology remains low. Skills levels amongst learners are also reasonable with more than 80% considered to be at intermediate or advanced level.

Despite the steady increase, year on year, in the adoption of VLEs reported by the LSN, their use remains limited to storing and downloading documents. Whilst some innovative providers are using technology to deliver improved services, widening their offering and access, the available ICT and e-learning resources “are probably not being used to their full potential” (LSN, 2008: p 31). For instance, the LSN found that more than half (58%) of practitioners facilitate forums for some or all courses, 42% only did so for a few or none at all. Only around 65% of practitioners believe that the VLE is widely or extensively used. In their *Designing for Blended Learning* paper, Falconer and Littlejohn (2007) found that “..despite substantial recent institutional investment in trying to exploit such technologies in learning there is little sign that education has changed in any fundamental way at the level of teacher practice” (p 42). Cooke and Greenwood (2007) also conclude that variability in ICT skills in practitioners “...impedes the ability of institutions to implement innovative methods of learning and teaching or to take full advantage of their Virtual Learning Environment” (p 51). Glover, Miller, Averis and Door (2005) cite an earlier study from 2000 which concluded that using technology as a “bolt on” results in a failure to match teaching with the learning needs of students. They also emphasise that many studies have demonstrated that the appropriate use of technology results in improved presentation and motivated students: “Case study evidence points to the specific gains from enhanced presentation and the enhancement of pupil motivation,” (p 165).

Change - or resistance to change - is the dominant barrier to the effective use of e-learning and blended learning. Connolly and colleagues argue that “If tutors remain rooted in a teacher-centred pedagogy they will not be making full use of the interactive facilities in the virtual learning environment” (Connolly, Jones & Jones, 2007: p 54). The LSN (2008) argues that variation in the take up of ICT and e-learning between curriculum areas could well be influenced by staff skills, and most importantly, their willingness to change.

Condie and Livingston (2007), in their review of the evaluation of the SCHOLAR project in Scotland, posit that the key question is the extent to which teachers must change their practice or adapt new ones “in order to maximise the potential of the new technologies to support learning and teaching” (p 338). It should be noted that the Condie *et al* paper is based on data collected between 2001-03. Despite this, there are

strong parallels with the findings reported in the LSN (2008) survey. Teachers taking part in the SCHOLAR pilot project were reportedly completely unaware that 56% of students accessed the online learning materials from home. This might explain why more than half of the teachers (56%) did not believe that the SCHOLAR programme had impacted on learning, despite an SQA validated finding that SCHOLAR students showed superior performance in national certification exams! Indeed, most teachers did not access the online features of the project, and showed limited awareness of the student progress tracking feature. Most teachers did not see the necessity of changing their teaching strategy - in other words, they stayed within their “comfort zone” - and “(M)any were unconvinced that the time spent in familiarising themselves with the various elements of SCHOLAR would pay off..” (p 343).

The changing role of the teacher, as a consequence of technology, is a trigger for change resistance. Condie and colleagues found evidence of a reluctance on the part of teachers to “relinquish the role of expert transmitter of knowledge”, (Condie & Livingston, 2007: p 343). Schulmeister (2007), in his review of e-learning in the USA, reports a view that the application of technology in colleges has not led to any changes in teaching practice or in the tutor-student interface, concluding that technology has just been “bolted on” to traditional practices. Connolly, Jones and Jones (2007) argue that “e-learning clearly creates new roles for teachers such as e-authoring and e-moderating” (p44) and it is this latter role which their pilot e-learning project found to hold the greatest challenges for teachers. They found that managing discussion forums was an issue for both tutors and students, and “(I)t was clear that FE tutors saw tutoring online to be on the margins of their overall teaching activities,” (p 53). Wang (2007), in his study of cultural orientation effects on students’ online learning perceptions, found “many students experienced difficulties in freely expressing themselves (on boards) because of insufficient instructor facilitation..” (p 304). Schulmeister concluded that the lack of participation in online communications led to de-motivation of both students and tutors.

Others have found that students have the impression that learning technologies are being used as a tutor substitute, with some students reporting that their tutor does not use the VLE at all (Deepwell & Malik, 2008). Perhaps as a consequence, Deepwell and colleagues’ investigation of Higher Education students’ experience of learning technologies found that students preferred face to face feedback over online feedback.

A secondary thematic barrier is centred around time, particularly time for training in technologies. The LSN 2008 survey found that time to train continues to be an issue, and that training is not always seen by practitioners and providers as the most effective approach in any event. The LSN survey does, however, speculate that perhaps this perception of a lack of time to train masks a lack of confidence. Connelly and colleagues also found that demands on time for both tutors and students was a constant issue (Connolly, Jones & Jones, 2007), while Cooke and Greenwood (2007), in their research into FE staff access to ICT, concluded that it often proved difficult to get staff released from essential duties to take part in training, and that this was particularly the case for part-time staff. As Salmon (no date) points out, there is also the issue of ensuring that practitioners have the time and opportunity to keep their skills up to date, and to regain confidence.

Lack of confidence is a third thematic barrier, as the LSN survey results hint. LSN (2008) also suggest that staff's lack of confidence may be behind the limited use of VLEs to managing workload and preparing for lessons. Salmon (no date) reports that many Higher Education teachers perceive ICT as worrying, risky or "wild" when used in a learning and teaching environment. This is an issue touched on by Balanskat, Blamire and Kefala (2006) in their review of the impact of ICT throughout Europe, where they suggest that there is a "nervousness" about using new methods - will they lead to the same results in national exams? Condie and Livingston (2007), in their review of the SCHOLAR evaluation, point specifically to a lack of confidence on the part of teachers in technical aspects of ICT, while Connolly *et al* blame a lack of confidence on the reluctance of students to use discussion boards, warning that "apprehension about posting online should not be underestimated" (Connolly, Jones & Jones, 2007: p 51).

Finally, there is the issue of scepticism. Condie and Livingston (2007) report scepticism concerning the benefits of e-learning amongst SCHOLAR teachers, concluding that because ICT and e-learning represents a fundamental challenge to the identity of both teacher and student, this can be an uncomfortable experience. They also note that reluctance and scepticism are compounded by a lack of evidence that ICT and e-learning enhance learning. Deepwell *et al* also report that "...there is still uncertainty (in the HE community) over the impact of the introduction of technologies.." (Deepwell & Malik, 2008: p 7). There is, however, less evidence of scepticism than can be found amongst, for instance, the Work Based Learning sector.

In summary, the principle barriers to the effective take up of technologies for learning and teaching can be grouped as:

- access to technology;
- resistance to change and a reluctance to tread into the new pedagogical territory created by technology;
- time to learn and put new skills into practice;
- lack of confidence;
- and a relatively muted level of scepticism mainly based around technology's efficacy to deliver, particularly in a high stakes exam environment.

None of these barriers are insurmountable, and the literature is relatively consistent in these findings.

## **Funding**

There is very little indeed in the literature on the subject of institutional funding implications for e-learning. The LSN (2008) reports a general attitude that strategies for e-learning need senior management support and adequate funding, which strikes a parallel with the findings in the literature review of the Work Based Learning sector.

With respect to VLEs, the LSN speculates that Moodle, being free open source software, has acted as an impetus to some providers to acquire a VLE. Although free, it is still software that must be maintained and supported, so there is still a cost.

In their survey of FE, ACL and Work Based Learning sectors, Bell, Gulatic and Hooker (2006) found that 25% of participants believe that if e-learning is necessary, it should be centrally funded by Government. One commentator argued that there is not enough

money coming into colleges to allow choice, and that many senior managers are not convinced of e-learning's benefits.

By contrast, the JISC-ALT-HEA's (2008) recent report claims that tangible positive benefits of e-learning can be seen in learning, exam results, student personal development, staff satisfaction, and that it has positive influence on retention of both staff and learners. One practical example given is the use of e-assessment to automate the marking process, which can lead to considerable cost savings. However, the key statement - bearing in mind the pressure on institutions to recruit students, retain them, ensure they complete the course and ensure that they achieve success - would surely be this: "...it is very evident that the appropriate use of technology is having a significant impact in terms of improving the quality of UK education," (p 13).

In its 2002 report to the LSC, the Distributed and Electronic Learning Group made reference to the variety within the Post-16 sector and that it would be difficult to accommodate for all parts of the sector within one single funding framework. The report recommended that funding methodology should not distinguish between distributed and electronic learning and other methods of learning delivery, but should rather be focused on learning outcomes to provide for an even playing field.

The fact that there is so little in the literature concerning funding could be taken as an indication that funding is not an issue. Or, indeed, it could mean the opposite. However, this is a gap in the review that is explored through subsequent interview.

### **Attitudes and Behaviour**

The present review investigated practitioner and learner perceptions and responses to e-learning and blended learning. The 2008 survey found a general belief in the benefits of ICT and e-learning, but that these are not being fully realised. Specifically, providers acknowledge that a particular benefit afforded by VLEs is their ability to facilitate out of hours and remote access. Moreover, there is a perception that ICT and e-learning:

- Provide a useful support tool
- Help students to learn more effectively, and to secure improved learner outcomes
- Meet learner needs more effectively, enabling a personalised support provision

The findings of the 2008 survey are consistent with those of the earlier survey. This latter also notes that a positive attitude is associated with having access to and support for e-learning (Golden, McCrone, Walker & Rudd, 2006). According to Golden *et al.* 80% of practitioners believe that e-learning has the potential to stimulate better understanding, increase flexibility in provision and equip learners more effectively for employment. With such a strong positive attitude and belief in e-learning reported in 2006, one must pause to wonder why learning technologies are not more embedded than they are currently. While there is a small increase in "late adopters" compared to "ambivalent", the proportion of e-enabled institutions remains the same as it was in 2006 (LSN, 2008). Golden *et al.* also confirm the correlation of practitioner confidence with e-learning and attitudes.

In their pilot e-learning project, Connolly, Jones and Jones (2007) found that tutors generally welcomed the opportunity to get involved in an innovative project, and to learn new skills, even though a number of tutors later said that e-learning had proved far more difficult than expected. Conversely, Condie and Livingston (2007) noted that some tutors taking part in the SCHOLAR pilot were so sceptical that they did not even encourage their students to use the online SCHOLAR materials, relying on text books instead.

Expectations and preferences affect perception and attitude. In his study of Higher Education students in the USA, China and South Korea, Wang (2007) found that asynchronous tools were much preferred (82%) over synchronous tools (65%). Affecting factors included technical difficulties, poor audio quality and the necessity of having to go online at specific times. His survey also concluded that students had a dislike for linking discussion posts to grades, but that the public nature of forums was, in any event, an inhibiting factor for students. Rather oddly, his research found that students preferred to do individual assignments rather than teamwork, which participants found to be too time consuming. This slightly flies in the face of what is believed to be good pedagogy in technology supported learning - the importance of collaborative learning.

By contrast, another study of Higher Education students' experiences and perceptions - this time in the UK - found that a small majority (56%) of students wanted to do more collaborative work, with a larger majority (71%) wanting to engage in more online discussion (Deepwell & Malik, 2008). The research found a very positive attitude to technologies in education, with 80% of the 237 participants considering them to be important to learning, and 64% stating that learning technologies have positive effects on students' attitudes towards learning independently. Students saw learning technologies as being of most use in developing creative thinking, which is an essential skill in higher education.

Despite these positive findings, however, there is still a perception that learners are unwilling to accept a completely online course. Deepwell and Malik (2008) found that slightly under half (45%) of students in their study placed greater value on face to face learning, which is a point underlined by Salmon (no date) when she argues that learners do not want to be without what she terms "human supporters".

LSN (2008) makes the point that electronic communications, for instance, are becoming the norm: 50% of participants in their survey use email to communicate between tutors and learners, an increase of 200% on 2006 figures.

"..the teacher is the ultimate key to educational change," (Hargreaves, 1992: as cited in Condie and Livingston, 2007: p 343). The attitude is generally and widely positive towards technologies in learning, but behaviour is slow to change, with some 95% of providers stating that lack of time for training prevents the effective use of ICT and e-learning (LSN, 2008).

## **Skills**

The review explored the skills needed by practitioners and learners in order to leverage the most benefit from e-learning and blended learning, and to gain insight into current skills levels together with training provision.

LSN (2008) reports a variation in practitioner skills levels with ICT and e-learning, with part-time staff being most likely to rate their skills as being low. More than 50% of practitioners consider themselves to be at an intermediate skills level with ICT in general, but less than 50% consider themselves to be at this level when it comes to using ICT with learners. Less than 30% of practitioners consider their skills to be advanced in the use of ICT in the classroom. This could explain the restricted use of ICT to managing workload and lesson preparation (LSN; see also Balanksat, Blamire & Kefala, 2006)

Affecting factors include issues over time to train. Since September 2007, practitioners in FE are required to log 30 hours of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) each year with the Institute of Learning (LSN, 2008). One question is over whether training in ICT and e-learning skills could be incorporated into CPD. There certainly appears to be no shortage of training courses on offer for practitioners, with 97% of those surveyed by the LSN offering training in general ICT skills, but less than 80% offering courses in topics such as “Teaching and facilitating online”. With respect to this latter course, only one-third of practitioners surveyed had taken this type of course, and a further 20% were unaware that it existed. In fact, more than 4 in 10 practitioners were unaware of training provision as a whole, and a further 27% believe that there is insufficient training on offer. Glover, Miller, Averis and Door (2005) note that while training, access and support are all problematic areas, a positive approach to these results in longer-term gains as teachers gain confidence with technology.

Salmon (no date) argues that influencing teaching practice (in HE) to include best ICT practice needs careful consideration that goes beyond training. If we assume that “best ICT practice” means student-centred, personalised, constructivist teaching and learning, then providing practitioners with a course in how to use the VLE will be unlikely to result in this being achieved. Balanskat, Blamire and Kefala (2006) also raise the issue of training in the development of ICT skills versus training in the pedagogic aspects of ICT. “Clearly, such attempts to address the re-skilling of academic and teaching staff through half-day workshops only scratches the surface of influence and change,” (Salmon, no date).

A hint of evidence in support of Salmon’s opinion can be found in Condie and Livingston’s report on the SCHOLAR project (2007). Practitioners were given induction events which focused on the programme itself rather than effective teaching strategies using ICT. Arguably as a consequence of this, a majority of teachers ignored the online features of SCHOLAR and did not change their traditional teaching strategies. Condie *et al* conclude that teachers must learn to use technology and “they must change fundamentally how they teach,” (p 338). They also note that learners must also learn new skills - communication skills, team working, problem solving and critical thinking - and change the way that they expect to learn.

Ultimately, Condie and Livingston (2007) argue that confidence in ICT skills does not equate to understanding how to use it to its full potential. It is possible that people make assumptions about practitioner and learner skills. For instance, Connolly, Jones and Jones (2007), in their pilot e-learning project, found that students lacked sufficient writing skills which proved problematic for discussion board engagement. In a survey of Higher Education students, 95% rated their skills level in self-directed learning as intermediate or above, but lacked skills in using institutional technologies such as the VLE (Deepwell & Malik, 2008).

In a close parallel to the same issues raised in the Work Based Learning Sector, visible commitment from senior management “may be an important component in raising the profile of ICT and e-learning use and training,” (LSN, 2008: p 43). Case studies researched by Cooke and Greenwood (2007) highlight the importance of leadership and a culture of learning.

### **Evidence, Exemplars and Innovations**

*“The scope for innovative use of ICT in education and training is enormous,” (European Commission, 2008: p 4).*

The review sought to find evidence for successful incentives and benefits of e-learning, along with case studies which demonstrate best practice.

In general, incentives work when they appeal to or align with an individual’s self interests. Alternatively, self interest can be influenced by incentives (Salmon, no date). The literature is quite light in the area of successful incentives, tending to be split between those that talk about very practical incentives, and those which take a philosophical approach. For instance, Cocea and Neibelzahl (no date) propose that “(M)otivation is regarded as “problematic” in e-learning and a tendency to separate it from the cognitive process of learning has somehow excluded it from the frame of research.” According to Cocea *et al*, Social Cognitive Learning Theory could provide the link between cognitive and affective processes, and place its emphasis on the importance of self-efficacy and self-regulation in learning. The writers attest that self-efficacy has been shown to be a good predictor of learner satisfaction (Cocea *et al*). And satisfied learners tend to be motivated learners. Cocea *et al* conclude: “...a motivational approach based on Social Cognitive Learning Theory fits very well in relation to four trends in e-learning: personalisation, adaptivity, affective tutoring and collaborative learning.” This notion that ICT supports personalisation, enabling learners to be knowledge builders and creators, finds wide support (e.g., European Commission, 2008).

