

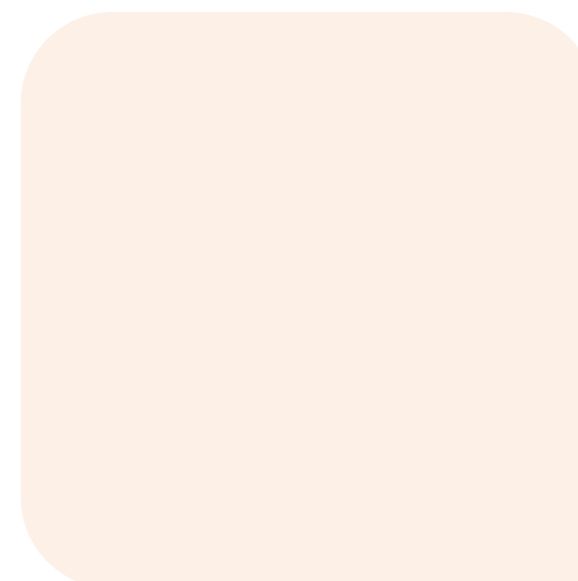
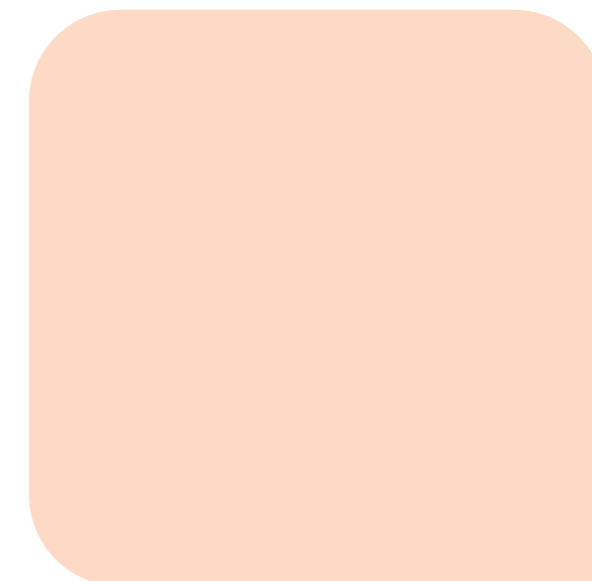


# Creating an e-learning strategy for social care in England

## Creating an e-learning strategy for social care in England

This consultation paper considers some of the issues involved with the development of e-learning in social care. Everyone in social care – practitioners at all levels, employers, training providers, service users and carers – is a potential beneficiary of e-learning. We need your thoughts on how e-learning can work best for you.

This publication is available in an  
alternative format upon request.



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SCIE's aim is to improve the experience of people who use social care services, by developing and promoting knowledge about good practice in social care. We pull together knowledge from diverse sources through working with a broad range of people and organisations. We share this knowledge freely, supporting those working in social care and empowering service users.

TopssEngland is the employer-led strategic workforce development body for social care. Its aim is to support employers in improving standards of care provision through training and development, workforce planning and workforce intelligence.

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**This report and its accompanying questionnaire are available in print and online at the e-learning for social care web site: [www.elfs.org.uk](http://www.elfs.org.uk)**

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## Overview

### *Background to the e-learning consultation*

E-learning is the use of information and communication technologies, including the internet and worldwide web, to improve and support teaching, training and learning. It will play an increasingly important role in the future of social care.

In autumn 2003, the Department of Health (DH) asked the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) to develop the use of e-learning in social care. As part of this work, SCIE and TopssEngland are jointly consulting on a sector-wide development strategy.

Everyone involved in social care – practitioners at all levels, employers, training providers, service users and carers – can potentially benefit from e-learning. We need your thoughts on how e-learning can work best for you. We have produced this consultation paper and questionnaire to start this consultation process.

We hope this consultation will contribute to our understanding of sector-wide requirements and responsibilities for e-learning planning and implementation. We also hope to understand better how the social care sector can link with others, including organisations in the health, education, training, skills and workforce development sectors.

The social care e-learning strategy which will be developed out of the results of this consultation is one part of a wider approach to improving learning, knowledge and skills in social care. It will contribute to the new TopssEngland National Workforce Development Strategy for Social Care 2005–2008.

### *Summary of consultation paper*

This consultation paper introduces the key concepts of e-learning, and includes a brief background about the social care sector, including both the opportunities for e-learning and the limitations and constraints. We have examined the strategic context for e-learning, and identified key stakeholders and partners in its implementation.

The main principles of e-learning in social care, including SCIE's aims for open access, usability, quality assurance, sustainability and a values-led approach, are introduced.

The paper focuses on five key 'action areas' that are crucial to an effective e-learning strategy:

- the 'kit' – infrastructure, including hardware and internet access
- the 'know-how' – skills development for both learners and educators, to embed e-learning in learning and teaching
- the 'subject materials' – learning content development, including online resources, courses and other materials
- the 'technical systems' – delivery platforms and learning systems
- the 'organisational systems' – the structures, partnerships and resources needed within and between organisations to enable the full exploitation of e-learning's potential.

We have explained any potentially unfamiliar terms and incorporated an extensive glossary. We have also presented a number of 'scenarios' showing how e-learning can benefit a variety of people in social care, including, for example, carers, social work students, social work lecturers, user-trainers, unqualified social care staff, vocational training assessors and service managers.

We then outline our draft action plans for e-learning for work-based learning, vocational training, further education (FE) and higher education (HE).

### *Consultation audiences and process*

We hope this consultation will be of interest to:

- individuals and organisations representing social care staff at all levels and in all specialisms
- social care employers and managers (statutory, voluntary and private sector) and their organisations
- education and training providers with an interest in social care (higher education and further education institutions, as well as statutory, voluntary and private vocational training providers)
- social care service users and their organisations
- health sector learning organisations
- workforce training and development organisations
- other individuals or organisations with a stake or interest in the development of the social care workforce or in e-learning.

We have incorporated suggested questions for consultation at the end of each section of this paper. These questions are collected together in a separate questionnaire, which also allows for additional comments.

This paper and questionnaire are available online in a variety of formats via the e-learning consultation web site: [www.elfs.org.uk](http://www.elfs.org.uk)

Printed copies of the paper and questionnaire are available from:  
SCIE publications tel: 020 7089 6840; e-mail: [publications@scie.org.uk](mailto:publications@scie.org.uk).

