



From schools to the workplace, managing director of Londonlearning Gerry Barnard, looks at e-learning in the context of education and administrative managers

Why e-learning affects us all

LEARNERS only flourish if education adapts successfully to the needs and demands of the age.

E-Learning is the dynamic education vehicle of our time and all managers must think carefully about its implications.

But the adult learner at the workplace is not the only customer of e-learning to focus on.

Importantly, our children, the employees of the future, can contribute much to e-learning strategy development today by being consulted in the process.

This is because children know better than anyone what is engaging, and what is not, in this digital media age. They provide good sounding boards for adults.

This year some 600,000 children will start school in the UK. The majority of them now have access to computers and the Internet. They will leave their mark on the 21st century.

The quality of the school, curriculum and learning they experience is crucial to their development and our prosperity.

The e-learning challenge

If we are to provide an excellent education for all learners, our education system must be responsive to the changing demands of life and work.

Increasingly, this will involve e-learning. A common challenge for teachers and business managers today then, is to identify excellence in e-learning courses and qualifications for their respective charges. This is not easy in an emerging marketplace.

While there is broad consensus about the underlying aims, purposes and values of lifelong education, there is plenty of debate about the best way to organise learning to achieve our goals.

The e-learning explosion

What we can say is that we all know the future is going to be different from our own learning past.

The implementation of national Information Communication Technology policies in our education system has led to an explosion in the availability of e-learning content.

The experience of the education sector can provide a valuable source of information and advice for managers considering e-learning for their staff or indeed themselves.

Organisations such as the British Education Suppliers Association or the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency are good places to begin searching for advice on e-learning.

In the last four years the Government has provided £400 million to drive the uptake of ICT learning resources in schools.

This takes the form of e-learning credits that schools can apply for to purchase educational software. In schools there has also been a massive investment in infrastructure with broadband access for pupils being a key feature.

The technology that has proved to have had

the most impact in schools is desktop/lap top computers.

Enabling employees to use company lap tops or access learning materials at their desk - or at home - via company intranets are key elements in successful e-learning strategies.

However, hardware must be up to date. Figures from the education sector show that the number of ineffective computers for teaching the curriculum has risen from 416,000 in 2003 to 433,000 in 2004.

So we must not only ensure that the speed and capacity of computers used for e-learning is sufficient for multi-media, but that simple things such as the provision of sound cards and headphones are not overlooked.



For many schools the use of ICT and introduction of e-learning represented something of a cultural change. Teachers and learners needed support and many will continue to do so. So too will managers and learners at work.

Introducing e-learning

Thus before introducing e-learning courses into the workplace it is a good idea to update staff on what is meant by e-learning, its benefits, when to use it and when not and to use it.

An effective way to approach this is to highlight what is happening in schools and universities today. Many employees are parents. Some of them may be anxious that they might be getting left behind in the use of ICT; they may lack software application skills themselves. They need to know that home-school learning will become a reality over the next five years as teachers increasingly post learning activities, provide support and receive completed tasks online. Already we are seeing new types of e-learning courses that do this. They are contextualised for school, home or office learners.

For example, the new BTEC Awards in ICT (online) courses now available for self-paced learning in primary and secondary schools are also offered via the Internet to parents at home, using different exercises, and also to administrators in the workplace. They provide instant reports on learner progress to managers, teachers and parents online.

The office learning environment

The office learning environment is beginning to operate in a similar way to schools, as companies in Europe consider their wider social responsibilities and use learning portals for staff and their communities.

Let's not think of schools and the workplace as opposite environments but rather as sharing the vision of becoming community centres of knowledge and learning; using the internet for information gathering and research; using portals and e-portfolios for collecting and exchanging information.

In three years' time a school child could submit their e-portfolio to an employer. E-portfolios are one of the most exciting developments in e-learning. Already we see them being introduced in national school-based qualifications, by universities and indeed by nations, such as the Welsh citizen e-portfolio.

There are different types of e-portfolio already being used. These range from a showcase collection of achievement to the more dynamic, interactive systems that facilitate a dialogue

between learner and tutor, learners and peers; that explain objectives, produce study plans and provide feedback and assessment.

Vision for the decade

The 1990s vision of New Labour's "education, education, education" saw the exponential growth of ICT in learning in schools and the workplace.

My vision for the first decade of the 21st century is that effective e-learning will create such a movement for change that our school and professional exams will quickly embrace e-assessment.

In turn this will dictate rapid reform of what is taught and how it is taught.

In the UK we cannot continue with the paradox of a Government championing ICT, yet still requiring its 16 year olds to sit paper-based examinations in Computing at GCSE level.

Nationally the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is working hard on a radical overhaul of assessment but employers, managers, teachers and parents can do much to speed up the process of effective change locally.

They can benchmark e-learning courses and online qualifications they and their children are offered against the following criteria:

- interactive mini-tutorials for self-paced learning
- contextualised activities
- immediate learner feedback
- individual achievement reports and study plan generation
- online assessment
- results within 24 hours
- supplementary support materials and/or mentoring
- learner peer group contact facilities
- and clear progression opportunities.



Londonlearning is Edexcel's only approved e-learning centre in the UK. This enables the company to add value to e-learning content by designing qualifications for customers that are recognised internationally. The Londonlearning Development Centre in India is a leading e-learning provider for companies and academic institutions across the globe. The company's aim is "to create effective and enjoyable learning, accompanied by fit for purpose assessment, through the use of appropriate technology."

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