Taking a more pragmatic approach, and linking incentives to expectations, some have found that instant feedback for learners can be motivational. Deepwell and Malik (2008) found that (HE) students in their survey had high expectations of almost instant feedback and that when this was not the case, learners would become frustrated (see also Connolly, Jones & Jones, 2007). The same survey found that learners wanted more online discussion (71%) and collaborative working (56%), with fewer learners wishing for more interactive exercises (40%). This finding would seem to provide a measure of support for the potential efficacy of Cocea *et al*’s proposal for a Social Cognitive approach.

The JISC’s Learner Experience of e-Learning case studies highlights motivational factors for students as having tutors who are fully engaged with e-learning, and having choice and control over their learning.<sup>33</sup> Others have found that students are motivated to engage in online activities to seek assistance with completing assignments and that learning outcomes can be improved when students are involved in setting their own goals with opportunities to work in groups (Wang, 2007). In the USA, Schulmeister (2007) found that the main reason students choose to engage in distance learning is for

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<sup>33</sup> “In their own words”, JISC, 2007

convenience, and that very few associated e-learning with improvements in the learning process.

There is also evidence of payment being given to staff members for time spent training and home loan laptops (Cooke & Greenwood, 2007).

Assuming that gaining superior learning outcomes operates as an incentive for both practitioners and learners, the findings of Condie and Livingston (2007) that students engaging in the blended learning SCHOLAR programmes gained better performances than those who had not should provide all the evidence needed to convince the sceptics of the benefits of a blended approach. Condie *et al* propose that these superior performances might have been even better if SCHOLAR had been used more effectively by the practitioners. They summarise what they conclude to have been the affective factors as:

- the ability to interact with a range of materials;
- the ability to work at a time of individual choosing, and;
- that the materials were appropriate to individual needs.

These factors, they argue, led to increases in learner confidence and motivation, an increased depth of understanding, the ability to take control of one's own learning and that learners were able to use the online materials to check their understanding. Unfortunately, most practitioners were unaware that students were using the online materials, which is probably a factor in more than half of them not believing that SCHOLAR online had any impact on learning outcomes.

The QIA and ALT have published a number of case studies which demonstrate success in the use of technology and varying measures of innovative use of technology.<sup>34</sup>

- Bridgwater College made strategic efforts to develop staff skills, and encourage innovation through training, sharing and peer observation. In other words, they used a variety of channels, rather than relying on the “training solution” alone, the efficacy for which is supported elsewhere in the literature. Taking a Continuous Professional Development approach has resulted in increased staff confidence and in overcoming resistance to change.
- North Devon College engaged top students undergoing a foundation degree course to work with IT personnel to link the college CIS, VLE and a shared drive to make resource and information access easier for both students and practitioners.
- LSN report increased enthusiasm for learning, self-esteem and confidence in learners as a result of a three-year project using mobiles and PDAs in learning. The success of this project has led to LSC funding of £6 M to fund a national roll-out learning programme for the FE sector.
- The City of Sunderland College used their VLE to create personalised sites for individual learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. “Those individual students with their own site have reported that they are more motivated because they feel more supported by the college.” (p. 30).
- In an innovative approach to widening participation, the University of Leeds enabled students in FE to access some of the tools, including an e-Portfolio

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<sup>34</sup> “E-Learning: Making it work”, QIA and ALT, 2007

system, used in some of its undergraduate courses. These encourage students to engage in self-directed and reflective learning. 75% of those students who participated were offered places on University medical and healthcare courses, compared with the national average of just 11%. Eight out of 10 students reported that the e-Portfolio system “had introduced them to a new way of thinking and learning.” (p 33). Importantly, practitioners in both HE and FE agreed that the e-Portfolio system bridged the gap between Further and Higher Education.

- A consortium of Scottish Colleges worked with the JISC RSC for Scotland to introduce a pedagogically sound blended learning delivery model to produce an enhanced student experience. The key component to the success of this has been the development of a new role: the Blended Learning Technologist (BLT). In addition, all digital resources were produced (based on re-engineering existing courses) as truly interoperable products. “The process has removed many of the technological issues that have affected the uptake of the outputs from previous initiatives,” (p 55). There is evidence that greater levels of attainment are being achieved by students, and, with the support of the BLTs, even previously inexperienced teachers have been converted.

### Supply v. Demand

The review investigated whether the supply of technology meets the demands of practitioners and learners. Whilst there have been improvements in the availability of computers for practitioners and learners in the period between the two surveys referenced here, there are still concerns. According to the LSN, four out of 10 participants believe that the current ICT stock is not sufficient to meet the demands of teaching and learning, while 56% of providers and 57% of practitioners are in close agreement that the demands from learners for computers are not being met (2008). Internet access is also problematical for learners, with almost half of staff (47%) stating that this could not always meet learner demand. Even more troublesome, access to computers outside of normal working hours is inadequate, evidencing a ratio of 27 people for each computer (LSN, 2008). It is true that the current (normal working hours) supply meets the government’s target ratio of 5 students per computer, but this target is clearly proving inadequate and a hindrance to embedding technology in teaching and learning.

This picture is compounded by issues with networks, with many experiencing regular difficulties, and constraints on file size and wireless networking acting as a significant barrier to capacity growth, personalised learning and remote learning (LSN, 2008). There is also an indication that access to college intranets from outside of the college is restricted. Balanskat, Blamire and Kefala (2006) found similar issues with access to institutional networks in European schools, arguing that this completely negates the benefit of “anytime, anywhere”.

In their study of staff access to ICT, Cooke and Greenwood (2007) found that only 68% of institutions have policies outlining the principles of access to ICT communications, and that these were mainly focused on compliance with acceptable practice rather than access entitlement. According to this survey (of 65 FE colleges), computer provision is generally acceptable, and staff tend to make use of their own computers at home, but that part-time or seasonal staff have to share computers. The authors also note that 81% of colleges had (at the time) initiatives underway to improve access to ICT.

Another factor identified by LSN in their survey is the low take up of freely available materials such as the NLN collection (2008). Only 20% of practitioners report using these regularly. Slightly more than 3 in 10 routinely use commercial products, with a majority (around 50%) using materials developed in house. This would suggest that either externally available materials (free or commercial) are not meeting needs, or budget is acting as a constraint on their purchase.

Salmon points out that, in blended learning, the online components need to be especially enticing or people will simply “gravitate” to the more traditional methods of teaching and learning (no date).

### **Conclusions and Gap Analysis**

Against a backdrop of unprecedented and fundamental reform, and with the pressure on to transform for expansion, some very basic issues persist, such as restrictions on computer and internet availability, particularly for learners. This is compounded by apparent network limitations and restrictions. With most institutions reporting that they are operating at capacity or near capacity, the implication of all of this is that the FE system is not in shape to meet the demands of the future. This is evidenced in the relatively unchanged statistic relating to e-maturity in colleges (LSN, 2008). It is also apparent that the targets originally set for practitioner and learner entitlement to computer access are no longer appropriate to support the evolution of a learner-centred, personalised blended learning environment.

No real universal progress has been made in terms of the use of technology: it remains in the domain of lesson preparation and work planning for practitioners, as opposed to supporting personalisation and collaborative learning, for instance. It is clear from the review that providing training in general ICT skills, which most institutions do, is not addressing the issue. There is a need for practitioners to change their practice on a fundamental level, and some solutions for this can be seen in the case studies drawn from the literature, yet it seems that there is still a very long way to go. As practitioners seem to have problems finding the time to learn new skills, it would make sense for ICT skills - and “teaching in an online environment” training - to be made a compulsory part of skills appraisals and CPD. However, as the literature has pointed out, training alone cannot be the only solution. Other channels such as peer observation, sharing and mentoring are required. Strong, committed leadership is also a key component.

The findings show a strong, positive support for the benefits of e-learning on the part of practitioners - even though some remain unconvinced due to a general lack of robust evidence. It would seem, then, that the “battle” to win hearts and minds about the values of e-learning are largely won. This is therefore a tangible asset that can be leveraged in the movement towards learner-centred, personalised learning environments. The question is - if such positive perceptions were reported as long ago as 2006, why has the practitioner community not risen to the challenge? The perception of e-learning amongst learners is also generally positive and strong: in this case, the question is, to what extent can students in the FE system make demands for e-learning? For many, their experience of e-learning learning is limited to researching and communicating with friends so, in a sense, the majority have not experienced what might be described as a fully embedded blended learning delivery.

There are a considerable number of individual case studies which demonstrate successful use of technologies, and this is clearly building the case for e-learning. In

collecting and publishing this type of evidence based on real experiences and measured outcomes, the QIA and ALT have moved the debate far beyond the cross-roads of “to e-learn or not to e-learn”. The question here is how to make the most of this type of information, and how to present such case studies in a way that enables their models to be adapted to suit local needs and circumstances, and to be equally effective.

A primary gap in the literature concerns funding, and its implications for e-learning. However, the fact that the literature continues to call for the support of senior management - and adequate funding to be in place - suggests that these are major issues which require specific addressing. A second major gap in the literature is around evidence of successful incentives, although the case studies included here provide some indication of the types of incentives that can work.

**Vantaggio**

**Lesley Mackenzie-Robb**

**29 October 2008**

Table 1: Barriers and enablers as a function of year.

Survey	Barriers	Enablers
<p>“Impact of e-Learning in Further Education: Survey of Scale and Breadth” (Golden, McCrone, Walker &amp; Rudd, 2006)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24% said they did not have sufficient access to e-learning resources to plan and research lessons.</li> <li>• More than half (54%) said that lecturers did not have sufficient access to ICT for use in the classroom.</li> <li>• More than a quarter (26%) said that they needed better and/or more training.</li> <li>• Almost a third (30%) said they needed more time to use ICT to prepare and develop learning materials.</li> <li>• More than one in ten (13%) said they didn’t know if their college had a VLE or intranet.</li> <li>• Participants had mixed opinions about the beneficial impact of e-learning:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 50% disagreed or didn’t know if e-learning /ICT is helpful to learners who cannot easily access the college;</li> <li>○ The same response was given on the issue of e-learning or ICT being helpful to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.</li> <li>○ Only 1 in 5 (20%) believed that e-learning can increase learner retention and only 33% thought that e-learning can increase learner achievement.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Participants were also split on e-learning’s potential to save lecturer time with 40%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 71% have sufficient access to e-learning resources to plan and research lessons. (According to the 2008 survey, only 19% had their own computers at work in 2004).</li> <li>• 66% of respondents said that their college has a VLE and intranet.</li> <li>• Almost three-quarters of participants felt that e-learning has the potential to tailor learning to individual needs in the future - but more than 1 in 4 (27%) disagreed.</li> <li>• A majority of practitioners use e-learning all of the time or frequently for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Research (75%)</li> <li>○ Accessing and/or creating teaching materials (75%)</li> <li>○ Preparing lesson plans (66%)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• A majority (75%) of practitioners believe that they are more effective at planning, preparation and sharing materials using e-learning.</li> <li>• Practitioners report that learners are more effective at researching and presenting work and that their knowledge is more effectively reinforced through the use of e-learning.</li> <li>• Overall, a majority (75%) reported that it was easy to identify opportunities to use e-learning.</li> <li>• Overall, practitioners were positive and proactive towards e-learning as a teaching support.</li> </ul>

	<p>uncertain or disagreeing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately half of practitioners believed that e-learning had no impact on being more effective at measuring learners' progress (55%), testing learners' understanding (50%) or assisting in one-to-one teaching(59%).</li> <li>• The way that practitioners use e-learning (which is also mirrored in learner use) shows that it is least used for communications, progress tracking and personalisation, which suggests limited use of the available technology, and that it is not being used to its full potential.</li> </ul>	
<p>“Measuring e-Maturity in the Further Education Sector: Final Report” (LSN, 2008)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An inconsistent use of technology: many providers do not have formal targets or a strategic framework for the use of technology.</li> <li>• 8 out of 10 providers believe that less than half of their staff is aware of an ICT and e-learning strategy within the institution.</li> <li>• 4 out of 10 participants said that the current ICT stock was not sufficient to meeting the current demands of teaching and learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 57% of practitioners stated that learners' demands for computers are not met</li> <li>○ 47% of practitioners stated that internet access could not always meet learner demand.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Out of hours access to computers is very limited (27 students per computer), which limits flexible learning opportunities.</li> <li>• VLE functions to encourage tailored learning (e.g., e-portfolios) have limited use, and there is limited use of mobile technologies.</li> <li>• There is limited use of technology for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 58% of providers state that staff members have their own computers at work and a further 17% of providers have identified this as a priority.</li> <li>• 89% of providers have a VLE, compared with 82% in 2006.</li> <li>• Overall, providers believe that ICT facilitates positive benefits with a large majority seeing ICT as a useful support tool, and as a means for students to learn more effectively, coupled with improved learner satisfaction and learner outcomes.</li> <li>• Approximately 60% of providers believe that ICT has a positive effect on learner retention.</li> <li>• The overall perception of providers is that ICT helps to meet learner needs more effectively, and enables the provision of tailored support.</li> <li>• Around 90% of practitioners consider that they have intermediate or advanced skills levels in general ICT, and around 75% have the same levels with ICT and e-learning with learners.</li> <li>• 97% of providers state that they provide training in</li> </ul>

communicating with learners outside of the classroom, managing target setting and assessing learner progress.

- There is a perception that the Awarding Bodies will not accept electronic evidence, resulting in limited use of e-Portfolios.
- There is a perception that e-Portfolios cannot be transferred across institutions and systems.
- Almost 4 in 10 providers said that large, media rich files are not encouraged on the intranet, with 14% stating that their intranet would have problems with such files.
- Technical problems with networks are common with 45% of practitioners experiencing difficulties up to twice weekly.
- Practitioners are not convinced that ICT helps to save time: only 3 in 10 believe that it saves time in assessment and less than half (46%) that it can save time in lesson delivery. Half of practitioners believe it saves time in record keeping and 53% in lesson planning and preparation.
- Despite provision of training in raising skills levels in using e-learning and ICT with learners, less than 50% of practitioners take up this training:
  - Lack of time
  - Lack of confidence
  - Unwillingness to prioritise e-learning training
- Almost 100% of providers stated that their institution's capacity is either "sufficient" or does not always meet demand.

general ICT skills, with just under 80% claiming to offer training in teaching and facilitating online.

- Technology is commonly used to plan and prepare for lesson activities by practitioners.
- Use of whiteboards is widespread and is considered to be successful.

# Work Based Learning: Literature Review

## Final Report

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### Introduction and context

The Leitch Review of Skills<sup>35</sup> set the scene for a revolution in the workplace with its call for urgent action to address a weak skills base in the UK which it linked to negative consequences for growth, productivity and social justice. The Review laid down a figurative gauntlet challenging Britain to become a world leader in skills by 2020. To achieve this, two key initiatives were proposed: the introduction of Skills Accounts alongside a new adult careers service, and the Skills Pledge, a voluntary commitment to training by employers, with the prospect of making training a statutory entitlement for employees if necessary. The Review also called for a shared responsibility for training and skills by employers, individuals and government, and an emphasis on a demand-led training provision.

The Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) took this challenge forward with its implementation plan for skills<sup>36</sup>, hoisting the flag for a skills revolution and culture change in the workplace. This plan paved the way for the introduction of the Skills Account and Skills Pledge (which, according to the Train to Gain website, some 900 organisations have taken up) as key reforms, and proposed new legislation to strengthen funding entitlement for adults to free training in basic skills and Level 2 qualifications. According to DIUS, the current annual budget for further education and training for adults in England is £3 billion. This is, however, dwarfed by the £38.6 billion which companies are reputed to have spent on training last year, representing a 16% increase on 2005<sup>37</sup>. The 2007 National Employer Skills Survey found that, in general, there is a much stronger commitment to training amongst businesses with some 67% of companies spending a combined 218 million days in training. According to Chris Banks of the Learning and Skills Council: “These findings are extremely encouraging. Never before have so many employers invested so much in staff training their workforce.”<sup>3</sup>

In 2008, Becta published its technology strategy for the Post-16 sector<sup>38</sup>, based around a new campaign, Next Generation Learning, to raise awareness of the strengths and benefits of technology supported learning. A core aim is to develop capacity to deliver, and to foster a capable and confident workforce of practitioners with the skills and knowledge to use technology effectively. Specific to Work Based Learning (WBL), the implementation plan aims to establish a business network to encourage sharing of best practice, mentoring and championing. The strategy aims to stimulate innovation and drive up standards for digital learning content, as well as leverage the right incentives for take up of technology based learning services and products.

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<sup>35</sup> Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills, 2006, HM Treasury

<sup>36</sup> World Class Skills: implementing the Leitch Review of skills in England, 2007, DIUS

<sup>37</sup> [www.trantogain.gov.uk](http://www.trantogain.gov.uk), accessed 18 August 2008

<sup>38</sup> Technology strategy for further education, skills and regeneration, 2008, Becta

The WBL sector is characterised by a large number of small providers with, according to Crisp, Crawford and Daar (2006), little interest in e-learning approaches, plus some very large ones which make considerable use of specific e-learning packages.