**The closing date for the consultation is 31 January 2005.**

1 e-learning:  
the use of  
information and  
communication  
technologies (ICTs) to  
provide, support or  
enhance learning via  
the internet, network  
or standalone  
computer

## 1 Aims of this paper

- 1 This discussion paper outlines the current thinking from the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and TopssEngland on an e-learning strategy<sup>1</sup> for social care in England, and invites responses and comments from all interested parties. SCIE and TopssEngland believe any strategic approach to e-learning requires us to work with others and build upon existing activities in the social care sector and elsewhere.
- 2 It is our view that e-learning is one of the tools social care can use in workforce development and the improvement of services. It is not an end in itself. While sector-wide responsibilities for e-learning planning and implementation need to be properly understood – a process we hope this paper will contribute to – ultimately the e-learning strategy is one part of a wider approach to improving knowledge and skills in social care.
- 3 We intend to finalise our e-learning strategy by mid 2005. The e-learning strategy will then be incorporated into the new TopssEngland National Workforce Development Strategy for Social Care 2005–2008.

### *Some notes on terminology and approach*

- 4 We have tried to make this discussion paper as accessible as possible to all parties who may have an interest. We have kept jargon to a minimum, and incorporated explanations of any potentially unfamiliar terms when they first occur, as well as in the glossary. There is also a list of acronyms.
- 5 We also hope to give a direct picture of what e-learning can mean for individuals. To that end, we have incorporated a number of 'scenarios', showing benefits for various people in social care:
  - a carer learning from home and at college
  - a student on the new social work degree
  - lecturers teaching the social work degree
  - a service user teaching the social work degree
  - social care staff without professional qualifications
  - a vocational training assessor
  - a mental health services manager.

The scenarios are based on e-learning projects or programmes that already exist, although the individuals described are fictional. Our thanks to the organisations concerned for permission to use them.

**The consultation audiences and process**

- 6 We hope this discussion paper will be of interest to:
- individuals and organisations representing social care staff at all levels and in all specialisms
  - social care employers and managers (statutory, voluntary and private sector) and their organisations
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  - social care service users and their organisations
  - health sector learning organisations
  - workforce training and development organisations
  - other individuals or organisations with a stake or interest in the development of the social care workforce or in e-learning.
- 7 We have incorporated suggested questions for consultation at the end of each section of this paper. These questions are collected together in a separate questionnaire included in this document. Responses to the questionnaire, and additional comments, can be made in writing, via e-mail or via the consultation web site ([www.elfs.org.uk](http://www.elfs.org.uk)). See Section 12 for more information. The closing date for responses is 31 January 2005.

**2 The social care context**

- 8 In 2003, the Department of Health (DH) allocated £2 million to SCIE to 'assist the social care community to make the best use of information and communication technologies for teaching and learning, to deliver an improved service to users and carers' (DH 2003). As part of this programme, SCIE and TopssEngland are jointly developing an e-learning strategy for social care in England. This discussion paper is intended to help clarify that strategy.

**The social care workforce**

- 9 Social care accounts for some 1.2 million workers in the UK, spread over more than 25,000 employers in the public and independent (i.e. private and voluntary) sectors. Social care includes residential care, domiciliary care and social work with all its specialisms.
- 10 The social care workforce is predominantly female (over 80%) and more than half the workforce is part-time. The proportion of social care workers with dependents ranges from 35 to 75% for different types of worker. Around 80% of those working in social care have no qualifications for their work - although many are highly competent. The diffuse structure of the sector has led to complex career pathways (see Figure 1). While some care workers may not be interested in a 'career' or the formal learning associated with it, they are interested in promotion, prospects and learning new skills.

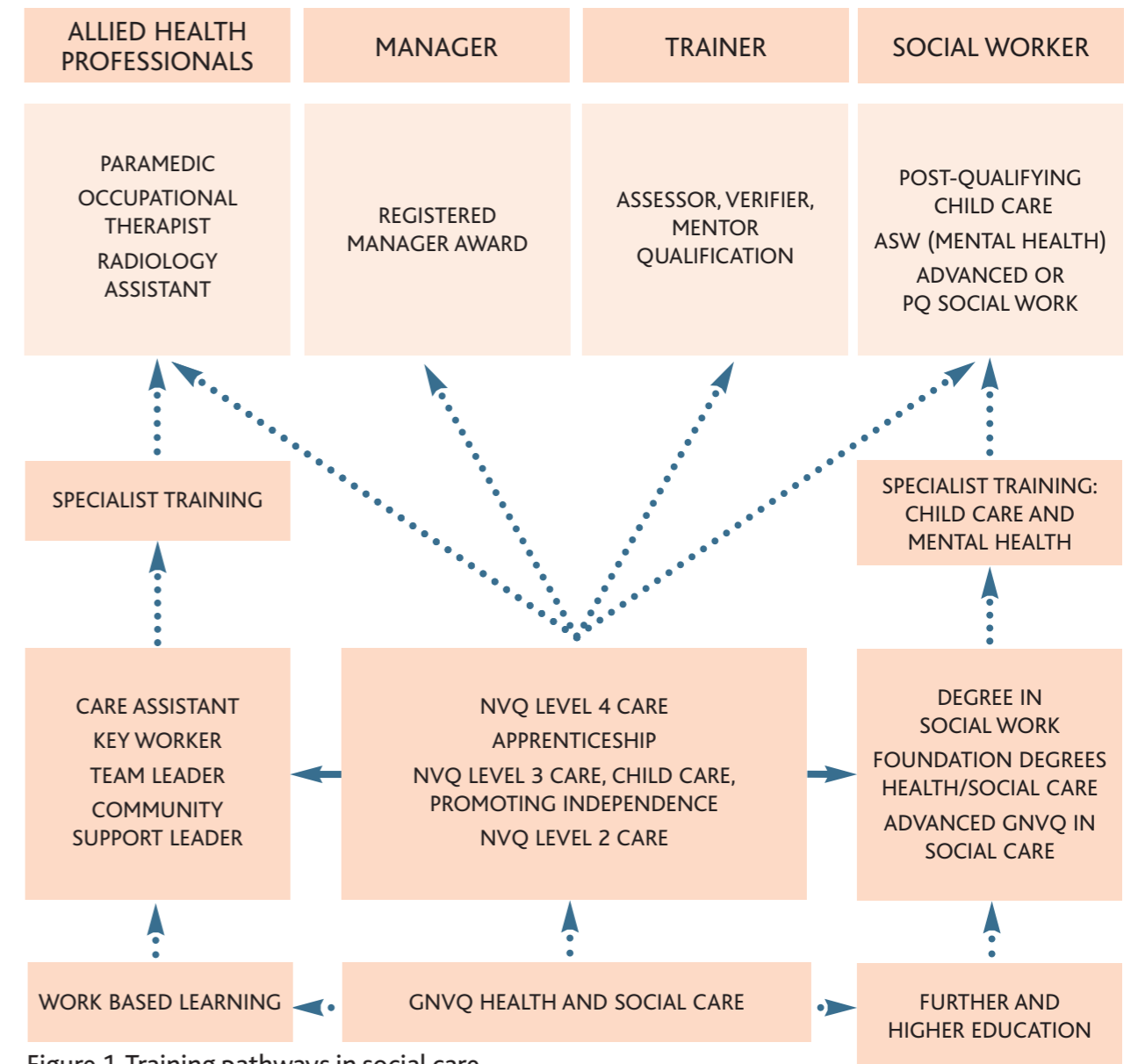


Figure 1. Training pathways in social care

**Government responsibilities**

- 11 The Department of Health is responsible for adult social care in England, and is developing a new vision for adult services (SCIE 2004). Children's social care is the responsibility of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), which has set out its visions and plans in Every Child Matters: The Next Steps (DfES 2004). Within DfES, an integrated approach to priorities for care and education is provided for through the Children and Young People's Directorate.

**Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)**

- 12 The establishment of SCIE was a key proposal in the DH Quality Strategy for Social Care, which recognised the importance of knowledge in changing practice and service delivery. SCIE works across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and its remit is to gather, synthesise, disseminate and promote knowledge in the social care sector, so that knowledge is used to facilitate better practice.

**2 ICTs:**  
information and communication technologies; an umbrella term that includes any information or communication device and its software

**3 learning content:**  
material designed to address a learning need

**13** *Training Organisation for Personal Social Services (TopssEngland)*  
TopssEngland is the employment-led strategic body for workforce development in social care in England, now in the official development stage of forming a UK-wide Sector Skills Council (to be called Skills for Care) with its UK partners. TopssEngland aims to support employers in improving standards of care provision through training and development, workforce planning and workforce intelligence.

#### *UK context*

**14** While this e-learning strategy will cover social care in England, it also seeks to reflect and draw on developments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Scottish Executive is funding e-learning initiatives in social work education, which are referenced later in this paper (Stor Curam 2004), and e-learning is being developed by the Care Council for Wales.

### 3 E-learning in social care

*'If someone is learning in a way that uses information and communication technologies, then they are e-learning'*  
DfES (2003a)

- 15** E-learning at its simplest is the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs)<sup>2</sup> to provide, support or enhance learning. Our vision for e-learning in social care is to develop a high proportion of the workforce capable of using ICTs to update continually their knowledge and skills, in order to deliver an improved service for users and carers.
- 16** The social care workforce is large, dispersed and, for the most part, lacking in formal training. Workforce inspection and regulation processes are undergoing significant reforms. We believe that e-learning can provide unique benefits for both employers and staff, and ultimately contribute to improving services for users. However, e-learning is not an end in itself. Rather, it is one of a range of tools that can improve workforce training and learning on a sector-wide basis.
- 17** To make e-learning really work for the social care sector, we need specifically to understand how it can:
- be made accessible to as many potential learners as possible
  - support both individual learners and group/network approaches to learning
  - support a variety of approaches to education and training, including both academic and vocational approaches
  - encourage uptake and retention in education and training
  - encourage sharing of quality learning content<sup>3</sup>
  - support collaborative approaches to the delivery of care services
  - help reinforce the link between learning and improved outcomes for service users.

**4 internet:**  
an interconnection of large and small computer networks around the globe

**5 information literacy:**  
the ability to locate, evaluate and use information to become an independent learner

**6 online communities:**  
groups of individuals who visit a designated online space to share a common interest

**7 e-portfolio:**  
enables the user to collect and organise files that provide evidence of their knowledge, skills and training

**8 e-mail:**  
the exchange of computer-stored messages by telecommunication

**9 chat:**  
electronic messages that are exchanged 'live' between individuals or groups

**10 bulletin boards:**  
an electronic version of the type of notice board found on the wall in many kitchens and work places

**11 learner-centred:**  
putting end-users of learning at the centre of development

**12 learning networks:**  
use information and communication technologies to promote connections between learners and their peers, tutors, and resources

- 18** The potential benefits of e-learning for learners in social care include:
- flexibility – anytime anywhere access
  - widened access to learning opportunities for diverse learners
  - widened internet<sup>4</sup> access to the knowledge base for social care
  - gains in information literacy<sup>5</sup>, writing and presentation skills
  - support for individual, self-paced learners
  - support for active learning/knowledge sharing through collaborative working and online communities<sup>6</sup>
  - improved motivation and engagement
  - potential for self-testing/self-assessment
  - enabling learners to assess, monitor and record their learning progress e.g. e-portfolios<sup>7</sup>.
- 19** The potential benefits of e-learning for social care educators and employers include:
- flexibility of time and place of delivery of learning opportunities
  - anytime anywhere support for learner–teacher communication
  - new communication dimensions, such as e-mail<sup>8</sup>, chat<sup>9</sup> and bulletin boards<sup>10</sup>
  - new testing and assessment methods
  - enhanced consistency of teaching and training across large numbers of learners
  - improved recruitment and retention in training
  - reduction of the administrative burden of learning delivery
  - sharing and re-use of learning resources
  - widened access via the internet to the knowledge base for social care
  - collaborative working for educators and learners.
- 20** All social care education and training is expected to have an explicit value base, incorporating:
- equal opportunities
  - anti-racist, anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice
  - partnership working with service users' groups and representatives
  - human, civil and legal rights for individuals, families and community groups
  - a learner-centred<sup>11</sup> approach.

In addition, the DH Social Work E-learning Steering Group (DH 2003) requires e-learning in the social care sector to 'provide a means to learn collaboratively and across and within multi-professional and inter-professional organisations'.

**21** E-learning has been accused of offering lonely, individualised and sterile learning experiences. However, we believe that e-learning, properly implemented and supported, can in fact be a tool to support learning as a collaborative, collective and social experience. It can support learning networks<sup>12</sup> and open up new communication channels.

SCENARIO:

A carer learning from home and at college

13 blended learning:

A combination of face-to-face and online learning

Patience

Patience is a 43-year-old woman who cares for her mother, who has dementia. She used to work as an office administrator but gave up full-time work four years ago when her mother became too ill to live alone. Patience has good reading, writing and comprehension skills in English.

Patience is concerned she is not managing her mother's affairs as well as she could, and is worried about being away from work for a number of years, and whether she will be able to get a job when she no longer has to care for her mother.

Patience's learning

Patience heard about the 'Learning for living' course at her local carers' centre. She is interested in the course because it offers to develop knowledge and skills relevant to her everyday needs in caring for her mother. It is also a course that Patience is doing 'for herself', to help her plan her own future further education, training and employment.

She is concerned initially that the course requires some work online, but is pleased to hear that only basic computer skills – using a mouse and typing small amounts of text – are required. Patience has the option of doing the course completely online, or as a mixture of online and face-to-face teaching at the local further education (FE) college. She opts for the 'blended learning'<sup>13</sup> approach.

She also has the option of learning informally, picking what she wants from the 16 topics on offer, and studying as little or as much as she prefers. Or she can take the course in a formal way, which leads to accreditation – a City and Guilds 'Certificate in Personal Development for Unpaid Carers'. Patience decides she would like a certificate at the end of her work, so opts for the accreditation route.