The present research seeks to identify and explore incentives in e-learning and blended learning, basing our research questions around eight themes: barriers, funding, attitude and behaviour, skills, evidence, exemplars, supply v. demand and innovation in technology.

A total of 9 surveys and 10 case studies and articles were reviewed as foundation research into WBL. The surveys covered (numbers of participants are shown in brackets):

- apprentices and the Entry to Employment (E2E) programme (508)
- Employees (5,360)
- e-learning and lifelong learning professionals (48)
- employees already using or with previous experience of e-learning (1000)
- Union representatives, learning centre staff, college practitioners, learning providers and government agency representatives (unknown)
- Micro business owners and employees (426)
- CIPD members (729)
- LSC funded learning providers (201)
- Learning providers, support agencies and learners (1000)

Survey methods mostly use self-report questionnaires, with some also incorporating qualitative interview, consultation and literature review.

The list of different types of participant covered by the surveys is a demonstration of one of the primary issues with WBL - its definition. A study for the Scottish Government in 2006 makes a direct reference to this problem: "A review of relevant literature and interviews with key players as part of this study demonstrated the lack of a consistent definition of work based learning."<sup>39</sup> The Higher Education Academy offers this definition: "A Work Based Learning Programme is a process of recognising, creating and applying knowledge through, for and at work which forms part (credits) or all of a higher education qualification."<sup>40</sup> Others (e.g., Mackinnon Partnership, 2008) define WBL, by default, as being LSC funded learning providers. In order to gain the widest and most thorough perspective, we have elected to define WBL in the broadest terms to mean learning engagement as a consequence of work, funded by, or with access provided and managed by employers.

Another issue with the sector is the quality of the literature, which is quite variable. An example is where statements of fact are made and opinions drawn, but on closer scrutiny of the data on which these are made, it is often the case that the data is several years old. Our research took 2006 as the cut off year for literature, but keeping options open to reach back to 2005 for significant papers or surveys. Because of the variability in standard and quality of the literature, we have been especially rigorous and careful in our review, in drawing out the evidence and in forming conclusions.

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2002/06/14558/3246>, Accessed 18 August 2008

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.engsc.ac.uk/er/wbl/index.asp>, Accessed 18 August 2008

We have seen how the Leitch Review and the DIUS strategy for skills have set in motion what is hoped will be a revolution leading to a transformed workforce and an evolved definition of “work” and “workplace”. The most recent statistics would appear to support the idea of the nation’s workforce being up-skilled, and that training is very firmly on the executive agenda. We would reasonably expect, therefore, to see an equally strong and increasing use of e-learning. The picture that emerges from the literature is a complex one, and very much reflective of the many different components which constitute the WBL sector.

The data from the surveys are used as the core evidence, with the case studies and articles used to add depth to these findings. The following sections present the findings from the literature for each thematic question.

## **Barriers**

The literature review investigated the barriers and enablers for practitioners and learners and the effective use of e-learning and blended learning.

Each of the 9 surveys focuses on a different sub-set of WBL constituents. Consequently, the respective barriers and enablers for each constituent are tabulated (Table 1) which can be found at the end of this paper. Common themes are extracted and shown at the foot of the table.

While each constituent has its own unique barriers and enablers, they do have many areas in common. This is unusual because of the large differences in constituent profile. For instance, some 85% of the organisations represented in the e-skills survey of existing e-learning users have dedicated training staff and 67% have dedicated e-learning staff. This makes for a stark comparison with the micro firms surveyed in Yorkshire and Humber, of which 75% claim to have no budget for training.

Time and again, leadership from Senior Management is emphasised as a critical factor to success: “..the single most influential intervention for promoting learning within an organisation,” (Jennings, Kay, Schmoller, Umar & Wallis, 2005). More recently, the Centre for Excellence in Leadership evaluation studies (CEL, 2007) underlined the need for Senior Management to be involved and to be visible in effecting organisational change through technology. Hill (2007) uses the Egg (online bank) case study to demonstrate how a learning culture develops from strong intention and leadership from the top of the organisation being turned into organisational policy which is actioned by management and then “pulled” by employees. Hill argues that this “pull” leads to empowerment which in turn leads to individual responsibility for learning and development. The author also contends that the interface between line manager and employee is a vital component to developing a learning culture, which supports a common “enabler” finding from the surveys.

An earlier report by Crisp, Crawford and Daar (2006), which is based on a review of surveys undertaken between 2004 and 2006, concludes that access to suitable computers is a major barrier to e-learning take-up, and this is clearly no longer so much of an issue based on the present review of more recent literature. Practitioner skills and training are also identified by Crisp and colleagues as a major issue, and this is a barrier which does continue to persist. Of interest, Crisp *et al.* note that there is no significant information available on the impact of learner outcomes, and, as the present review has shown, learner impact remains a perception rather than a fact, which can only be a

contributory factor to the wider perception of e-learning not being effective, or its business case not being proven.

Berge and Huang (2004: as cited in Tyler-Smith, 2006) developed a model to address attrition rates in e-learning in the USA. Whilst focused on Higher Education and distance learners, the model may hold some currency with respect to WBL. Attrition, they argue, is impacted by a complex array of variables which they group into three categories: personal variables (e.g., age, ethnicity), institutional variables (e.g., institutional attitudes and values) and circumstantial variables (e.g., course design and facilitation). These variables can be broadly mapped to issues raised in the WBL surveys. Tyler-Smith also rates “readiness for e-learning” as being critical to a learner’s persistence. That is, online skills, beliefs about e-learning (attitudes), self-management of learning and learning initiative (environment of self-empowerment and self-direction) and the degree of interaction with tutor and other students (tutor support and social learning).

Similarly to those identified in the WBL surveys, Tyler-Smith proposes that the most significant barriers to e-learning success are technical problems, cost, time and support, personal motivation, technical skills, social interactions and tutor issues. These issues crop up time and again in the WBL surveys. This study concludes by referring to Cognitive Load Theory in which working memory quickly becomes overwhelmed by learning new material or a new skill for which there is an incomplete scheme in long term memory. Mediating factors for the “overload effects” of first time e-learning include start up workshops, orientation modules and tutor proximity - in fact, many of the strategies which Unionlearn has adopted and which it claims to be successful.

Hamburg and Lindecke (2005) note that in 2000, the expectation was that e-learning would be taken up by companies in a big way, largely because of the perceived financial and practical benefits. The American Society of Training and Development famously predicted in 2000 that e-learning would change vocational training in 1000 days (Hamburg *et al*). “But performance and reputation of e-learning have not lived up to the lofty expectations set by the early realisation of the enormous potential benefits of this marriage of learning and technology” (Hamburg *et al*). The authors argue that this is largely because e-learning was viewed from an administrative perspective and seen as an opportunity to cut costs. It is ironic that this “lesson” persists in WBL today! In another parallel, the authors found that most Small to Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Europe do not have suitable infrastructures for e-learning or training in general, that they are not interested in e-learning and that this may be because e-learning products are too standardised or generalised thus making them irrelevant to individual business needs. SMEs comprise 99% of enterprises throughout Europe, so it is concerning that “e-learning... has had little effect on small to medium-sized enterprises, despite the flexibility that it could offer them,” (European Commission, 2008: p 4). This echoes the findings from many of the surveys in the present review.

There are many examples in the literature of successful e-learning implementations within organisations. Howarth (2008) highlights how Cable and Wireless evolved e-learning “to become a critical, integrated component of the overall business transformation strategy” by merging learning with performance. Unionlearn factored upskilling of tutors into their strategy to ensure that they could not only deliver the course programme, but also input to its design and development (QIA and ALT, 2007). TUC Education Online surveyed 260 Union reps who had taken up online courses during 2006 - 2007, finding “that attitudes towards the idea of online learning have changed

dramatically and in a positive way...” and that “Tutors now also see online teaching as complementary to their work in the classroom.”<sup>41</sup>

A recently published set of guidelines offers 10 case studies covering a range of different types of organisation (BERR, CBI, TUC & DIUS, 2008). Whilst these guidelines refer to training in general, many of lessons demonstrated in the case studies are highly relevant to WBL and e-learning. What they all have in common is a strong leadership from the top of the organisation and unequivocal support for training, a learner-centric approach in which learners are encouraged on their own merits, and, most importantly, formalised structures to support and sustain organisational learning in the context of a learning culture. Four of the ten are noted as provided “time incentives” - time off or time back for training.

## Funding

There is unexpectedly little on the subject of funding in the literature. A survey and review by Bell, Gulati and Hooker (2006) offers a lot on the subject of funding, but unfortunately only 6% of participants are drawn from the WBL sector, with their responses largely grouped with those from Further Education and PCDL participants. Bearing this in mind, Bell *et al.* found that 25% of participants felt that if e-learning is necessary then it should be funded by the Government. One WBL provider is quoted as saying: “It annoys me that the college gets £150k worth of special kit for Motor Vehicle delivery: we get nothing and there’s no sharing of resources. It’s an uneven playing field. Everything we do is on our own,” (p 30).

This latter point picks up on a point made earlier concerning WBL providers’ reluctance to invest in new technology because the business case has not been proven, and the value to the business is not clear. Managers of WBL businesses report limited gains from using e-learning (Mackinnon Partnership, 2008). On the other hand, colleges which provide WBL services are largely already equipped with ICT through public funding.

Jennings, Kay, Schmoller, Umar and Wallis (2005) call for free or subsidised access to learning centres coupled with free support and advice, as well as free or subsidised access to personal learning technologies, seeing this as a key enabler to developing a learning culture. Indeed, Overton and her colleagues identify cost as a main barrier to e-learning adoption in the next three years (Overton, Hills & Dixon, 2007).

Cost is even more of an issue with small businesses - which is significant when one considers that more than 98% of businesses in the UK employ less than 50 people.<sup>42</sup>

According to the Mackinnon Partnership (2008), the LSC agenda is concerned with reducing cost through using e-learning, but many WBL practitioners find the opposite to be the case. This is particularly so with e-portfolios according to this study, but this point is not expanded on. Overton *et al* (2007) also found that 49% of participants believe that a main driver to e-learning take up is the need to reduce training costs.

The message that comes through from the WBL sector is that investment in new technologies and working practices is unlikely to happen until a business case and values are proven. This viewpoint should be balanced with the recent evidence produced by JISC InfoNet in collaboration with ALT and the HEA (2008) which argues that technology

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/education/learn-2282-f0.cfm>. Accessed 9 September 2008.

<sup>42</sup> [www.equal-works.com](http://www.equal-works.com), Accessed 30 July 2008.

has been shown to have a positive impact on retention rates (both teachers and learners), and is able to offer examples of tangible benefits many of which can be directly related to funding. The ability to demonstrate evidence of improved retention rates as a consequence of the use of technology should be of particular interest to the LSC-funded WBL providers.

### **Attitude and behaviour**

Tyler-Smith (2006) suggests that “..learners in employment bring a different set of needs, strategies and motivations to the learning process,” (p 4). The research sought to investigate learner and practitioner perceptions and responses to e-learning and blended learning.

The expressed views of the apprentices and E2E participants are the most positive with 62% feeling more motivated through the use of technology in learning, and 67% said that they are more likely to complete their programme because they are using technology. Even better, 97% of learners who have used customised digital learning materials found them useful or very useful (Cooper, 2007). This is a dramatically more positive picture than that for other constituents in WBL. It is the first survey of apprentices and E2E in terms of e-learning, so there is nothing to compare it with. The reason for the more positive attitude towards e-learning might be partially explained by the participant profile which is quite distinct from the standard WBL profile: young, ability to learn socially through their college, a clear career path and a clear objective and rewards for success.

Turning to e-learning in the corporate environment, Skillsoft (2007) found that “...asking a colleague is still viewed as one of the best ways to learn,” (p 9). More than 40% of this survey’s participants found that their e-learning could have been better, or that it was irrelevant and boring. Less than 40% believe that “learning at the desk” will be a main training channel in the future, while 100% of the Human Resource executives interviewed in this survey believe in a continuing shift towards e-learning. From a corporate perspective, is it a case of the inevitability of e-learning whether employees want it or not?

Overton, Hills and Dixon (2007) found a more positive response from their participants with 45% agreeing that e-learning is making a positive difference to their job performance, which, none-the-less, still leaves more than 50% who do not. Further positive views are expressed when e-learning is aligned to role and performance. However, this study found that the role of line manager as coach is the most likely to lead to strong positive business impact, which is mirrored by others (e.g., Skillsoft, 2007; CIPD, 2008).

The CIPD (2008) survey presents a less positive picture. A slim majority of participants (57%) believe that less than a quarter of employees take up e-learning, and of those, less than a quarter complete the course according to 55% of participants, which is in stark contrast to the findings in the survey of apprentices. A large majority (92%) believe that e-learning demands a new attitude to learning, and 80% believe that e-learning also demands a new skills set on the part of the learner. Presumably, both of these “demands” are seen as brakes in the take up of e-learning.

In their survey of WBL providers, the Mackinnon Partnership (2008) highlights the need to change attitudes of practitioners to encourage them to change their working methods and to develop the skills. However, according to this report, 66% of practitioners use

online materials, and 62% of these believe that online resources save time. However, the report does not detail how time is saved. Practitioners (81%) and providers (72%) believe that ICT has improved the range of learning opportunities for learners, but that there is a lack of evidence of the actual impact of e-learning and ICT on learning outcomes. Crisp and colleagues (2006) found that 30% of providers are unsure of the effectiveness of the e-learning they are providing.

Of the micro businesses surveyed in Yorkshire and Humber (elearn2work, 2007), 20% of business managers had completed online courses with most finding the experience useful or very useful. Unfortunately, a third of those reported technical difficulties which could potentially influence their attitude towards e-learning in the future.

## Skills

Under this theme, the study reviewed the literature for evidence of skills required by practitioners and learners to maximise the benefits of e-learning and blended learning. Perhaps surprisingly, our review found little evidence of concern over a lack of IT skills amongst learners. For instance, 96% of apprentices believe that they have the skills to use technology effectively for learning (Cooper, 2007). Overton and her colleagues also found that only 17% of participants believe staff IT skills will be a barrier in the future (Overton, Hills & Dixon, 2007). Similarly, CIPD (2008) found that only 6% of employers believe that new staff are lacking in appropriate IT skills.

IT skills amongst learners would appear to be no longer an issue for e-learning take up. The area that is most often cited as being lacking with respect to learners is technical support.

The perception of practitioner skills levels is a more complex one. Bearing in mind the recurring theme of “resistance to change” amongst practitioners uncovered in the literature, it is also the case that training can only be effective where staff are willing to take part, and to make the most of the opportunities to learn (BERR, CBI, TUC & DIUS, 2008). Whilst acknowledging that some providers are still trying to understand how to use ICT effectively, the Mackinnon Partnership (2008) predicts that across the whole WBL sector, 79% of practitioners are either competent or advanced in the general use of ICT (but not necessarily in e-learning). However, 80% of employers believe there is a skills gap between current practitioner skills and those needed to deliver and support ICT learning effectively (Mackinnon, 2008). The survey goes on to identify what those primary gaps are:

- Development of electronic materials (72%)
- Teaching and facilitating online (66%)
- Knowledge of how best to use ICT resources (63%)
- Use of specialist software packages (59%)
- How to use ICT to manage learning (59%)

Bell, Gulati and Hooker(2006) also identify practitioner skills as an area of concern, noting that practitioners need space and time to practice and to foster self-confidence in using technology. A key finding from a learner e-learning experience study (JISC, 2007) found that learners want to have tutors who are fully engaged with e-learning.

Crisp *et al* reviewed data collected in 2005, concluding that staff skills and training are the biggest issues, with specific skills gaps identified as being: learning needs analysis, instructional design and screen design (Crisp, Crawford & Daar, 2006).

There are some success stories. The CEL WBL e-leadership programmes - Connect, Realise and eXplorer provide transferable ideas, strategic and holistic approaches and forums for sharing effective practice. Since 2005, CEL reports some 300 WBL leaders have completed the e-leadership programmes (QIA & ALT, 2007). What percentage of the estimated 800 WBL organisations' personnel (Bell, Gulati & Hooker, 2006) this represents is unknown. Unionlearn also recognises the importance of having "upskilled" tutors to the success of its programme, and reports a rise from 800 online learners in 2005 to 1000 in 2006 as a measure of this successful approach (QIA & ALT, 2007).

Opportunity and accessibility would appear to be key incentives in relation to practitioner skills.

### **Evidence and Exemplars**

The review investigated the evidence for successful incentives and benefits of e-learning. With the exception of the apparently successful take up of e-learning by apprentices and E2E learners, where Cooper (2007) found that 67% of participants considered themselves more likely to complete the course because of technology, there is scant evidence for the benefits of e-learning.