She enrolls on the course at her local FE college. She contacts the course helpdesk to get some advice on which of the modules to choose. She chooses the introductory unit, which offers help with learning skills, communication skills and assertiveness; she also chooses the 'Managing Caring' unit because it offers help with managing money (something that is of increasing concern to her with regard to her mother's estate), working with decision-makers, knowing how services work and safety matters.

Each of the four topics in Patience's two chosen units takes about three hours to complete, but she finds she can break the learning into 'bite-sized' chunks of half an hour or so that fit around her carer's schedule.

Patience gets assigned a personal tutor, who welcomes her to the course, helps her with queries during her studies and assesses her work for each unit. She finds the tutor very supportive.

14 virtual learning environment:

an environment where online interactions of various kinds take place between learners and educators

SCENARIO:

Preparing social work students to work with diverse communities

Benefits for Patience

Patience is able to complete the course from beginning to end in a way that fits in with her lifestyle. She gains a sense of the value of her role as a carer, the complexity of the tasks she manages daily, and the high level of responsibility she is shouldering.

She has gained in self-confidence, and her skills as a carer are also enhanced, with the units on communication and on dealing with authorities proving particularly beneficial. She has also gained ICT skills and increased confidence with computers. She feels the course will help her look for and engage with work when she decides she wants to return to employment.

*This scenario is based, with permission, on an existing course developed by City and Guilds and Carers UK. For more information see [www.learning-for-living.co.uk](http://www.learning-for-living.co.uk)*

Tarlochan and Angela

Tarlochan and Angela are lecturers responsible for delivering a 'Working with diverse communities' module to approximately 45 social work students in the first year of their social work degree.

Tarlochan has a well-developed knowledge of the institution's virtual learning environment<sup>14</sup>, and is helping Angela develop her skills in its use through the incorporation of e-learning into the module.

Blending teaching and learning

Their university is in a large city with an ethnically diverse population. In previous years, representatives from different ethnic communities in the city had come into the university to give an overview of their community to students. They would provide a personal account of their perception of their particular community. Assessments revealed that this approach did not encourage individual students to reflect on their own beliefs, and negative student stereotypes of diverse communities were being reinforced.

Tarlochan and Angela decide to reformat the module, using the virtual learning environment to manage learning, provide online resources and enable student learning through dialogue with staff and peers. In the following year, students are split into seven groups and assigned a community to explore within the city. They are also provided with training in the use of the virtual learning environment.

The students are given specific tasks to carry out to develop their knowledge of the community in terms of cultural practices, history within the UK, demographic profiles and what barriers they face in accessing appropriate social care services. During their research, students have to complete a weekly online group reflective journal, where they share the activities they have undertaken and their

findings during the week with their peers. At the end of the module, this reflective journal is used as part of a half-hour presentation to peers and staff.

### Benefits to Tarlochan and Angela

During the delivery of the module, the students are responsible for directing their own learning. Most of their work is carried out through visiting people and accessing resources in the local communities to which they have been assigned. Tarlochan and Angela are able to monitor and facilitate student learning by using the communication tools available in the virtual learning environment.

All students read the online entries of the other groups, and the tracking facility enables the tutors to make certain that all students are doing this. This allows all students to access information about all groups, not just the one they have been assigned.

Tarlochan and Angela use the discussion forums to highlight common issues of oppression, discrimination and good and bad practice across the groups under study.

The reflective group journal illustrates the starting point of the students' knowledge and understanding at the onset, and the subsequent learning that takes place. By asking appropriate questions online, the tutors are able to manage and guide student learning to achieve the aims and objectives of the module.

Tarlochan gains some valuable insight into pedagogic design issues, and Angela gains a greater working knowledge into how online learning environments can be blended into an overall teaching and learning design.

*This scenario is based, with permission, on an existing module at the University of Birmingham School of Social Sciences.*

● *For more information see [www.socialresearch.bham.ac.uk](http://www.socialresearch.bham.ac.uk)*

### Martha

Martha is a manager of a mental health service. She is keen to offer students on the social work degree opportunities to undertake their practice or work-based learning in her team. Martha is particularly interested in identifying what makes a good work-based learning experience. She is committed to involving service users in student placements, and wants to encourage her own team to see themselves as part of a learning organisation.

### Martha's evaluation tool

Martha has access to a web-based evaluation tool. The tool consists of a series of online questionnaires: one each for students, their assessors, teachers, services users and work-based managers. Once each person has completed their questionnaire, the software produces a series of charts and reports comparing the evaluations of all these key people.

● The software provides feedback about a placement under four main headings: organisation and management of placement; relevance to students' needs; quality and responsiveness of staff; and quality of assessment.

● Martha can see instantly how well the placement has achieved its aims. With each person's agreement, Martha can see the results of everyone's evaluation, which will give her clear information as to the strengths and limitations of a particular work-based learning event.

● Detailed breakdowns of answers provide information on which to base improvements. On one placement, Martha discovers that the service user felt that they had not been included in the assessment and that they would have liked to share their comments about a student's work. The student felt that they had not been offered sufficient opportunity to work with people from different disciplines. The preparation arrangements for taking on the student were not as thorough as they should have been.

### Benefits for Martha

● Martha can critically review a work-based opportunity, enabling her to develop specific improvement plans. This in turn allows her to support her staff's continuing professional development.

● She uses scores to compare her team's scores with those of similar teams in the country. This evidence can be used to demonstrate that she is part of a learning organisation for best value reviews and for her own professional development. Martha is also able to use the evidence to support her achieving quality benchmarks such as Investors in People.

● The evaluation tool can collect information at various levels: for individual placements; for whole social care organisations; for HE institutions; across regions, and so on.

● *This scenario is based, with permission, on an existing resource developed by the Practice Learning Taskforce. For further information see [www.practicelearning.org.uk/pelqet/index.htm](http://www.practicelearning.org.uk/pelqet/index.htm)*

#### SCENARIO:

Evaluating the quality of student placements



**15 distance learning:**  
where the learner is not geographically close to the individual or organisation delivering learning

**16 communities of practice:**  
groups of people who share work-related knowledge and experience

**17 knowledge management:**  
techniques and tools for collecting, managing and disseminating knowledge within an organisation or sector

**18 e-skills:**  
skills required by non-IT professionals to use computer hardware, software and electronic communications effectively at home, school or work

**19 hardware:**  
the physical aspect of computers, telecommunications and other information technology devices

- 22 In social care, therefore, e-learning is not:
- learning viewed solely as the transmission of information electronically
  - a way of making educators or face-to-face contact redundant
  - synonymous with distance learning<sup>15</sup>
  - aimed at only part of the social care sector
  - divorced from service outcomes
  - a technology-led development.

23 Our vision for social care is of e-learning as 'blended learning'; that is, learning achieved by interaction with people as well as technologies. It is both a collective and an individual process. In order to enable social care workers to update and improve their social care knowledge and skills, we will aim to develop individual learners' critical thinking, support the social skills to apply these thinking skills, and cultivate active participation in improving learning communities or communities of practice<sup>16</sup>. All of these activities need to be grounded in social care practice and the evolving social care evidence base.

Q1

Do you agree with our vision of social care in e-learning?

Q2

Have we identified the main benefits of e-learning for learners, educators and employers?

## 4 Limitations and constraints

### *Limitations of e-learning*

- 24 E-learning is a means, not an end. Any approach to e-learning in social care must be incorporated into wider education, training and knowledge management<sup>17</sup> initiatives for the social care sector. Most importantly in social care, e-learning must be linked to improved service outcomes.
- 25 Basic e-skills<sup>18</sup> are needed to begin to engage successfully in e-learning. In the UK there is still a 'digital divide' – the gap between those who have access to hardware<sup>19</sup> and networks and the skills to use them, and those who do not. The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS 2003) show that fewer than 50 per cent of UK households have access to the internet. While this persists, e-learning runs the risk of widening the gap between disadvantaged learners and others.

**20 connectivity:**  
the ability to connect to communication networks such as the world wide web

**21 basic skills:**  
'the ability to read, write and speak in English/Welsh and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general' (Basic Skills Agency definition)

26 Research on early e-learning initiatives across a number of other sectors shows a lack of quality e-learning content and a lack of support for learners, leading to some drab and isolating experiences and low retention rates. These early initiatives failed to take account of learner preference, focused solely on the electronic transmission of information, and forgot the importance of the human element in all teaching and learning. Social care can learn these lessons from other sectors and ensure e-learning is a tool to enhance good teaching and training, not a way of replacing it.

27 An assumption that e-learning delivery systems must be ambitious and bespoke has driven the commercial market to produce over-elaborate systems, and also to some duplicate procurements within and across sectors. The potential for sharing systems has not been fully realised or exploited. At the same time, a tendency to opt for commercial versions of systems such as virtual learning environments (VLEs), with restrictive licensing and terms of use, can 'lock out' some potential learners – and educators – from the education process.

28 While e-learning can, in theory, be made accessible to a broad range of learners, in reality, e-learning is not currently very accessible. Sometimes this is because the technical work required has not been addressed. But sometimes it is because learning materials and the systems that support them are not addressing the real needs of users in the first place.

### *Constraints in the social care sector*

- 29 The social care sector is dispersed and heterogeneous, and consequently under-researched. While we do not know precisely the current state of e-learning readiness in the sector, the available evidence suggests significant constraints in terms of lack of ICT hardware, lack of connectivity<sup>20</sup>, lack of skills on the part of both learners and educators, and a lack of organisational awareness.
- 30 The sector has a large number of small organisations, where workforce development support is limited. Interpersonal skills are properly valued in the sector, but on occasion this has been allowed to mask the need for staff to have, and to continue to acquire, knowledge and additional skills. The leaders and managers of the large numbers of relatively small and dispersed organisations that make up the sector need strategic and hands-on support in understanding, planning for and sustaining investment in and use of e-learning.
- 31 Previous attempts by some e-learning providers to sell off-the-shelf 'solutions' to social care employers have created some scepticism in the sector. E-learning has matured, and the number of quality providers will continue to grow, but some ground will need to be made up in the sector before confidence is inspired.
- 32 A major feature of learning support for social care is the need to deal with basic skills<sup>21</sup>, since a disproportionately high number of staff need support in these areas. Effective approaches currently being used

22 **learner support:** the services and systems that enable learners to learn

23 **personalised learning:** learning that is tailored to the individual learner's needs and preferences throughout the learning process

integrate vocational learning – often for the induction or foundation standards – with basic skills and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). While e-learning can be used effectively to support these approaches, face-to-face support is critical.

- 33 Beyond basic skills and induction standards, social care has very complex training pathways (see Figure 1), which can be difficult to access for learners and educators alike, and can make identification of the most effective targets for e-learning provision difficult.
- 34 Two particular challenges we face in encouraging optimal e-learning for the whole social care sector are:
- addressing the differences in culture and approach to e-learning that currently exist in the further education, higher education and workforce development sectors (both private and statutory)
  - understanding the best mix of centralised and decentralised delivery of services; where a national strategy should plan the delivery of actual products/services for the sector, and where it should play an enabling role by providing a nationally co-ordinated framework that supports individual organisations or local/regional partnerships to develop their own products and services.

Q3

Do you agree with our assessment of the limitations and constraints?

Q4

Are there additional limitations and constraints we need to consider?

## 5 The strategic context for e-learning

- 35 There are a number of national e-learning strategies being developed in related sectors that inform the strategy for social care.
- The DfES E-Learning Strategy Unit has consulted on a unified e-learning strategy with the aim of 'bringing high quality accessible e-learning to everyone' (DfES 2003a). The consultation proposed seven action areas, including developing the education workforce, and unifying learner support<sup>22</sup>. The DfES has also produced a skills strategy 'Success for All' (DfES 2002), covering provision for basic skills and ICT skills in the adult population. In July 2004, the DfES issued its Five Year Strategy, with priorities for reform including personalised learning<sup>23</sup>. Technology is seen as a key enabler, and it is envisaged that the unified e-learning strategy will be published in autumn 2004 as a perspective on the Five Year Strategy.

- A major strand of the social care e-learning strategy is the provision of e-learning support for the social work degree. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is charged with embedding e-learning in higher education in England. Its strategic work in e-learning through the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) includes networks, innovation and standards, with a focus on sustainability, and aims to encourage curriculum design that uses e-learning effectively for learners and employers – a critical partnership in the social work degree (HEFCE 2004). The DH commissioned scoping work in relation to the social work degree in 2003 (SWAP 2003). The new Higher Education Academy will focus on the needs of practitioners in all specialisms.
- The NHSU, which has an educational remit for social care as well as health, is developing, with Strategic Health Authorities and the National Workforce Group, an e-learning strategy for the National Health Service (NHS). The current strategy seeks to identify the respective roles of key agencies and organisations in embedding e-learning across the NHS, and to establish some common aims and visions between health and social care, and to outline potential areas for collaboration. NHSU will be developing systems to support all aspects of the learning process, including offering learning resources, advice and guidance, research and development, administration and management (NHSU 2004).
- The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is conducting a number of strategic reviews on a regional basis to assess how employers, education institutions, unions and other stakeholders can best improve workforce skills. The social care sector is one of LSC's areas of focus. It also published a national report on e-learning (LSC 2002) and works jointly with the DfES on overseeing the post-16 e-learning strategy (delivered through the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta) as the National Learning Network (NLN) Transformation Programme). This programme aims to build capacity and embed e-learning in FE colleges, specialist institutions, adult and community learning organisations and training providers. Additionally, the DfES Standards Unit is working towards rollout of good practice frameworks and teaching materials in a range of curriculum areas to support the 'Success for All' strategy from September 2004.