The Mackinnon Partnership (2008) and CIPD (2008) surveys both found that the business case and effectiveness of e-learning are not proven. Somewhat confusingly, Mackinnon also found that 67% of practitioners believe that ICT improves learner satisfaction and 59% believe it improves learner outcomes (a reduction from 2006). But these data are based on perceptions, not evidence. Indeed Mackinnon notes that there is a significant lack of evidence to support these claims. However, e-learning is expected to grow (CIPD) although perhaps not at the speed predicted by some at the start of the millennium. CIPD found that 47% of participating organisations use more e-learning compared to two years ago, while 46% have stopped using it, or do not use it or use about the same amount as they did two years ago. This presents a rather static picture and is, perhaps, summed up by the finding that only 7% of participants consider e-learning to be the most effective method of learning (CIPD).

In a review of how the use of e-learning has developed since 2000, a European Commission report found that many large companies had invested heavily in e-learning, "reporting high levels of satisfaction and significant cost reductions," (2008: p 9).

Evidence of successful incentives is more readily available from case studies which feature generic learning and training programmes, such as those showcased by BERR, CBI, TUC and DIUS (2008).

### **Supply versus Demand**

Does the supply of technology meet the demands of learners and practitioners? One of the key issues for both practitioners and learners is that of restrictions applied to remote access. Overton, Hills and Dixon (2007) found that learners wanted more access from home and whilst travelling, while the Mackinnon Partnership (2008) found that only 37% of WBL providers have a network that can be accessed by learners. However, 79% of managers and 73% of practitioners are satisfied that they have access to appropriate technology, which, while not being ideal, is still an improvement on previous years.

Overton *et al's* (2007) survey of participants who use or had used e-learning found that a majority (55%) buy commercial products, and 33% have their own in-house development tools. According to the Mackinnon Partnership (2008), 72% of WBL providers have bought commercial resources, and 40% have developed e-learning resources in partnership with other providers. It is worth noting that the % of providers buying commercial resources has slightly fallen from 81% in 2005, while those developing in-house resources has slightly increased from 53% in 2005 to 66% in 2007. In general providers are content with the quality and availability of digital resources (both commercial and free), but perceive that there is room for improvement and that practitioners are not always convinced they are using the best available resources implying that “time” associated with search and discovery is an issue when trying to identify resources (Mackinnon, 2008).

Only slightly more than a third of providers give learners and practitioners access to a VLE, while a third offer dedicated website services to learners (Mackinnon, 2008).

In the world of micro businesses, there is less access to the internet than reported elsewhere: while almost 90% of businesses have internet access, only 52% of employees do so at work (elearn2work, 2007). This, of course, could reflect the type of business involved in the survey, and less than 50% of firms use computers for developing skills.

As discussed earlier, apprentices and E2E learners are largely satisfied with their access to computers (95%) and the internet (93%), with 84% using ICT to compile evidence for their portfolios (Cooper, 2007). Interestingly, while 81% of learners use mobile phones to contact other learners, only 14% use chat rooms or MSN. This is a facet picked up by the Mackinnon Partnership in their 2008 survey of providers: very limited use of discussion forums and little use of technology to encourage learners to work collaboratively.

### **Innovations in technology**

The literature was reviewed for any evidence of innovations in the use of technology to enhance the learner experience, such as Championing and sharing. What we found was a surprising lack of innovative use of technology. Hamburg, Lindecke and Terstriep (2005), in their review of the state of e-learning in WBL in Europe, argue that educational institutions have simply replicated classroom practices and course design in the e-environment and that technological advances have not been accompanied by improvements in pedagogies.

Amongst WBL providers, there is limited use of discussion forums: the use of un-moderated forums has fallen from 11% to 10% in 2007, and the use of moderated forums remains the same at 22% (Mackinnon, 2008). In other words, there have been few developments in pedagogic approaches to technology in the last 12 months, or longer. Crisp, Crawford and Daar (2006), in a review of data from 2005, also found that only 22% of practitioners used ICT for collaborative learning. Moreover, Mackinnon also found that only 4 out of 10 providers make provision for individual learning spaces for learners and that practitioners are least likely to use ICT to foster collaborative learning or to manage individual targets for learners. That is, all of the core benefits that VLEs offer to learners that are unique to e-learning in comparison with classroom based learning.

Apprentices make surprisingly little use of chat rooms and discussion forums, preferring to use mobile phones for peer to peer communications. One in 10 apprentices, and four in ten E2E learners (in the group surveyed) have a learning difficulty, a disability or a health problem (Cooper, 2007). The finding that 62% of this group feel motivated to learn through technology is an indicator that technology is being used innovatively to assist learners who might otherwise not be able to engage in learning. More than 75% of participants expressed the view that technology has allowed their programme to be better tailored to their needs. More than half (53%) also stated that they would like to use technology in future programmes, but almost a quarter disagreed. One could surmise that there is a hard core (1 in 4) of apprentices and E2E learners who do not wish to use technology in learning, but the survey does not offer any views on how this group could be profiled.

In a case study of the Cable and Wireless learning revolution, Howarth (2008) concludes that successful e-learning projects “tend to be rooted in actual work practices and contextualised to the owner’s workplace and experience - preferably involving networking with other owner-managers.” Howarth argues that “packing” other online activities - such as marketing and networking - around e-learning aspects can sometimes motivate small businesses to get involved. This is also something which the elearn2work survey concluded with respect to micro businesses (2007).

Involving practitioners in the professional development of materials has been shown by Unionlearn (QIA & ALT, 2007) to be a successful strategy, but does involve training practitioners in aspects of e-learning design: “The reliance on practitioners for course development support underpins the sustainable approach by spreading expertise and developing the skills of established tutors.”

Hill (2007) argues that performance management and measurement should be used to form the organisational bond between learning, skills, rewards and business outcomes.

Based on Tyler-Smith (2006)’s study of the factors associated with attrition rates and e-learning in the USA, preparing the learner for e-learning is the single most important factor to improving retention rates - and by inference, the learning experience. Tyler-Smith argues that there is evidence to suggest that an individual’s first experience with e-learning is likely to impact on any future decisions to drop out or engage in more. The influence of poor experience can also be seen in the survey of micro businesses (elearn2work, 2007).

## **Conclusions and Gap analysis**

The 2007 National Employer Skills Survey appears to demonstrate a stronger commitment by employers to training, which is supported by an increase in training investment. We have found, when looking specifically at e-learning, that this positive picture is not necessarily reflected. SMEs make up 98% of the total number of enterprises in the UK, but these are least likely to engage in any form of staff training or learning. WBL providers, in particular, mainly consist of SMEs and show little interest in e-learning approaches combined with a reluctance to invest in new technologies.

An analysis of the literature reveals many common barriers and enablers across the sector, despite its broad diversity and complexity. What this analysis suggests is that, irrespective of organisation size, barriers specific to e-learning persist. What is slightly more troubling is that the common enablers identified from the surveys could apply to any form of learning which suggests that e-learning is not being leveraged to its full and

unique advantage. Or, it is simply a reflection of the fact that, according to Hill (2007), one in 3 companies does not provide training - at all.

One of the most significant barriers is the lack of evidence of the impact and values of e-learning - as some have said, the business case is not proven. In general, investment will only follow when the business case and values are evidenced. "There is probably an underpinning and unavoidable problem in looking for evidence of learner impact from ICT / e-learning through any attempt at capturing large scale evidence of current practice. There are so many intervening variables that a direct enough causal link between the ICT intervention and the learner outcome (retention or achievement) can never be established," (Crisp, Crawford & Daar, 2006: p 20). Is it therefore the case that we should stop looking for evidence of e-learning, and instead, seek evidence of training or learning per se?

The overall impression one gains from the literature is that little has changed in the last few years, with the exception of a notable increase in the availability of computers and access to the internet. However, the availability of equipment does not in itself constitute an incentive. IT skills also appear to no longer be an issue, but IT skills do not necessarily transfer automatically to ICT skills or good e-learning skills. The perception is that there is an increase in the number of practitioners creating their own resources as opposed to buying commercial products, despite a common view that practitioners lack effective e-learning skills. Bearing in mind the general low esteem that learners hold for e-learning, this has to be a concern.

Learners' preference for learning from colleagues, mentors and coaches over e-learning suggests that e-learning is seen as a solitary practice and the potential for social learning is not being leveraged. Evidence which suggests that practitioners make limited use of collaborative learning tools such as discussion forums would attest to this. Ironically, support for social and collaborative learning is one of e-learning's greatest strengths. This could be a considerable incentive to learners.

Clearly, e-learning has to be seen in the wider context of the learning culture, and the need for top level management leadership and support within a sustainable structure. The evidence from literature on training in general is quite clear on this, and it is reflected in much of the e-learning literature. Within SMEs, though, there is a noted apathy towards e-learning, and training in general. It appears that the argument in favour of training in general needs to be won before incentives to take up e-learning will be considered.

One of the major concerns is the very real lack of momentum in terms of developing pedagogies which take advantage of the technologies, and in making full use of the benefits which these technologies can afford. For instance, there is the apparent static use of discussion forums by practitioners, and the limited access to networks given to learners. The evidence suggests that e-learning is not being used effectively and that its benefits are not being realised.

The key gaps, based on our review of the literature, lie in evidence of successful incentives and benefits of e-learning, and the institutional funding of e-learning. In terms of case studies which demonstrate best practice, there are many but the evidence that they successfully deliver a rich learner experience is limited and largely based on individual perception. Indeed, it is true to say that the literature rarely talks about "rich learner experience" and "e-learning": the learner experience is more related to convenience and choice. In searching for opportunities for the innovative use of

technology to enhance the learning experience, we have found many, but only if one accepts that “discussion forums” can still be considered to be innovative. Our intention is to explore these four key gap areas in more depth through interviews with practitioners and learners as the second stage of the research.

The WBL sector is large and complex, more so than any other. Some of the literature we have reviewed in our research is of questionable quality and validity. However, a cross analysis does reveal consistency in the major areas, which gives us confidence in our interpretation of the findings.

**Vantaggio**

**Lesley Mackenzie-Robb**

**29 October 2008**

Table 1: Barriers and enablers as a function of constituent type

Constituents	Barriers	Enablers
WBL Providers (LSC funded) Mackinnon Partnership (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providers tend to focus on the business case for using ICT, but report limited gains. The perception is that there is no proven business case and therefore there is a reluctance to invest, particularly into new technology.</li> <li>• E-learning can lead to cost increase, not cost reduction.</li> <li>• Physical limitations of business premises.</li> <li>• Technology strategies tend to focus on technical support (86%) more than on training the trainer (68%).</li> <li>• 80% of providers believe that practitioners have gaps in the skills necessary to deliver technology supported learning.</li> <li>• Practitioners lack the time to consolidate new skills.</li> <li>• Scepticism and a lack of confidence amongst practitioners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 81% of practitioners believe that ICT has improved the range of learning opportunities, with 67% reporting improvements to learner satisfaction, and 54% reporting improved learning outcomes. It should be noted that these are perceptions and there is no evidence to validate these statements.</li> <li>• E-Guides and Connect are seen as positive enablers, but they are not enough on their own.</li> <li>• There is no significant <i>lack of demand</i> from learners.</li> </ul>
Apprentices and E2E Cooper (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited access to computers and the internet are considered to be barriers, however it should be noted that the participants report high levels of actual access to computers and the internet, and so it is likely that the complaint of limited access is ascribed to one or two individuals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High levels of access to computers and the internet (just under 100%).</li> <li>• Reported high levels of skills to use technology effectively.</li> <li>• Technology itself is seen by many (67%) as a motivator.</li> <li>• Many report a positive impact of technology on their learning.</li> </ul>
CIPD Members CIPD (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E-learning is not seen as effective and any effectiveness is not proven, although 60% of participants claim to use it, and consequently there is no significant growth in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High levels of IT skills are present amongst participants and their workforces.</li> <li>• The perception is that demand for learning is higher than it was 5 years ago, which is consistent with the findings of the</li> </ul>

	<p>the take up of e-learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E-learning is seen as a distinct practice, separate from on-the-job training, coaching and mentoring which are seen as far more effective training methods.</li> <li>• E-learning has not fulfilled its early promise (Sales hype?)</li> <li>• The perception is that people don't complete e-learning courses (which is the opposite to the data from the Apprentices' Survey), and that learners have a poor attitude towards it.</li> <li>• Reductions in training funds reported by 27% of participants while 51% reported no increase in funds - which does not correlate with the data in the National Employers' Skills Survey as reported by Train to Gain.</li> <li>• E-learning needs new attitudes and skills on the part of the learner, which are seen as a barrier to take up.</li> <li>• Lack of awareness of provision.</li> </ul>	<p>National Employers' Skills Survey as reported by Train to Gain.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A case study reveals that promoting awareness of provision and ensuring that the learning materials are in the relevant context can result in successful take up.</li> </ul>
<p>Micro firms E-learn2learn (no date)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only 1/3 of staff members have learning appraisal or development plans.</li> <li>• 75% of firms have no budget for training.</li> <li>• Limited access to the internet at work (52%)</li> <li>• 75% prefer to learn from colleagues.</li> <li>• Lack of interest, time and money - perceived low business value of e-learning.</li> <li>• Training is seen as a cost rather than as an investment.</li> <li>• Poor experiences of e-learning (poor tutor support, technical problems, poor quality of content) affects the perceptions of management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A majority of employers (75%) and employees (66%) perceive a need for new skills, or would benefit from more training although 25% said that they were already trained enough.</li> <li>• Chat rooms and discussion forums associated with e-learning could be used as opportunities to develop marketing partnerships.</li> </ul>
<p>Unionlearn</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductions to e-learning, including e-learning courses,</li> </ul>

Dadabhoy, Gowan, Luton and Jewell (2006)		guides and booklets are effective at introducing e-learning to first time users.
e-Learning users Overton, Hills and Dixon (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited demand from the workforce (11% of participants).</li> <li>• Extravagant claims for cost savings - supplier hype.</li> <li>• Mandatory compliance training is seen as a disincentive.</li> <li>• Poor infrastructure, complex systems and lack of remote access: however this report goes onto state that whereas poor infrastructure and IT skills were a barrier in the past, this is no longer the case.</li> <li>• Lack of time and poor time management.</li> <li>• Lack of awareness of what is available.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E-learning has a positive impact on job performance (45% of learners).</li> <li>• To be successful, e-learning must be relevant and easily transferred to job performance.</li> <li>• Other key enablers include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use of pilots</li> <li>○ Senior management support</li> <li>○ E-learning champions</li> <li>○ Branding</li> <li>○ Communicate success</li> <li>○ Perception of learner empowerment</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Convenience and breadth of learning opportunities.</li> <li>• Offer options to study at home as well as in the workplace.</li> <li>• Raise awareness through a range of channels including line manger briefings, newsletters and emails.</li> <li>• Recognition of success - but only 50% of learners are looking for recognised qualifications.</li> </ul>
Learners in large corporates Skillsoft (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of awareness</li> <li>• Lack of relevance and quality in learning materials (40% found e-learning courses could be improved or were irrelevant and boring).</li> <li>• Lack of importance placed on training by companies - 70% stated their companies placed only some or no importance on training at all - which is at variance with the findings of the National Employers' Skills Survey.</li> <li>• Lack of time to learn (40% said they had no time to learn), and only 25% said they were allocated time to learn.</li> <li>• Lack of employee commitment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publicising what is available is more likely to lead to e-learning take up as shown in the ING Direct case study.</li> <li>• The Line Manager role is critical to learning take up in general.</li> <li>• Based on their survey, the authors predict a marked shift towards “learner pull” and self-directed learning.</li> </ul>

<p>Providers, support agencies and learners Bell, Gulati and Hooker (2006)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of support services.</li> <li>• Lack of ICT skills amongst practitioners.</li> <li>• Lack of funding to enable colleges to implement e-learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exchange of good practice at local and regional level.</li> <li>• Practitioners being given time and space to develop and practice new skills.</li> </ul>
<p>E-learning and lifelong learning professionals Jennings, Kay, Schmoller, Umar and Wallis (2005)</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key enablers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Access and relevance of content</li> <li>○ Time to learn</li> <li>○ Reward and progression</li> </ul> </li> <li>• “The most significant interventions that make e-learning successful are ultimately the same as those that make for a positive learning culture in general” (p1).</li> <li>• Key incentives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A licence to learn</li> <li>○ Peer / tutor support and encouragement</li> <li>○ Social learning</li> <li>○ Leadership from senior management</li> <li>○ Advocacy and championing</li> <li>○ Learning strategy and a learning culture</li> <li>○ Financial support</li> <li>○ Organisational rewards</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Common themes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The business case for e-learning has not been proven.</li> <li>• There is an issue of funding, particularly among WBL providers and micro businesses.</li> <li>• Extravagant claims (e-learning will save up to 50%!) have proven to be groundless.</li> <li>• A perception of resistance to change amongst practitioners and learners, partially as a consequence of having to learn new skills.</li> <li>• There is a perception that practitioners lack the skills necessary to work with e-learning.</li> <li>• Amongst practitioners, there is a perception of lack of time to learn new skills, and to consolidate them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior management support and leadership is vital to successful uptake of e-learning.</li> <li>• The role of the Line Manager is also critical to motivating and supporting learners.</li> <li>• Access to computers and the internet at home and at work, with the ability to access learning content remotely.</li> <li>• High levels of IT skills exist.</li> <li>• Promote awareness of provision.</li> <li>• People have a perception of the need for training and a positive attitude towards training in general.</li> <li>• E-learning content needs to be relevant - the right context.</li> <li>• Recognition of success and rewarding success.</li> <li>• “Licence to learn” - time and space to learn.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poor past experience with e-learning, and e-learning is not seen as effective particularly compared with more preferred forms of learning including learning from colleagues, mentors and coaches.</li><li>• Lack of appropriate technical support.</li><li>• Lack of commitment and lack of awareness on the part of learners.</li><li>• “Perhaps the biggest challenge to the successful adoption of e-learning is changing the attitude of the learners towards it.” (CIPD, 2008: p 27)</li></ul>	
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# Personal and Community Development Learning: Literature Review Final Report

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## Introduction and Context

Post compulsory education below degree level is a sector difficult to define because of its extent and the very diverse nature of learners who undertake it. Now often referred to as Further Education (FE) and Skills, or Post-16, it covers learning delivered in colleges, sixth form colleges, specialist colleges, work-based learning providers and adult and community learning. The term Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL), which actually refers to a specific funding stream, has very recently come into use to describe what was formerly known as Adult and Community Learning (ACL).