### *A strategic framework*

- 36 An e-learning strategy for social care needs to encourage sector-wide coherence, while at the same time supporting regional and local plans, initiatives and collaborations. The strategy itself contributes to wider long-term visions for social care, for lifelong learning and for workforce development, as set out in the following framework.

	Sponsors, partners, stakeholders	Timescale
Vision: social care (adults and children)	DH: Modernising Social Services (1998) Quality Strategy for Social Care (2000) Vision for Adult Services (SCIE 2004); DfES: Every Child Matters (2004)	10 years
Vision: skills	DfES: Five Year Strategy Success for All (2002); 21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential (2003b)	10 years
Vision: e-learning	DfES: Towards a Unified e-learning Strategy (2003a)	10 years
Strategy	E-learning strategy sponsored by SCIE/TopssEngland incorporated into the TopssEngland National Workforce Development Strategy (forthcoming 2005–8)	3–5 years
Plans	Unified plans from SCIE/TopssEngland and social care partners, education providers, local government partners, NHSU, regional development agencies	3–5 years
Initiatives and projects	Joint initiatives and projects from SCIE/TopssEngland and social care partners, education providers, local government partners, NHSU, regional development agencies, commercial developers	1–3 years
Evaluation	SCIE/TopssEngland, DH, DfES, key social care partners	ongoing

### Q5

Have we identified the key elements of the strategic context for e-learning?

### Q6

Are there any other resources, documents or policies that we should take into account?

### Q7

Are there any additional elements that should be included in our strategic framework?

## 6 Stakeholders and key partners

- 37 E-learning is not an end in itself, and it can never be effective in isolation. An e-learning strategy for social care can only work if we create collaborative partnerships, both within the social care sector and also with our fellow stakeholders in education, workforce development and in health. We must also build on, rather than duplicate or stifle, existing initiatives in the sector.
- 38 SCIE and TopssEngland stakeholder groups include:
- service users, carers and their organisations
  - social care staff in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors
  - social care employers and managers in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors
  - social care education and training providers across all sectors
  - policy-makers and planners
  - regulatory bodies
  - government departments.
- 39 From a specific e-learning perspective, our key stakeholders include:
- service users, carers and organisations – who may be learners as well as educators/trainers or learning content providers/advisers
  - social care staff at all levels and in all specialisms – who will be the principal learner group, and some of whom will also have training/education roles
  - social care employers and managers (statutory, voluntary and private sector) – who will be the principal ‘purchasers’ of workforce training for their staff, and who will also have both learner and trainer/educator roles
  - social care education and training providers – who include HE and FE institutions as well as statutory, voluntary and private vocational training providers
  - health sector learning and workforce training organisations – some of which have a specific social care remit and all of which have a requirement for multi-professional and inter-professional training.
- 40 A number of potential key partner organisations represent the interests of these stakeholder groups, or have strategic interests in these areas, including:
- the LSC (nationally and regionally), and Sector Skills Councils for health (Skills for Health), for information technology (IT) (e-skillsUK) and for lifelong learning
  - Becta, Ufi/Learndirect, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI)
  - Higher Education Funding Councils for England and Wales, JISC, the Higher Education Academy, including the Social Work and Policy Subject Centre (SWAP), Joint University Council - Social Work Education Committee (JUC-SWEC)
  - HE and FE providers

24 **practice learning:** learning through real-life practice in a workplace, and through simulation

- Trades Union Congress (TUC) Learning Services Department; Unison and other unions, British Association of Social Workers (BASW), Social Care Association (SCA), the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS)
- the Employers Organisation for Local Government (EO), the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA), Local Government Association (LGA)
- Local Education Authorities (LEA) Community, Adult and Lifelong Learning departments
- the National Association of Training Officers in Personal Social Services (NATOPSS - Learn to Care)
- practice learning<sup>24</sup> providers and the Practice Learning Taskforce (PLTF)
- service user and carer organisations
- the NHSU and the NHS strategic health authorities and workforce development confederations
- Business Link and other organisations providing learning support to small and medium-sized enterprises (which covers most private and voluntary social care providers)
- the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and education and training accreditation bodies such as City and Guilds, the Open University and National Open College Network
- private sector e-learning organisations, including training providers and content developers
- the General Social Care Council (GSCC) as the regulators of social work education and training in England
- UK partner organisations such as the Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (SIESWE)
- in England: the DH and the DfES oversee social care; the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) oversees local authorities, which deliver and manage the delivery of local social services; the Department of Trade and Industry has an interest in workforce development for the 25,000 small and medium-sized enterprises that deliver social care across England.

25 **interoperability:** the ability of a system or a product to work with other systems or products without special effort on the part of the users

26 **usability:** a measure of how effectively, efficiently and easily a person can use a system or product

27 **accessibility:** the measure of how easy a product or service is for everyone to access, whatever their circumstances or specific needs

28 **pedagogy:** the theories, principles and practices of teaching and learning

29 **scalable:** the ability of a system to increase in size and/or complexity

## 7 Principles and aims

41 We have defined the following principles and aims for e-learning in social care:

Principle	Aim <i>Plan, develop and deliver e-learning that:</i>
open access	• offers as unrestricted access as possible to students, practitioners, managers, educators, service users and carers, and encourages a collaborative and open approach
interoperability <sup>25</sup>	• integrates with e-learning initiatives in the social care sector, in other professions, across regions and between sectors
usability <sup>26</sup>	• is effective, efficient and satisfying to use, and involves learners in development and testing
accessibility <sup>27</sup>	• is available in formats suitable for as broad a range of users as possible, including those with disabilities
quality assurance	• adheres to explicit standards and specifications in pedagogy <sup>28</sup> , accessibility, usability and technical build
sustainability	• provides a robust and scalable <sup>29</sup> model of delivery and support of learning, and ensures content and courses remain accessible and up to date
needs led	• ensures that products and services are developed in response to clear evidence of sector need
values led	• ensures that products and services are grounded in social care values
pedagogical soundness	• ensures that both materials and teaching processes are grounded in sound social care-specific pedagogy and an understanding of how learners best learn
learner focus	• ensures optimal uptake and retention of learners by understanding individuals' learning needs as well as employers' training needs
outcomes focus	• ensures that learning is demonstrably linked to improved learning outcomes and ultimately to better services for social care service users

Q8

Have we correctly identified our key stakeholder groups from an e-learning perspective?

Q9

How might we best consult stakeholders locally, regionally and nationally?

Q10

Have we correctly identified our main potential partners in developing social care e-learning?