The distinction between ACL and PCDL is described in the E-maturity review carried out by SERO Consulting on behalf of Becta published in April 2008, and which is an important source of recent background information for this report. It states:

“PCDL activity is delivered as part of Adult and Community Learning (ACL) programmes by a complex web of providers, ranging from large local authorities and large FE sector colleges through specialist designated institutions to small voluntary and community sector organisations. ...Whilst the former ACL sector represents a useful starting point, PCDL has a perceptibly narrower footprint than ACL. Currently, the identity and characteristics of the PCDL sector remain somewhat opaque” (p7)

For the purposes of this literature review we have drawn on research from a wide definition of the sector and referred to it as ACL\PCDL unless drawing from the SERO E-Maturity review which carefully restricted its scope. As well as learning for 14-19 year olds in FE colleges and for learners over 19 in FE colleges, Ofsted describes other adult learning it inspects in two ways: ‘learning and e-learning provided by learndirect through the University for Industry’ (Ufi) and ‘adult and community learning, ‘for example local authority funded evening classes’.<sup>43</sup>

The LSC divide statistical records of learning they fund into four types of Programme: FE, Work-based Learning (WBL), Train to Gain and Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL). Statistical First Release data shows ASL to have accounted for 314,600 learners enrolling in 2006-2007 and 259,600 in 2007-2008. Filtering this data by highest qualification level indicates that a tiny number are Level 3 learners (500 in 06-07 and 300 in 07-08).<sup>44</sup> Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL) provides a range of “appropriate adult learning opportunities for personal development, cultural enrichment, intellectual or creative stimulation and enjoyment and community development learning” (LSC, 2007: p6).

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Education-and-skills/Learning-and-skills> Accessed September 2008

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Education-and-skills/Learning-and-skills> Early April 2008 Excel File Accessed September 2008

In the LSC National Learner Satisfaction Survey, learners are divided into four categories - FE, WBL, PCDL (including learndirect) and learning delivered by an adult learning provider (ALP). The 2007 survey sample showed that a key difference between the learners in these groups was that the proportion of female learners was much higher in ALP and PCDL at 73% and 77% respectively, compared with 61% in FE and 43% in WBL (p5). Adult Safeguarded Learning does not include Skills for Life and other pre-level 2 learning, much of which is undertaken by adult learning providers. The LSC's statement of priorities for 2007 describes the volume of adult learners in "learning formerly known as ACL (including PCDL)" as 958,000 in 2007-8 (p30).

The diversity and characteristics of PCDL outlined in the SERO E-maturity review (2008: p 8) are a good description of adult and community learning as a whole, because the providers that draw down PCDL funding are largely those regarded by Ofsted as adult and community learning with the exception of learndirect. Learning is provided by local authorities, but some deliver directly and some contract out, possibly to an FE college and possibly to a voluntary and community sector organisation. The LSC fund some PCDL learning directly to FE colleges. PCDL funding is also accessed by a number of historically eligible organisations and some voluntary and community sector organisations. The nature of the environment is that it is 'extremely part-time for both learners and tutors, even managers' (p8), and the learning is diverse, not necessarily a formal programme and often negotiated with the learners.

ACL\PCDL providers may have restricted eligibility to national initiatives (for example, the Subject Learning Coaches programme was not accessible to them in its early phases) and when resources have been developed for Post-16, 'adult learning' has sometimes been regarded as a subject in its own right. National Learning Network (NLN) materials for ACL were developed in the final phase - a common pattern where initiatives take place in FE before they are rolled out to ACL. The SERO E-maturity review identifies the 'smallness overall' of PCDL as a barrier to progress in e-maturity (p46).

The review (2008) also describes the history of e-learning investment and development, (p9-10). It suggests that there have been three phases of e-learning development and that 'much of the current e-learning provision can be attributed to the second phase'. This refers to the period of investment funded by the LSC, managed by NIACE, and driven by the ACL NLN Strategic Working Group's plan (2003 - 2006). This plan 'articulated the need for ACL provision to be appropriate to the needs of the sector' (p9).

Towards the end of this period, NIACE carried out a survey 'The Potential of e-learning, 2005 in Adult and Community Learning' (Luger, 2005), which was also reported in the wider FE analysis of e-learning evidence (Crisp *et al*, 2006). No more recent information concerning the infrastructure and background to e-learning developments has been found by this literature review.

As the SERO E-Maturity review findings were based on a relatively small sample (37 providers, 88 practitioners), and in the absence of much other evidence, some reference is made to the NIACE survey as a significant source of information although based on data from before our cut off point of 2006. A small amount of evidence has been drawn from Higher Education (HE), including a small-scale investigation into Open University online learners who displayed some indicators of social exclusion.

The present research seeks to identify and explore incentives in e-learning and blended learning, basing our research questions around eight themes: barriers, funding, attitude and behaviour, skills evidence, exemplars, supply v. demand and innovation in technology.

## Barriers

This study investigated barriers and enablers to the take-up of online and blended learning. It draws primarily on three sources, a NIACE survey which compared data from 2003 and 2005, the e-maturity review of PCDL carried out by SERO Consulting (2008) on behalf of Becta, and a survey that formed part of a NIACE research report into the potential of introducing online and blended learning undertaken in 2007.

The NIACE survey, 'The Potential of e-learning 2005' (Luger, 2005) investigated the impact of the LSC funding that took place between 2003-2006 on the basis of the targeted interventions of the ACL NLN Strategic Working Group's Strategy (LSC, 2003). There were 347 respondents to the survey, of which 44% described themselves as local authorities, 19% as voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, 14% as FE colleges, 2% as Libraries and Museums and 2% as WEA. The results of the survey are reported in two groups - the ACL sector as a whole, and the local authority providers.

SERO Consulting's report 'E-maturity in personal and community development learning: Review report' (SERO, 2008) consisted of a provider self-assessment, a provider questionnaire and a practitioner questionnaire. 37 providers responded of which 70% were local authority direct delivery services, 24% local authority 'contracting out', and 2% VCS providers. 32 providers engaged in self-assessment using a model based on Becta's E-Maturity Framework for Further Education. 88 practitioners linked with these providers completed a questionnaire.

The NIACE research report 'Development of online courses with full online support project: Research report: The potential for introducing online learning in adult and community learning provision' (NIACE, 2007) surveyed providers' approaches to IT/ICT delivery and included questions designed to gain an understanding of providers' views of online learning and factors affecting their adoption of online learning. There were 191 responses to this survey and the breakdown of types of providers is even more extensive: 25% are VCS, 22% FE, 19% local authority, and 13% prison education. Private training providers, Adult Colleges, schools, Libraries and WEA are represented in the remainder of responses.

The composition of the respondents to all the surveys demonstrates the complex make-up of ACL\PCDL. The E-maturity review's (SERO 2008) smaller scale sample does not include FE colleges, although PCDL funding is available to FE as the report notes (p8).

Comparative figures in the NIACE survey from 2003 and 2005 show improvement in capacity to deliver e-learning, use of e-learning materials and availability of staff training both in ICT and in the use of ICT to support learning, starting from a low baseline compared with FE colleges as the computer student ratio (1:26 in local authorities) indicates (Luger, 2005). SERO found 38% providers in the 'developing aspects of e-maturity' category and the report further observes that in the categories of Context, Resources, Learning Support and Learning and Teaching providers are 'uniformly at the developing stage' (p11). Some of the 2005 survey data can be said to

indicate optimism, whereas the SERO data paints a more realistic picture in 2008. One example of this is the high number of local authorities implementing or planning to implement a learning platform in 2005 (Luger) contrasted with the 60% of staff who rated their ability to upload material to a learning platform as “poor” or “don’t know” three years later (SERO, 2008).

The student to computer ratio is very high, although continued capital investment since 2005 will have made a further impact on it. While this represents a barrier in terms of access, it must be seen in the context of the part-time learning that takes place in this sector with many learners only attending one or two classes per week. One computer therefore ‘goes further’ than in a more full-time learning environment. The SERO (2008) finding that the sector has strong ‘technical infrastructure and adequate connectivity’ (p11) is perhaps unexpected and may be explained by the fact that the small sample size was largely dominated by local authorities.

Both NIACE surveys indicate wide interpretation of online learning with substantial numbers citing the use of online learning materials such as BBC websites and NLN materials. (Luger, 2005; NIACE, 2007). Although all three surveys indicate knowledge of learning platforms, the evidence suggests that few ACL\PCDL providers are delivering ‘wholly’ online courses with full online support. Less than a third 28% reported this and included learndirect within that, a service they will have contracted to provide rather than courses they have created (NIACE, 2007 : p69). Consequently, there are very few opportunities for staff to develop experience of online tutoring or facilitating.

Table 1, which can be found at the end of this document, summarises the barriers and enablers extracted from the data.

## Funding

Funding for ACL\PCDL has changed many times in the last five years, seeing the end of the Adult and Community Learning Fund, and the introduction of PCDL, First Steps, and Train to Gain. Many ACL\PCDL providers have also had access, through regeneration partnerships and other consortia, to local funds such as Wired Up Communities, or UK online centre funds which enabled them to offer learning in well-equipped community-based learning centres. Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) funds have also been used in ICT initiatives. External funding sources, including the targeted LSC investment of 2003-2006, have driven most e-learning initiatives, with the exception of learndirect which attracts mainstream LSC funding. The SERO report (2008) identified ‘reliance on external funding for e-learning developments’ as an issue (p46) commenting: “Local funding has helped development of e-maturity; but many adult learning providers report that a relative lack of recurrent funding means that investment in capital and equipment may be less effective than hoped for ”(SERO, 2008 : p47).

This literature review found little evidence of funding models for online and blended learning. The NIACE research report (2007) reported that ‘approximately a third of respondents saw funding as a barrier’. Asked to select from a range of options that might act as enabling factors, the most frequently chosen answer related to staff development (44%) and was followed by funding to develop in-house materials, appropriate for learners (35%), further funding for additional hardware and supportive technology (34%) and additional staff time or funding for staff time to enable development of materials and requisite skills (15%), (p72).

This research (NIACE, 2007), also undertook expert interviews which identified a need for research into a ‘cost/benefit model in terms of benefit to the organisation and the learner’ (p7), and a review of current funding models to explore a funding model that can deal with enrolling learners outside the area the provider is contracted to serve.

One can infer from all the above that a longer-term funding model enabling ACL\PCDL providers to widen their market beyond their traditional geographical boundaries would act as an incentive to developing online learning delivery, perhaps building on existing investments in learning platforms.

## **Attitude and Behaviour**

### **Learners**

As reported previously, this literature review found no studies that exclusively investigated the perceptions of online and blended learners in ACL\PCDL. As we have seen from the previous discussion of barriers there is little wholly online provision taking place in this sector. However, ACL\PCDL providers are increasingly making online resources available as part of their programmes. In this section we draw on a range of studies that have investigated the perceptions and responses to online and blended learning of adult learners in other sectors.

A parallel is often drawn between a distance learner and an online learner (e.g., Clarke, 2007; Semmar, 2006; Knightley, 2007). Evidence of successful learning strategies in paper-based distance learning are therefore expected to work in an online environment. Clarke (2007) asserts ‘online learning is similar to distance learning in that successful students are often self-confident, with a past record of success, are good time managers and are willing to accept responsibility’ (p28). He argues that ‘only a minority’ of those accessing the enormous quantity of online resources, such as those made available through universities, ‘are highly skilled learners’ (p29).

Hedberg (2006) also discusses the use of digital repositories and the learning strategies that are required, which he defines as ‘personalized project management, the collection of resources from more than one source, requiring comparisons and contrastings to ensure that the information found meets the learning goal’ (p178). Like Clarke (2007), Hedberg considers the task a difficult one, even for ‘well-developed discipline knowledge specialists’ (p178).

This demand for what Semmar (2006) defines as ‘self-efficacy, self-regulation and motivation’ may be considered a substantial challenge for ACL\PCDL learners given what we know about the levels at which they are studying (mostly below Level 3), that they are likely to have had poor previous educational success, and may have basic skills needs. However, both Semmar and Clarke (2007) believe that learners can develop the learning strategies, independence and metacognition they need if they are effectively supported, given thorough and effective feedback (Semmar, 2006 : p253) and encouraged to undertake activities that are integrated into their learning programme (Clarke, 2007: p29).

Knightley (2007) has conducted a survey of Open University (OU) learners highlighting one or more indicators of social exclusion, such as low previous educational qualifications, disability, age, and ethnic minority background. The OU offer degree level courses, but they are a ‘second chance’ provider with an open entry policy. It

could be argued that the experiences of online learning reported in Knightley's study could be generalised to a wider group of adult learners at other levels of study. More than half of her sample were aged 25-44 and a third had low previous educational qualifications. Some learners were disabled. They either had access to a home PC or were provided with one by the OU. Their attitudes were investigated through telephone survey conducted before the course and some four months later.

Interestingly, their pre-course understanding of the nature of online learning was 'shallow' (p275). Some did not know what online learning meant and a few thought it no different to traditional learning. Over 40% had chosen the course for the degree or qualification it offered. When the nature of online learning had been explained to them and they were asked why they had chosen to study online 'more than half stated that they had not specifically chosen to study online': 6% cited flexibility, 5% cited 'can study from home' and 22% 'wanted to increase IT competency' (p276). These findings are important because if learners are largely unaware of the nature and demands of an online course at the outset, the provider and tutor must take great care to ensure the support mechanisms, opportunities for early success, effective feedback and appropriate learning activities (e.g. Semmar, 2006; Hedberg, 2006; Clarke, 2007) enable them to develop independent learning strategies.

Some other perceived advantages of online learning were also confirmed in Knightley's (2007) study. A number of disabled students reported on the convenience of studying from home and one commented that the anonymity of the online world was a positive, with some questions being 'easier to ask' (p280).

Online conferencing and discussions were popular with the group as a whole who were able 'to develop a sense of identity as a learner and receive support from their peers and tutor' (p280). One commented:

"Some students in the conference are already talking [about the first assignment]. I've not yet started so that's a bit of a worry - but also an incentive to get on with it" (p279)

Knightley (2007) reports the perceived benefits of online learning and that it can overcome barriers of access, but also reminds us that while educationalists hold up online learning as being at the cutting edge, 'students remain driven to learning by a thirst for knowledge...rather than by a curiosity to experience a different way of learning' (p282).

Learndirect, a major provider of online learning for adults, has been identified by the Leitch report as an example of good practice in addressing the key factors that support adult learning, such as 'aspiration, motivation and choice' (Ufl, 2008 : p2). Although Leitch's focus is on skills it is interesting that he selected these three psychological factors as reasons behind the establishment of the service. The ways in which learndirect suit the attitudes and behaviors of non-traditional learners are detailed in our report on offender learning and skills.

## **Practitioners**

For practitioner/tutors working in the range of environments described above, and under constraints of inspection regimes and new quality standards, motivation to adopt new working practices such as online teaching is likely to be diverse and context dependent. A study (Oslington, 2005) into what motivates academics to adopt online

and e-learning practices - or conversely, what perceptions deter them from taking it up, identifies three factors: a difficulty in 'verifying on-line learning expertise' (p99), the problem of 'firm-specificity' (p101) and 'the team nature of online learning' (p102). This study is set in the context of Australian universities but these issues will be encountered in Post-16 education in the UK, and perhaps most acutely in ACL\PCDL where online and blended learning is least prevalent.

The development of the eCPD framework (LSN, 2007) was an attempt to address the problem of unverifiability of expertise. It details competencies required as tutor, internal advisor on e-learning, external advisor on e-learning and e-learning project manager. Some qualifications are offered in online tutoring and online support: for instance, learndirect offer a range of short online course. For practitioners in ACL\PCDL however, the incentive to acquire such skills is tempered, as the lack of current online and blended provision will not afford them opportunities to develop expertise through practice, and it is unlikely that promotion, job-security or rewards will be affected by gaining such expertise.

The NIACE survey (2006) into the impact of the E-Guides training programme indicated that few staff were allocated time to carry out the role of promoter of 'e-learning', although it also pointed to high turnover amongst E-Guides, which might suggest that e-learning skills are in demand in the sector, but is more likely to simply be a result of the systemic turnover issue identified by SERO (2008).

Oslington argues that 'firm-specificity' - that is, skills that are not transferable between jobs - means that academics will be unwilling to invest their time and effort in acquiring online teaching skills. This may be a contributory factor in 'the lack of take-up beyond enthusiasts' (SERO, 2008: p73). However, there may also be an emerging incentive in acquiring firm-specific skills in the use of popular applications, such as the Moodle learning platform.

The team nature of setting up and running a course 'from an incentive viewpoint' (Oslington, 2005: p102) is least attractive to the academic (compared with other team members) because the link between individual efforts and results is 'not as clear' as in the traditional roles of course leadership and teaching. For the ACL\PCDL practitioner, there may be no team to work with, so the converse could be the case. Working alone however, requires the practitioner to develop skills in instructional design, technical skills, online tutoring, facilitation and moderating. The individual effort would be considerable, and highly visible and this would bring risk of failure along with opportunity for success, which may bring no other reward than recognition. A departure from traditional practice into online and blended delivery contains complex motivations and disincentives.

The SERO e-maturity review and the NIACE survey (2006) reported positive beliefs amongst practitioners. For example, '87 per cent believed that ICT and e-learning had allowed learners greater choice in learning opportunities' (SERO, 2008: p71) and fewer than 2% reported that personal motivation was low (NIACE, 2006 : p70). This contrasts however with SERO's findings that providers report low levels of confidence in policies concerning the wider benefits of e-learning, together with low levels of confidence in reduction of administrative burden.

Attitudes and skills are closely linked as this research has suggested; positive perceptions of online and blended learning may lead to skills development.

## Skills

In this section of the research we investigate what skills are needed by learners and practitioners to maximise the benefits of online and blended learning.

## Learners

ACL\PCDL learners are mainly studying below Level 3. 'The relatively low level of learner capability in using technology reflects the continuing high demand for entry and low level courses in the sector, both in ICT and other subjects' (SERO, 2008 : p93).

Alongside the learning strategies attitudes and behaviours required to succeed in online and blended learning, basic skills such as reading and writing are essential, and this is reflected in our report on Offender Learning and Skills, as well as in those relating to FE and Work Based Learning. In addition, online learning environments may require learners to have competence with Web 2.0 tools in order to engage in online conferencing and chat, or to enable recording of achievement in an e-portfolio, or reflecting on progress in a blog. Clarke (2007) argues that learners can acquire these skills through appropriate learning activities. He lists 'collaborating with others', 'searching for information' and 'assessing the quality of information' as 'skills required by the e-learner' (p28). Hedberg (2006) refers to 'IT literacy issues' by which he means not technical competence, but 'the ability to validate the information they had retrieved from the web or repository' (p178).

## Practitioners

Staff development was self-assessed as the most fundamental problem for ACL\PCDL providers in the E-maturity review (SERO, 2008: p23). The factor identified by most respondents in the NIACE 2006 survey that would enable them to incorporate online learning into their delivery was 'staff/training or development in online learning design (44%)' (NIACE, 2006: p71). Although 80% practitioners rated their skills as good or very good and over 60% rated their skills as 'OK' in 'using ICT with learners, knowledge of specialist software and managing workload with ICT' (SERO, 2008: p69-70), significant weakness appears in 'skills in teaching and facilitating online'(p22). Incentives to acquire such skills are discussed elsewhere in this report.

Good course design is widely considered to provide the structured learning environment learners need to succeed. This may include initial assessment, regular review, opportunities for goal-setting, and appropriately designed learning activities (e.g., Ufl, 2008; NIACE, 2006; Semmar, 2006; Clarke, 2007). Clarke argues that 'a balance must be struck' between over-formalising structure and maintaining 'the freedom that online learning offers'. The skills of the effective online tutor, in 'encouraging participation' and 'helping learners to become independent' (2007: p29) are just as important.

There is a general agreement about the kind of skills that practitioners need to develop and the drive towards professionalization, combined with the mandatory requirement to undertake CPD, is likely to lead to increasing numbers of staff taking advantage of national training programmes such as E-Guides and Subject Learning Coaches. This review has found it harder to uncover evidence of the most effective forms of CPD

however. Training is not considered to be 'successful' if it does not lead to changed behavior, according to Kirkpatrick's model, and while there is evidence of attitudes changing, e-learning practice has not been found to be the 'norm' anywhere in Post-16. Although the NIACE report into the impact of the E-Guides training programme was able to demonstrate that trainees and those who had received cascade training from E-Guides had improved their skills, knowledge and confidence, the low e-maturity findings indicate that this final transformation has not yet taken place.

In the early phases of the E-Guides training programme, funds were made available specifically to enable organizations to attract part-time staff to attend training. The NIACE Briefing Sheet (2006) suggests that payment to attend was practically a 'requirement' (p3) and that other rewards, such as memory sticks and peripheral devices 'had raised the profile' of the training. Other factors included delivering training in 'real workplace' situations as opposed to ICT rooms, and ensuring that tutors had access to equipment immediately after training to put skills to use. Training in curriculum teams and in small groups was felt to be effective. Embedding training in staff meetings was felt to be 'normalising' (p2). This suggestion is corroborated by the case study of Middlesbrough Adult Learning Service on the Excellence Gateway where the project leader suggests 'hi-jacking' team meetings to promote the use of a learning platform.<sup>45</sup>

Some E-Guides have reported that peer observation and team teaching have contributed to the uptake of e-learning by those less experienced with technology (E-Guides Case Studies: Westminster)<sup>46</sup>. The Briefing Sheet (NIACE, 2006) reports that training in basic trouble-shooting techniques can overcome the fear of 'looking silly' in front of a class when things go wrong.

One recommendation for a 'stand-alone CPD enhancement for all PCDL tutors' in providing 'pastoral support' for learners comes from the E-maturity review (SERO, 2008: p26).

### **Evidence, Exemplars and Innovation**

This section of the research report points to some current examples of e-learning practice in ACL\PCDL. Much of the evidence comes from NIACE project work .

Some local authorities have reported developments in online learning in the offer of professional development to staff, and in the offer of ITQ throughout the local authority (e.g., Westminster, Middlesbrough).

A small number of innovative projects, funded through Technology to enhance Adult and Community Learning (TrEACL) from the LSC pioneered online learning delivery: Creative Writing at Lancaster College, and Permaculture in the WEA South West (NIACE, 2005 p3-4)

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<sup>45</sup> <http://excellence.qia.org.uk/page.aspx?o=159430> Accessed September 10<sup>th</sup> 2008

<sup>46</sup> [http://www.niace.org.uk/Research/ICT/EGuides/research\\_eval.html#training0406](http://www.niace.org.uk/Research/ICT/EGuides/research_eval.html#training0406) Accessed September 10<sup>th</sup> 2008

Use of tutor-created video has been used quite extensively at Bolton Community College and the College's current EISL project uses vod and podcasting technologies for access via mobile devices<sup>47</sup>.

Grundtvig funding has supported an imaginative transnational development in online language learning, 'Apprendre virtuellement'. The Tees Valley learning platform consortium are the UK partners, and are utilising video and animations. They are also experimenting with drama for language learning in Second Life (an immersive environment)<sup>48</sup>.

Good practice in e-learning is reported by the E-maturity review and includes examples such as using the learning platform to provide resources for learners, and using e-learning to support 'assessment and record-keeping (in woodturning)'. No examples of online communications are given (SERO, 2008: p79)

No ACL\PCDL providers are among the ten providers selected in 2008 as technology exemplars, although some have been selected to be part of this initiative as developing providers.

### **Supply v. Demand**

The 'smallness overall' of the sector and 'low critical mass' in some subject areas (SERO, 2008: p46) means demand will always be less visible than that from other sectors.

Although SERO (2008: p15) report good staff access (67%) to a computer at work, it is unlikely that this would be found across wider ACL provision. Within this small sample, figures for access to the internet (58%), and to a learning platform (43%), drop to only 31% with access to a wireless network.

Demand for e-learning materials was seen to be steadily increasing by the NIACE 2005 survey (Luger, 2005), but LSN's finding that there is low overall usage of NLN resources suggests that this has perhaps levelled out.

'Virtually no providers' are making use of resources from the cultural sector (SERO, 2008 : p108). However, the NIACE 2005 survey reported a high demand for resources in Arts media and publishing (41%) and Languages, literature and culture (40%), suggesting a serious breakdown in communication between ACL\PCDL and the cultural sector.

### **Conclusions and Gap Analysis**

The low levels of e-maturity identified in 2008 contrast somewhat with the steady increase in e-learning development shown to have been taking place between 2003 and 2005. There may be a number of reasons for this, such as arrival at a critical point in the adoption curve, or increasing instability in a decreasing sector of provision. However, one obvious explanation would be the adoption of a Post-16 wide strategy in Harnessing Technology which does not take account of the very specific needs of this unique sector. An example of this, evidenced in the E-maturity review (SERO, 2008), is the extremely low understanding of personalised learning spaces and under use of e-portfolios. The

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<sup>47</sup> Extending, Inspiring and Supporting Learning through the use of Mobile Technologies <http://www.rsc-northwest.ac.uk/content/view/559/220/> Accessed September 8<sup>th</sup> 2008

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.grundtvig.org.uk/>

report suggests the value of personalised learning spaces should be understood in the context of PCDL, which has a tradition of delivering individualised learning.

Innovative projects are taking place in isolation and the low provider perceptions of the benefits of e-learning will not foster a climate in which change can flourish. Although local management appear to rate their understanding and vision of e-learning clearly, they are aware of the failure to turn this into reality. In a sector of such disparity, visible pioneers and role models, such as the technology exemplar providers, are needed to boost perceptions and model practice.

Powerful case studies of e-learning practice would fill some gaps in the literature which found few specific examples of incentives for providers to adopt online and blended learning apart from the generalised benefits that are well-known. Gaps include funding, examples of uses of social networking or uses of Web 2.0 tools, and evidence of management support for online and blended learning practice. These will be addressed in the interviews that form the next phase of our research.

**Mary Moss**

**NIACE**

**3 November 2008**

Table 1

	<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Enablers</b>
<p>The Potential of e-learning in Adult and Community Learning 2005 (Luger, 2005)</p>	<p>Ratio of learners to computers in local authorities improved from 30:1 to 26:1 by 2005 (p6) and for all ACL providers from 36:1 to 34:1 in 2005 (p37).</p> <p>22.5% locations had broadband access (p34).</p> <p>The number of locations providing computer access increased considerably since 2003 but fewer than one third had internet access (p6).</p> <p>Only 33% local authorities had adopted the E-Guides training programme model (p28).</p> <p>Only 6% of tutors and delivery staff were full-time (p24).</p>	<p>85.5% local authorities had one or more locations connected to the internet via broadband (p34).</p> <p>70% local authorities and 44% of other organisations were either using or in the process of installing a learning platform (p34).</p> <p>97% local authorities had access to some form of technical support (p24).</p> <p>80% offered some form of ICT skills training (p26).</p> <p>90% offered some form of in-house training in the use of ICT to support or deliver learning (p27).</p> <p>69% all ACL providers using some form of online learning content or materials (p42).</p>

<p>E-maturity in personal and community development learning: Review report. (Conducted on behalf of Becta by SERO consulting, April 2008)</p>	<p>The sector faces ‘a unique combination of systemic and organizational challenges’ (p10), most of which represent fragmentation - of delivery, of management structures, of curriculum and of the workforce. A further weakness is instability both of funding and of curriculum.</p> <p>The sector shows most weakness on the ‘Fit for purpose technology and systems’ quadrant of the Becta ‘balanced scorecard’ and this is largely due to very low scores in relation to ‘personalised learning spaces’, and use of learning platforms (p20).</p> <p>Over 60% staff rated online teaching/facilitating skills as poor/don’t know and a similar number were not confident in uploading material to a learning platform. However, practitioners indicated that they had reasonable knowledge of online learning materials.</p> <p>‘PCDL is an extremely ‘part-time’ environment for both learners and tutors, even managers’ (p8). Combined with systemic weaknesses described above, this leads to issues with staff development that is ‘self-assessed as the most fundamental problem’ (p23).</p> <p>Learners have low skills in the use of technology and the low balanced scorecard rating implies that practitioners do not see a change in this. Provision of technical support to e-learners was rated as ‘notably negative’ (p72).</p> <p>There were only 9% providers where ICT and e-learning</p>	<p>One strength that emerges from the e-maturity benchmarking is that there is ‘an effective technical infrastructure with adequate connectivity’ (p11).</p> <p>‘Learner focused assessment is relatively highly rated, to the extent that good practice is generally embedded across the PCDL sector’ (p93).</p> <p>Positive views were expressed about available support, both IT technical support and external advice.</p>
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	<p>are largely embedded, and 19% at the early stages of ICT and learning. Management is the only area in which the stronger providers cross the threshold from ‘developing’ to ‘established’ (p10). ‘Take-up of e-learning beyond enthusiasts’ was considered a weakness by staff (p72).</p> <p>Local authorities that contract out and small and rural authorities all find it more difficult to ‘reap the benefits’ of e-learning and technology.</p> <p>There are some low levels of confidence amongst providers that will impede the development of a climate for change.</p>	<p>There are positive beliefs amongst a majority of practitioners (87%), both in their own skill levels and that e-learning can bring about ‘greater choice for learners’ (p15).</p>
<p>Development of online courses with full online support project: Research report: The potential for introducing online learning in adult and community learning provision. (NIACE, 2007)</p>	<p>Limitations or barriers to online or blended learning were identified as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the environment within which the delivery/practice takes place (47%)</li> <li>• management structures and organizational ethos (28%)</li> <li>• access to technology/concerns over failure of technology (27%) (p70)</li> </ul> <p>‘Approximately a third’ of respondents cited funding as a barrier (p72) to use of online learning.</p>	<p>Few respondents had negative beliefs regarding online learning and their learners. Very few reported low motivation to use online learning.</p> <p>Over 44% respondents indicated that some form of online learning was in use, ‘dominated by provision that was not online but made use of online materials such as BBC websites’ (p71).</p>

		Staff development was the most frequently recorded factor perceived as enabling progress (44% respondents) (p71).
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# Offender Learning and Skills: Literature Review Final Report

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## Introduction and Context

It is no surprise that this literature review has not uncovered a great deal of research into e-learning in the offender learning and skills sector in the UK because, until recently, there was very little computer technology available and consequently no experience of the impact of this on education for offenders. However, recent government priorities have sought both to raise the quality of offender learning and to encourage the effective use of technology as part of this quality improvement (DfES, 2005a).

The offender learning and skills sector is a complex one, with a prison population that currently numbers over 80,000 in England and Wales, and a further 200,000 under the supervision of the Probation Service. In addition, many resettlement and rehabilitation services for ex-offenders are provided by voluntary and community sector organisations. Concerns about rising prison numbers and overcrowding in prisons are regularly reported, and the cycle of re-offending is not only a major social problem, but also represents a substantial cost. Powell (2008) quotes an estimated cost of £65,000 per prisoner in 2002<sup>1</sup> and ‘some current estimates double that figure’ (p4).

Men comprise approximately 95% of the prison population. In August 2008, the population in custody was 83,852. This includes those held in Secure Training Centres and Secure Children’s Homes. Of the total population, 78,976 were male, and 4,430 were women. Approximately 85% of the prison population are adults, i.e. 21 years of age or over (Ministry of Justice, 2008).

Education is seen to be a major force in breaking the cycle of re-offending (Offender Learning Journey 2005; Powell, 2008; Potter, 2008). The publication of the Offender Learning Journey (OLJ) (DfES, 2005a) demonstrated a policy-level understanding and commitment to make learning work for offenders both because ‘learning activities contribute to the delivery of a ‘humane and constructive prison regime’, and because for ‘offenders in the community, learning is a core intervention towards rehabilitation’ (DfES, 2005a : p4). ‘The right learning and skills’ will help the individual find work, and help them to remain in work - sustained employment is recognised as a major factor in reducing re-offending (DfES, 2005a: p4).