Q11

Do you agree with our aims for e-learning and the principles underlying them?

Q12

Are there any other aims or principles that should underpin our e-learning work?

**30 learning objects:**  
small 'chunks' of digital learning, focusing on one, or occasionally two, learning objectives

**31 repository:**  
a specialised database that stores 'chunks' of learning content to enable easy retrieval

**32 learning management systems:**  
software that automates the administration of learning

**33 ICT skills:**  
those skills needed to take full advantage of the capabilities of information and communication technologies

**34 ECDL:**  
a widely recognised certificate in the use of computers

## 8 Key action areas

- 42 There are five fundamental elements underpinning the successful delivery of e-learning in any environment, elements which define the action areas in our strategy for social care:
- i the 'kit' – infrastructure, including hardware and connectivity
  - ii the 'know-how' – skills development for both learners and educators, to embed e-learning in learning and teaching
  - iii the 'subject materials' – learning content development, including online resources, courses and learning objects<sup>30</sup>
  - iv the 'technical systems' – delivery platforms and learning systems such as VLEs, repositories<sup>31</sup>, learning management systems<sup>32</sup>
  - v the 'organisational systems' – the structures, partnerships and resources needed within and between organisations to enable the full exploitation of e-learning's potential.
- 43 These elements, however, have not hitherto been addressed in a co-ordinated way from a sector-specific perspective. The challenge we face in devising a sector-wide e-learning strategy is to identify the parts of the sector where there is currently little or no provision in one or all of our e-learning action areas, and to establish the most effective way to encourage such provision.

### 8.1 The kit

- 44 The current state of infrastructure provision in social care is very mixed. Students of the new social work degree, for example, are relatively well supplied, as higher education institutions and their funders have responsibility for the provision of hardware and connectivity for students on campus. However, infrastructure provision still varies between universities, and few have reached the stage of having e-learning facilities within all teaching and learning spaces (as opposed to collected together in 'computer rooms').
- 45 Once students move into the workforce, their access to hardware and connectivity becomes even more patchy: the plurality and diversity of the sector mean that provision varies greatly and benchmarking data is scant. It is probable that staff at different levels and in different specialisms will have different levels of provision, but again, detailed data is not available. Social care has no equivalent of the NHS national programme for IT (NPfIT), taking a sector-wide approach to infrastructure.

### 8.2 The know-how

- 46 There are some skills that need to be acquired to engage in e-learning. Learner support therefore includes helping learners to acquire basic ICT skills<sup>33</sup> – such as those defined by the 'IT user skills framework' from e-skills UK (the Sector Skills Council for IT) or the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL)<sup>34</sup>. A requirement for ECDL or its equivalent is incorporated in the social work degree. However,

**35 e-moderating:**  
the ability to plan and manage events online

**36 instructional design:**  
the application of a systematic methodology based on instructional theory to create content for learning

**37 e-GIF:**  
e-Government Interoperability Framework; guidance on internet and world wide web standards for all UK government systems

sector-wide, social care has no counterpart to the NHS national programme to support ECDL training for NHS staff, and there is no ICT element in the social care induction or foundation standards.

- 47 While ICT skills are a necessary prerequisite for engagement in e-learning, they do not of themselves enable effective learning. Additional information searching and evaluation and skills – which together with ICT skills collectively form information literacy – are also necessary if a student is to get the most from e-learning.
- 48 Educators also need e-teaching skills. Support includes helping educators not only to acquire information literacy skills, but also the specific technical and pedagogical skills needed to be an effective 'e-educator'. These skills include an understanding of how different people learn online, 'e-moderating'<sup>35</sup>, the ability to plan and manage online assessment, and the ability to develop, re-purpose and use high-quality content. Generic schemes such as the Ferl Practitioners Programme for e-educators in further education, or the LeTTOL programme (an accredited course in online tutoring) are potential resources on which to build social care-specific training programmes.

### 8.3 The subject materials

- 49 Both learners and educators rely on high quality content to learn and to teach. E-learning content can take a number of forms, from entire online courses of varying duration (for example ECDL), to discrete 'chunks' of learning sometimes known as 'learning objects'. Whatever its form, content must above all be relevant and quality assured. The DfES comments that the UK currently has an underdeveloped e-learning resources market (DfES 2003a), and this is true in social care, where high quality e-learning content is thin on the ground. Given the number of potential learners, there is scope for a thriving market, and partnerships between social care organisations, educational organisations and commercial developers will be key to this.
- 50 A prerequisite for developing this market in the social care sector will be supporting and implementing guidelines, standards and specifications. Of particular importance are pedagogical guidelines, which ensure that content is developed with input from both social care subject matter experts and instructional designers<sup>36</sup> who understand the specific context of online learning. Standards, specifications and guidelines for usability and accessibility will ensure that as broad a range of users as possible, including those with disabilities, find the content efficient, effective and satisfying to use. Finally, technical standards and specifications are overseen for the UK public sector by the e-Government Unit and the e-Government Interoperability Framework (e-GIF<sup>37</sup>), and set by national and by international e-learning standards bodies. They aim to ensure that content can be catalogued, located, downloaded and effectively used by all educators and learners, and that consequently the e-learning content market is as open as possible.

- 51 Where the market for social care learning content is too small or specialist to provide viable commercial opportunities, appropriate funding support and resources will need to be provided, subject to quality assured standards and also to the principles outlined in Section 7.
- 52 There are significant issues surrounding intellectual property rights (IPRs) in e-learning. The ease with which digital material can be retrieved, copied and re-purposed or otherwise amended poses specific challenges in establishing appropriate contractual and licence arrangements for the numerous stakeholders involved in e-learning content. These include authors, technical developers, commissioners (such as SCIE or TopssEngland), providers (such as higher education institutions or commercial training organisations), purchasers (such as local authorities) and individual learners. The principle of open access provides a starting point for an IPR strategy: arrangements must protect intellectual property, and take account of commercial exploitation issues, while promoting the sharing of resources.

#### 8.4 The technical systems

- 53 The networked e-learning planned for social care will need to be 'delivered' to both educators and learners via web-based systems. E-learning in certain forms can be delivered effectively through standard generic web systems. However, in recent years there has been a growth in tailor-made learning platforms and systems, which are designed and built to perform some or all of the specific functions associated with learning. These functions divide broadly into two categories:
- the storage, delivery and direct support of learning-related content and learning-related activities – broadly, this encompasses the interactions between individual learners and their teachers
  - the support and management of the overall learning and teaching process – broadly, this encompasses the interactions between individual learners and their learning institution.
- 54 There are a number of basic tools that form the focus for learning-related content and activities in web-based learning:
- teaching materials – for example, module notes, presentation handouts, learning objects
  - communication tools – for example, e-mail, mailing lists and bulletin boards
  - assessment tools – for example, electronic submission of assignments, multiple choice.