The positive effects of learning and opportunities for employment are perceived by offenders themselves as well as policy-makers and educationalists:

“‘Education is invaluable for self-development, self-esteem, knowledge and future career prospects. Without the additional qualifications I have achieved and will continue to attain during the sentence, I would be seriously compromised in work opportunities. At least now I can contribute to society.’ (Respondent 03)” (Englebright, 2007b : p50)

Potter (2008), who heads a major pilot e-learning programme (POLARIS), argues that technology can ‘have a positive influence on’ three of the factors identified as having an

effect on the propensity of an offender to commit further crime on release - education, employment and maintaining family contacts.

The OLJ (DfES, 2005a) provides a definition of who is included under the term “offender”, and this definition is also used by the LSC:

“those held in custody, serving part of their sentence in the community or whilst under supervision in the community. Remand prisoners are not, of course, offenders. Nevertheless, the offer outlined in this Offenders’ Learning Journey applies equally to those - unconvicted prisoners - held on remand.”

Since the start up of the OLJ, new arrangements for learning in prisons have been established, and the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) went live in 2006 after a year’s trial. Personalised individual learning plans, based on detailed needs assessments, are at the heart of the OLASS provision, which states:

“ensuring offenders have the underpinning skills for life (literacy, language, numeracy and basic IT skills), and have developed work skills, will enable them to meet the real needs of employers in the area where they live or will settle after their sentence is complete.” (DIUS, 2007)

There are eighteen OLASS providers and they are subject to Ofsted inspection to the same standards as other Post-16 education providers. In fact, two colleges and one private provider account for approximately two thirds of OLASS provision (Powell, 2008: p6). This new development in education for offenders is having a significant impact on the opportunities for developing the take up of e-learning and blended learning because of the commitment to integrate with mainstream education (which already includes an online/blended offer).

The OLJ has a section entitled Distance Learning, Resource-based Learning and e-learning which outlines a broad commitment to ‘altering and expanding’ e-learning which it claims ‘has already been successful in engaging offenders who are not willing to take part in traditional learning’ (DfES, 2005a : p34). Reasons given for the adoption of e-learning include continuity of learning between prisons, and between prison and the community, flexibility, the ability to empower learners to achieve their learning goals, and to engage learners who are ‘demotivated’ by paper-based traditional learning, as well as achieving value for money by ‘maximising the availability of resources’. Ufl learndirect provision is considered to be ‘successful’, ‘interactive’ and ‘engaging’ (DfES, 2005a p34).

Over the last five years, a number of initiatives have been implemented that have provided opportunities to develop ICT skills and to use technology in other learning such as language, literacy and numeracy, as well as providing access to a wider curriculum through online learning. These initiatives include:

- Prisons ICT Academy (PICTA)
- Open University courses
- Learndirect
- Programme for Offender Learning and Resettlement Information Services (POLARIS)

PICTA is a National Offender Management Services (NOMS) Offender Employment, Skills & Services Group, which is a managed and funded project that aims to promote IT training within Prisons. It offers a range of courses and delivers using workshops that

are required, as far as possible, to simulate a real office environment. PICTA established its first workshop in 2004 and now has 24 sites<sup>49</sup>. None of these are in women's prisons.

Pike estimates that the Open University (OU) registered approximately 1500 courses to prisoners in 2006-7<sup>50</sup>. OU courses were previously available via paper-based distance learning, but now require internet access for full participation.

Ufl and learndirect also deliver in a number of prisons subject to the agreement of each individual Governor. In 2007, there were 25 prisons with full internet based delivery (Powell, 2008). Drawing on two previous evaluation reports, Powell claims that learndirect is "both relevant and outstandingly successful for this client group," (p36).

The POLARIS project involves seven prisons. It is a 'proof of concept' project that has the potential to be rolled out across the entire secure estate. The primary objective of POLARIS is to deliver a joined up offender network that provides a managed and secure environment. The infrastructure provides safe, filtered internet access through a system of 'dumb' clients, and content is carefully accredited (Potter, 2008). The term 'dumb' clients in this case is used to describe terminals that do not process data or execute user programs locally, meaning they cannot be hacked into.

It is clear that e-learning initiatives are still in the early stages in this sector and as a result, only a limited amount of research has been undertaken. This report is therefore, based on a fairly narrow range of research, taking 2006 as the agreed cut off point but reaching further back to 2005 for significant contributory documents such as the OLJ. We also include evidence from two surveys of offenders' views undertaken by NIACE in 2004 because of their high degree of relevance.

The literature search for this report, Incentives for Online Learning Offender Learning and Skills (2005-2008), was carried out using Heritage, the NIACE Library catalogue, and the British Education Index (BEI). The search included anything relating to the specified sector that might contain information on 'incentives' in the sense of 'factors that contribute to success'. It was assumed that the implicit focus of all recent literature (2005-2008) on e-learning, ICT and learning etc., is in fact online learning, rather than merely computer-based learning. A search on offender learning / prison education in general was also carried out with implicit references to e-learning highlighted. A number of EU projects focusing on offender e-learning, were also identified.

The present research seeks to identify and explore incentives in e-learning, basing our research questions around eight themes: barriers, funding, attitude and behaviour, skills, evidence, exemplars, supply and demand and innovation in technology.

## **Barriers**

### **Access to facilities**

Access to equipment and resources is clearly a major factor for those in custody as this is entirely dependent on the regime of the prison or institution. For those in the community, this is also important as the facilities available for learning are likely to be under-resourced.

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.picta.co.uk/> Accessed September 5<sup>th</sup> 2008

<sup>50</sup> <http://pet.netefficiency.co.uk/index.php?id=103> Accessed September 5<sup>th</sup> 2008

Table 1 at the end of this paper draws on recent research to describe the current access situation in offender learning.

The hardware, software and connectivity issues outlined above can be improved through the current capital investment programme. The attitudes of prison staff towards the use of technology are also an important factor in dealing with risk. The Head of Learning and Skills, HMP Ranby, expresses this issue clearly:

“E-learning in prisons is a sensitive issue, especially so in a prison holding men who have offended using the Internet. The aim is therefore to manage the risk rather than avoid it and any use of ICT is carefully monitored. The more successful use we make of ICT in learning, the more practised we will become at managing this risk,” (cited in Englebright and Essom, 2008: p18).

Further barriers to the uptake of e-learning and blended learning arise from the environment of offender learning and the skill levels of offenders. In Englebright’s (2007a) survey of male and female offenders’ views of online learning, respondents identified lack of access to computers at home, long waiting lists in public points of access, and unreliable equipment as barriers. A further concern was getting ‘access to tutor support’ (Englebright, 2007a: p68).

### **Learners’ Skills**

Offenders very often have poor levels of language, literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, which are collectively termed ‘basic skills’ needs (OLJ, 2005; Englebright, 2004; Englebright, 2007; Powell, 2008; Taylor, 2005). These may prevent offenders from being able to use computers effectively for learning.

Englebright’s (2007a) survey investigated differences in views between male and female prisoners and showed degrees of familiarity with ICT and applications. Male respondents were twice as likely to have used a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA); 5% more males than females had used digital cameras, and 20% more males than females had used a scanner. More than two-thirds (69%) of all respondents had used a word-processor and almost all (94%) had owned a mobile phone. Although 20% more male than female respondents had owned a computer, overall ownership of computers, at 62%, was quite high when compared with data on home ownership of computers amongst the UK population which at that time was 59%. There were 228 respondents to this survey of whom 137 (60%) were aged 25 or under.

Despite the apparent familiarity with technology within this group, data relating to use of the internet and email indicates less familiarity. For instance, only ‘37% had sent or received email’ compared with the 85% of internet users regularly using email reported by Cabinet Office in 2004 (Englebright, 2007a: p45). Not surprisingly, only 2% of offenders had used the internet while in prison (p44). Reporting on their previous experience, prior to sentencing, respondents (male and female) described their internet usage. Almost half (46%) had used the internet from a friend’s house, a quarter (26%) in an internet café and 22% in a public library. Female respondents were 8% more likely to use the internet in a library than male respondents (p43). There are many possible interpretations of this finding - perhaps women are more inclined to use the internet where they can also access some support. Englebright comments that public internet

use in libraries is 'limited', but that these statistics indicate it is not through 'lack of interest'. She suggests that perhaps friends have a role in offering support (p43).

Respondents also identified a number of potential barriers to online learning that related to attitude and behaviour, citing lack of confidence with computers, lack of confidence in asking questions and understanding learning material, lack of 'push' from a tutor. They also commented on the possibility that learners would access information "they're not supposed to" (p71).

In an open question when asked for further comments about education, learning or technology, responses often indicated very positive responses to education in general and to the use of computers. Lack of access to the internet was perceived as having critical impact, especially for those studying or wishing to study Open University courses, but also for completion of IT courses (p71-2).

### **Staff Skills**

The staff engaged in the delivery of learning within the secure estate is highly dispersed and often geographically distant from the college employer. Staff working in the voluntary and community sector organisations and through the Probation Service are unable to access support and training offered to the college workforce. Training programmes such as E-Guides were not made available to practitioners in offender learning nor to staff from VCS during the pilot and first phase of the programme (2004-2005) in contrast to extensive training opportunities available in colleges as detailed in our FE report. In any event, it can be argued that their remoteness from main sites would have prevented them from benefitting from the cascade element of this programme.

The majority of staff engaged in learning delivery are part-time, which is similar to the findings for the PCDL/ACL sector. Since 2006, OLASS staff has been covered by the same requirements in terms of professional qualifications and continuing professional development (CPD) as staff in other areas of Post-16 education. However, the requirement to log 30 hours of CPD per year with the Institute for Learning (IfL) is reduced pro-rata in the case of part-time staff to a minimum of 6 hours.

The delivery of learning and skills depends on the attitudes of prison staff. Braggins and Talbot (2005) indicate that 'prisoners value support and encouragement from 'officers on the wings', and drawing on research with a sample of 77 prison officers, they found that 'officers thought that prisoner education was important, although they had different priorities from learning and skills professionals' (p8). This report has only one reference to information technology as officers from only a small number of prisons raised the issue. Staff from 'juvenile prisons' felt that more use could be made of 'interactive websites' to assist in learning and improve contacts for offenders on release' (p30). Two possible barriers are indicated here: a potential tension between prison staff and those employed by contracted learning providers, and low awareness of the opportunities that technology can bring to learning. Training and awareness raising in the 50,000 staff who make up the prison service with a 24/7 delivery is no easy undertaking (Bolger and Bennet, cited in Englebright, L "Test the Prison" (unpublished)). It may be inferred from this that time is potentially a major barrier to the uptake of ICT and e-learning training amongst prison staff.

A range of barriers confront learners and practitioners in the offender learning environment both in prisons and in community settings. Opportunities for practitioners to engage with technology in their courses and classes are limited. Offender learners rarely find themselves in situations with access to a wide range of e-learning resources. Barriers for learners and practitioners can be summed up as:

- Lack of access to suitable equipment;
- Lack of access to the internet and consequently to the range of resources that have been developed to support the delivery of the Post-16 curriculum;
- Low skill levels which prevent taking full advantage of available resources;
- Low levels of awareness of the benefits of using computers and technology amongst prison staff;
- An understandably high degree of risk averseness amongst prison staff;
- Differing priorities between prison staff, including governors, and learning and skills staff that may result in tension affecting the 'climate' for learning;
- Isolation from the mainstream preventing staff from taking up training opportunities and peer support;
- Lack of time for prison staff and part-time employees to be released for training.

### **Funding**

Currently offender education is mainly funded by the LSC through contracts awarded under OLASS which run until end of July 2009. Private prisons, of which there are eleven currently operating in 2008, have different arrangements.

During the consultation process on the OLJ, the LSC were asked how e-learning projects could be implemented. Firstly, their response (LSC, 2008) detailed the sums of money invested as described above. Secondly, they cited POLARIS (currently funded by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS)) as a potential model for the future. Thirdly, they stated that they were encouraging learndirect to 'extend its provision in custody using LSC mainstream funds' (p50).

The relationship between OLASS and learndirect is said to be a 'mutually supportive one' with one provider contracting learndirect. (Powell, 2008; p14)

The E-enabling offender learning and skills (EEOLS) project funding (LSC, managed by NIACE) was available to contracted providers of offender learning, including prisons and probation services, private training providers and voluntary sector organisations. There were forty-nine successful projects which received a total of just over a million pounds for capital and revenue.

Funding streams for capital and the EEOLS projects were over-subscribed (NIACE data) indicating that discrete funding has been an incentive for providers to explore uses of e-learning in the offender learning environment. Subsequent interviews may be able to determine whether these projects have led to sustained e-learning practice.

This literature search found no reference to mainstream funding for e-learning online and blended learning for offenders other than the references to learndirect. This gap in the literature will be explored through subsequent interviews.

## Attitude and Behaviour

The present review investigated practitioner and learner responses to online and blended learning in particular.

### Learners

Englebright (2007a) describes the profile of offenders: they are likely to have poor previous learning experiences, few qualifications and a history of truancy. They also have 'low self image and see themselves as failures' (p11). Powell (2008) adds a further list of behaviour patterns such as 'inability to see intentions through to completion', 'short term enthusiasm, which collapses without immediate reward', and 'short concentration span' (p35).

Characteristics attributed to successful distance and online learners, such as 'taking responsibility', 'past educational success' and 'good time management' are in direct contrast to this (Clarke, 2007: p28). Clarke further argues that the ability to work independently and to apply effective learning strategies must be fostered in order to support the development of successful online learners.

Powell (2008) argues that the learndirect product is 'almost uniquely designed' to address the attitude and behavior problems found amongst offenders' (p35). Learndirect is an online product, with its courses designed around the concept of short chunks of learning. It has a fully integrated support system, the Learner Support Environment (LSE), with 'embedded induction, goal-setting review and progression points built in' (Ufl, 2008: p7). The result is a personalised learning experience which starts with a needs assessment, and which enables learners to undertake activities in short chunks, to keep track of their progress and review it regularly with staff (Ufl, 2008; Powell, 2008).

Although the learndirect product is online, Ufl describes the importance of face-to-face support which is 'highly valued and the learning experience is personalised through the building of relationships between learner and tutor' (Ufl, 2008: p8). The 'one-to-one' nature of the tutor's feedback and encouragement, are emphasized alongside the flexibility that learndirect gives learners in terms of working at their own pace, repeating tasks as necessary. It is argued that one of the attractions for learners with pre-existing negative experiences of learning is its 'private nature', and the way it removes the fear of failure (p10). Powell (2008) also asserts that 'the key to good practice lies in what tutors and centre staff do....which is critical to the experience and ultimately the success of a client group that need a lot of support' (p37).

The main themes from Englebright's 2007a survey indicate that offenders experience a sense of achievement when skills and confidence improve, and that education (especially computer related) is a way to improve employment prospects. In relation to online learning, respondents identified the benefits of online learning as offering the opportunity to acquire ICT skills and qualifications that might lead to employment. They were concerned 'not to get left behind' as technology moves forward, and they perceive that online learning offers unique opportunities of 'time, place and pace' (Englebright, 2007a: p9).

Respondents showed a good understanding of these benefits, commenting on how specific groups such as one parent families and people with disabilities can access this form of learning as well as those in prison. Other motivating factors they identified were that it is 'up to date', 'provides access to a wide range of information', 'cuts down on paper' and 'enables you to ask daft questions without embarrassment' (Englebright, 2007a: p62).

“Learning online is a good idea especially for people with disabilities or single mums it keeps people in education and provides a 24 learning service. We should have them in our cells in prison then achieve as much as we can.” (Female respondent in Englebright, 2007a : p62)

This survey also indicated that the offenders believe that online learning would be able to provide the support they want in a variety of ways, such as email contact, chat and conferences. Also they felt online learning was able to add to the learning experience by 'removing the sense of isolation of learning at a distance' (p49).

The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research's report of a project offering internet access in four prison schools commented that "the technology became a tool for developing self-confidence and skills and is a source of motivation for many of the inmates (2004: p27). Clarke (2007) also asserts the 'overarching factors' of 'self-confidence and self esteem' in success with online learning (p29).

Although the attitudes and behavior considered to be typical of the offender learning group would suggest that online learning was unlikely to be successful, Englebright's (2007a) survey suggests that learner perceptions of online learning are very positive. Powell's Best Practice Guide argues that, with effective support, the online offer from learndirect is very successful. It can be argued that if similar effective support systems were set up, offender learning provision may be able to maximise the use of existing e-learning resources, making a wider curriculum offer.

## **Practitioners**

This review found very little information that related directly to the perceptions of practitioners working within prisons. The FE impact survey (Golden *et al*, 2006) has no apparent evidence relating to staff working with offenders and neither does the PCDL e-maturity review (SERO, 2008).

The role of prison staff is significant in ensuring offenders have access to learning opportunities. Powell (2008) identifies 'two deeply ingrained views held by many prison officers' : firstly that computers are 'a form of entertainment', and secondly that skilled users may be able to 'sidestep the inbuilt safeguards' and compromise security, viewing the internet as a tool of the trade for paedophiles and other sexual predators' (p28). Braggins and Talbot (2005) encountered only a small number of prison officers who were positive about the use of technology.

In conditions where senior staff and security regimes are cautious about the introduction of technology and access to the internet, enthusiastic e-learning practitioners are faced with greater challenges than those encountered in FE and PCDL. Since 2004, over one hundred staff working in offender learning have attended the E-Guides training programme, funded originally by LSC and currently by QIA, which trains practitioners in

e-learning skills (NIACE internal data). Some staff in offender learning also had access to the 'Exploring e-learning' for literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers' training that was delivered to FE staff between 2003 and 2005. Attending training off-site and obtaining permission for release is problematic where many of the staff members are themselves part-time, as is most of the learning provision. Finding suitable cover staff is also an issue.

Both surveys reported in the FE section of our report indicate uptake of training and positive attitudes and beliefs about e-learning, but they also report that the embedding of e-learning has a long way to go. The PCDL e-maturity review (SERO, 2008) found the majority of provision to be at 'developing' level. Given that e-learning investment in offender learning and skills occurred later than elsewhere in Post-16, and that there are additional barriers unique to this sector, it can be argued that the enthusiasm of the small number of staff who have the required skills will have had limited impact to date, mainly due to their isolation and the relatively short period they have had to implement new practice.

## **Skills**

This research study sought to identify the skills needed by learners and practitioners in order to maximise the benefits of online learning.

## **Learners**

A report by The House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2004-5) stated that the lack of IT access available to prisoners is a failing of current provision. It argues that prisoners need IT skills for improving their employment prospects and accessing online courses (cited by Englebright, 2007: p11). ICT skills were established as a Skill for Life in 2003. The OLJ expects learning providers to take note of new qualifications in ICT, such as the ITQ, and asserts that 'learners must have the opportunity to gain ICT skills and be encouraged to use them across the curriculum' (p23). It also suggests that 'some learners may be capable of progressing to level 3 or 4' (p23).

Englebright's 2007a survey found a familiarity with computers and other devices but that this knowledge of technology had been acquired outside custody.

A further finding was that offenders are likely to have poor basic skills, not just in ICT but also in literacy and numeracy. Respondents described difficulty with 'reading the English', and 'understanding the way the questions were wrote' as possible barriers to online learning (Englebright, 2007a : p11). Taylor (2005) argues that offender learning has suffered from 'death by basic skills' provision (p12). However, progress in achieving basic skills qualifications is meeting government targets. In 2004-05, the National Probation Directorate (NPD), in partnership with the LSC, exceeded its annual target for basic skills awards with nearly 9,500 awards achieved against a target of 8,000 (Green Paper, 2005). Clarke (2007) includes reading and writing in a list of skills required by the e-learner (p28). He further argues that as 'email is the dominant method of communication' between tutor and learner, good writing skills are required to communicate the learner's needs 'clearly and concisely' (p28). This may prevent offenders from engaging in effective email discussions about online learning in environments where there is no face-to-face support.

Mellar *et al* (2007) found in the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) for adult literacy and numeracy that ‘learners improved in almost all cases in both literacy/ESOL and ICT skills and confidence’ (p8). This was a small case study research project and did not include examples of offender learning. However, the main findings point to two factors of relevance: firstly that ‘most users found the use of ICT motivating’ and that mobile devices such as PDAs and mobile phones were ‘particularly motivating’ (p8), and secondly, that initial ICT-confidence scores correlated with learners’ persistence. This second factor would suggest that building ICT confidence may enable those learners who are easily discouraged to sustain their learning programmes. ‘The findings of this report lend strong support to the claim in the Moser report (DfEE, 1999) that learners who use ICT for basic skills double the value of their study time, acquiring two sets of skills at the same time’ (p10).

Clarke (2007) lists a number of other study skills, such as planning, collaborating with others and problem-solving as being required by the e-learner (p28). Powell (2008) describes offender learners as having ‘no capability for rational planning’ and ‘no awareness of the consequences of their actions’ (p35) which would limit their abilities to work with others and work through a problem. Clarke argues that activities that encourage the development of these skills should be introduced into online learning (p29).

### **Practitioners**

The LSDA ‘Exploring e-learning’ summary of outcomes (Woodcock, 2005) found that ‘training in teams and in the workplace’ is effective in CPD (Presentation slide 5). The NRDC Effective Practice Study in ICT found that tutors used experimentation and reflection before ‘sharing their learning with peers’ to develop their skills (Mellar *et al*, 2007: p9). It can be reasonably assumed that opportunities for collaborative staff development are restricted in the relative isolation of offender learning both in prisons and in community settings.

The same need for staff development was identified in the NIACE mapping report (Englebright, 2007c) as in the PCDL e-maturity survey (SERO, 2008). In their impact in FE study, Golden, McCrone, Walker and Rudd (2006) found that a third of practitioners felt they needed more time to use ICT to prepare and develop learning materials. Lack of time is also reported as an issue in the LSN e-maturity survey and in the E-Guides Impact study (NIACE, 2006).

In his discussion of the staff skills required in learndirect centres, Powell (2008) states that although learndirect is an online product, it is clear that the face-to-face support is a critical element of these centres’ success. He supports the recommendation from centre managers that a staffing ratio of one tutor to eight learners is ideal. He argues that staff who work in these centres need to have ‘attitudes’ such as positivity and ‘a well-defined sense of what is appropriate behaviour’ as well as ‘attributes’ such as self-reliance. He argues that these are as important as the qualifications, skills and experience that professional tutors are required to have (p22).

In contrast to other sectors of Post-16, where practitioner skills in using Virtual Learning Environments (VLE), online course design and online moderation and facilitation are discussed in the context of online and blended learning, no similar references have been found in the literature covering the offender learning and skill sector. We can assume that this is due to the very restricted opportunities that staff would have to make use of such skills.

## Evidence

Evidence of successful incentives and benefits of online learning in this sector has been found in reports of learndirect provision. The benefits include thorough individual initial assessment leading to personalised courses of learning, regular review points, and effective support.

NIACE project work shows that the provision of information on CD-ROM has been both attractive to offenders and an effective way of improving access to information about learning. In addition, Skills for Life tutors and learners have reported positive responses to interactive diagnostic tests (Englebright, 2007c).

Nashashibi *et al* (2007) report a case study at HMP Wolds in which learners were trained in online marketing skills. They developed their own website as part of the training. The study<sup>51</sup> reports that 'offenders were highly motivated to acquire media technology skills. Participants are selected through a rigorous process and strict rules of compliance are enforced. The case study suggests that offenders involved in this project were all successful in gaining parole at first application and some gained employment, after their release, with the company and training provider who 'employed' them during the project. One of the reported success factors was the rigorous selection procedure. Other case studies<sup>52</sup> report a degree of e-learning taking place - in-cell television, onscreen assessment for dyslexia, and recording music, stories film etc.

There is some evidence in the case studies and elsewhere that learners respond well to learning in realistic work environments and working to deadlines (e.g., Youth Offenders DVD production project; PICTA reports; Englebright, 2007c)

## Exemplars and Innovation

The present study has identified a number of success stories in e-learning, online and blended learning.

Potter (2008)<sup>53</sup> claims POLARIS 'is viewed as successful not only by prison staff, but also by senior members of the Prison Service, offenders who use it and other stakeholders in the education and resettlement areas'. The LSC (2007) expects to draw lessons from POLARIS that will demonstrate the potential for e-learning activity in custodial establishments and lessons from that project will be incorporated in plans for the future' (p50). Pettit and Hussain (2008) report that the POLARIS pilot will inform 'a business case ahead of a potential national rollout' (p4). Potter (2008) lists a number of developments as extensions of POLARIS that are under investigation for the near future including a learner management system, in-cell delivery, the development of the 'campus' model (a DIUS/LSC pilot project to integrate mainstream and offender learning and skills), the creation of new content, and work with the OU to enable access to courses. He adds 'areas of interest for the future include offender email, video visits and an offender intranet'<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Accessed on CD: navigate>About promising practice

<sup>52</sup> Accessed on CD: navigate>About promising practice

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk> Accessed September 8<sup>th</sup> 2008

<sup>54</sup> <sup>54</sup> <http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk> Accessed September 8<sup>th</sup> 2008

One prison/youth offender institution (HMP/YOI Moorlands) has used interactive voting software in classroom based learning which is said to have motivated learners to participate and been of particular benefit to learners with low literacy skills and/or learning difficulties or disabilities (Englebright, 2007c)

The WEA, working with an area-based Probation Service team used dyslexia pens which convert text to speech. This has enabled learners to learn in a group at the same speed as others and it has been reported that this has also had a positive impact on self-confidence. (Englebright, 2007c)

Red Kite Learning, a VCS provider, has provided laptops with wireless connectivity for use in probation offices so that learners can access a learning platform which hosts a range of resources and the opportunity to follow accredited preparation for work courses (Englebright, 2007c).

One college (Leicester College) has found online e-assessments to be more effective than paper-based tests for learners they work with through the probation service. One major advantage of this was that results were obtained immediately which allowed the next stage of learning to be planned and organised quickly.

HMP Swaleside has put over 1000 learners through learndirect centres (Powell, 2008). In some prisons, there is just one centre for the whole prison, but others have centres located on a wing (a residential area within the prison), or wings. Powell (2008) discusses the pros and cons of the location of centres, but is generally in favour of the wing-based centre which allows more prisoners to engage with learning and reduces dependence on security staff to escort offenders to a central centre. HMP Swaleside at one point had five wing-based centres.

Learndirect provision through a probation service in a rural area (Avon and Somerset) has covered learners' travel costs to reach centres, and taken learning out to a variety of locations through a mobile facility (Englebright, 2007c).

Two projects working with young offenders explored the opportunities of internet access. The first is an example of aligning offender learning with the mainstream. This Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) project enabled young girls held in custody to use the internet for the first time. This 'enhanced' their learning experience 'in line with the experiences their peers take for granted' (p47). The second, in which two stand-alone computers were used for job-search and CV writing, demonstrated a change in the young people's attitudes to e-learning as a result of what they perceived to be a 'heavy investment in their learning' (p48).

Norfolk Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (ACRO) and Norfolk Probation Area, aimed to improve offenders' skills by developing and sustaining e-learning. The project reports that learners have gained in confidence when approaching tests, improved independence in revision skills, and this has ultimately led to gaining employment as a result of qualifications (p13).

### **Supply v Demand**

In the context of this sector, the question of whether supply of technology meets the demand of practitioners and learners could be said to be less relevant because knowledge and awareness of what technology can offer is not highly developed.

However, a demand for safe internet access and for the kind of engaging, interactive, personalised and appropriate learning attributed to the use of technology has been frequently reported (OLJ, 2005; Ufi 2008; Powell, 2008; Englebright, 2007).

There has been very significant capital investment throughout offender learning in the last three years and there is now significant opportunity to extend the good practice learned from other sectors. Evidence from elsewhere in Post-16, detailed in our reports on WBL and FE, suggests that to ensure benefits from this investment are maximised, systematic staff development is required, along with reliable maintenance and technical support.

There is a demand for safe web access that would enable offenders to have a personalised online learning space or online portfolio where learning records and achievements could be stored (Pike, 2008; SERO, 2008). A presentation to an Open University colloquium on e-learning in prisons reported that 54 out of 57 prisons in Sweden were part of a national network that enabled students to carry on studying 'seamlessly' - 'students are provided with thin clients and communicate with their teacher in a 'virtual room' where the teacher can deposit materials and communicate with the student via a forum'.<sup>55</sup>

Taylor (2005) argues for offenders to have access to email to improve communications and to reduce time spent monitoring prisoners' post. He quotes the governor of a large Category B male prison: 'I like the idea of prisoners using email. After all, you can't email heroin into my prison' (p16).

### **Conclusions and Gap Analysis**

Technology is a motivator for learners in this sector both in prisons and in community settings. Online and blended learning for this group must have very effective learner support. The incentives for this group of learners could be described as being high stakes as opportunities to gain employment are associated with acquiring skills and qualifications as are improved life-chances. But they are likely to need highly personalised programmes to progress and develop effective learning strategies.

Commitment from government to working towards parity in learning opportunity for offenders, and to reducing re-offending are likely to be the strongest drivers to overcoming the identified barriers. Gaining skills and qualifications will therefore continue to be a primary goal of learning for offenders who will be released into the community.

The PCDL e-maturity report (SERO, 2008) concludes that for PCDL, the creation of personalised online learning space should be targeted at certain sectors of the constituency. The OLASS commitment to a personalised plan for organising and recording an offender's learning would suggest that this requirement could be well served in the same way.

E-maturity in this sector can be seen as emerging. The range of innovative pilot projects has not yet been translated into firm developments.

The part-time nature of employment, the high degree of dispersal and relative lack of access to staff development opportunities impedes take-up of training for learning and

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<sup>55</sup> <http://sclater.com/blog/?p=100> Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> October

skills staff and prison staff alike. With the additional disincentive of having to overcome security issues, it is unsurprising that change is taking place very slowly.

The support of senior staff is essential, and in prisons this is likely to be the Prison Governor.

The primary gap in the literature concerns evidence from practitioners about both the incentives and enablers for e-learning. E-maturity surveys in FE and PCDL have drawn extensively on the views of staff and less on learners' experiences. In addition, there is a gap in evidence concerning the funding of provision beyond that associated with learndirect.

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**NIACE**

**3 November 2008**

**Table 1: Barriers and enablers identified in Offender Learning and Skills**

Barriers	Enablers
<p>Where there is equipment, the quality is variable and often poorly maintained (DfES, 2005a; Englebright, 2007a).</p>	<p>LSC investment in equipment and infrastructure amounted to £2.18 million in 2006-2008. A further investment of £5.7 million is committed for 2007-2008 (LSC, 2006).</p> <p>PICTA workshops in 24 prisons offer ICT training in ‘realistic’ work environments.</p> <p>Prison libraries are being developed as distance learning centres, with resources to support learning programmes and self-directed study (DfES, 2005a).</p>
<p>Access to the internet can usually only be found in Category D (open) prisons (DfES, 2005a).</p>	<p>POLARIS is making internet access available in a variety of prisons - including one category A, one Youth Offender Institution and one female prison (Pettit and Hussain, 2008).</p> <p>Full internet based learndirect delivery, using a separate, dedicated ADSL line is now available in 25 prisons (Powell, 2008).</p> <p>Using a secure separate line, supervised access can ‘enable and enhance learning’ (Englebright and Pettit, 2008: p21).</p>
<p>Security requirements of the prison service limit the availability of e-learning and learning providers are unable to change these. Security decisions are in the hands of the prison governor. Introducing a new initiative such as learndirect is at the governor’s discretion regardless of HMPS approval (DfES, 2005; Powell, 2008).</p>	<p>Keystroke technology can be used to ensure security when there is open access to the internet (Englebright and Pettit, 2008).</p> <p>A significant number of staff has access to devices such as digital cameras and video cameras. Some have access to interactive whiteboards and assistive/adaptive</p>

<p>Access to communication devices is blocked to prevent ‘criminal collusion’ and other ‘nefarious uses’ (Powell, 2008: p5).</p> <p>Electronic media, including CDs and DVDs may be ‘banned completely’ (Powell, 2008: p6).</p>	<p>technology and a few to such devices as PDAs and interactive voting sets (Englebright, 2007c: p41).</p>
<p>The majority of staff has no internet access at work (Englebright, 2007c).</p>	
<p>Security staff is unfamiliar with technology and must be satisfied there is no risk involved before new initiatives can be implemented, which can be a slow process (Powell, 2008).</p> <p>Security staff must also be satisfied there is no risk in the movement of prisoners that is required in their attendance at a learning centre (Powell, 2008).</p>	<p>An e-learning project involving the secure estate should be assessed and agreed with HMPS at a local and national level (Englebright and Pettit, 2008).</p> <p>Security is a ‘constraint, not a problem’ (Powell, 2008: p6).</p>
<p>Learning programmes may be disrupted by security actions.</p> <p>Learning programmes are regularly interrupted by repeated movement between prisons (a phenomenon known as ‘churn’).</p> <p>Release can also cause disruption (DfES, 2005a; Powell, 2008).</p>	<p>Programmes such as learndirect are designed to be delivered in short chunks (Ufl, 2008).</p> <p>‘Safe web access’ would be a solution offering consistency in access to tutors (Pike, 2008).</p>
<p>Prison officers, responsible for escorting learners from cell to learning centre, may be suspicious of technology and computers, creating a difficult climate for learning (Powell, 2008; Englebright, 2007c).</p>	<p>In-cell unsupervised access to learning, such as that offered by secure systems such as POLARIS, could reduce costs (Pettit and Hussain, 2007).</p>

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