A system that incorporates all the above tools within one single software environment is known in the UK as virtual learning environment. A special-purpose database holding digital learning content in various forms that can be catalogued, located and downloaded into a VLE is known as a learning repository.

**38 managed learning environment:**  
a single software environment supporting the whole range of processes that contribute directly or indirectly to both learning and learning management

55 Most learning and teaching is also supported by information management systems – for example, to manage learner records, finance, administration and course management and accreditation. A single software environment can support the whole range of information systems and processes that contribute directly or indirectly to learning and learning management. In the UK, such a system is known as a managed learning environment<sup>38</sup> (MLE) (the preferred term in the education sector) or a learning management system (the preferred term in the corporate sector).

56 Terminology and definitions can be somewhat interchangeable, and indeed confused, in this area. The academic and commercial sectors use different terms, and there are also differences between the UK and other countries. The following diagram indicates the main functions of and relationships between e-learning systems.

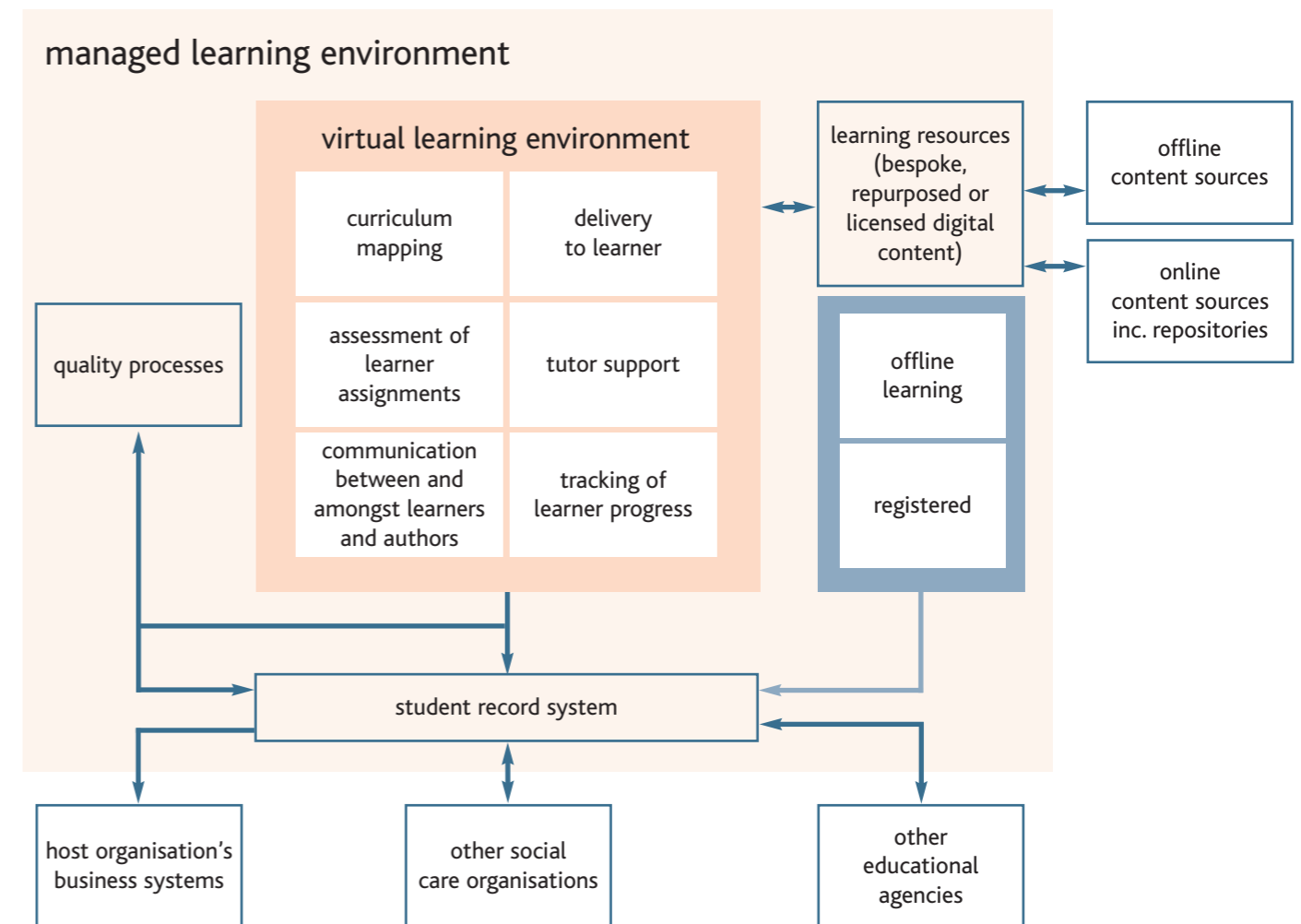


Figure 2. E-learning systems in social care

57 In higher and further education, well over 80% of institutions have a VLE or MLE (although uptake is not uniform within institutions). In the social care sector as a whole, there has been no significant uptake – as yet – of either VLEs or of larger MLEs. However, with the move towards a regulated and registered workforce and the implementation of national training strategies, this is likely to change. Numerous opportunities exist for co-operation with partners at national, regional and local level on joint procurements and shared implementations. Understanding the specific needs of the sector, with all its diversity, in relation to learning platforms and systems will be the key to maximising value and ensuring uptake from core stakeholders at all levels.

58 In addition, the DfES vision for UK e-learning includes personalised learning as a key element. This means ensuring learning is tailored to the individual learner's needs and preferences throughout the learning process. Learning advice and guidance, assessment (before, during and after learning) and the delivery and support of learning can all be tailored to a learner's style of learning, format preferences (for example, voice only, or text only) and other requirements. Social care organisations in all parts of the sector will need to focus on linking with each other to achieve this. The ultimate aim is to move away from a 'one size fits all' approach to learning and training, and also offer learners a 'seamless transition between school, college, work-based learning, university and lifelong learning' (DfES 2003a).

### 8.5 The organisational systems

59 As each of the case studies/scenarios in this paper illustrates, e-learning exists within a human and organisational context where the 'e' supports and enables the human interactions at the heart of learning. For example, Patience's learning relies on the support of a local FE college and its tutors, an accreditation body and a carers' organisation; Martha's evaluation tool will only fulfil its potential if students, assessors, teachers, service users and work-based managers all provide input.

60 Our blended approach to e-learning requires, therefore, not only the support of the learner and the educator directly involved (see section 8.2), but also:

- support for those with human resources (HR) responsibilities within social care organisations, large and small, to help them understand what e-learning offers and how to begin to use it
- support for social care managers to understand what e-learning can offer them and what it can offer their staff
- ensuring that e-learning developments are directly tied in with the existing training and learning pathways in social care (see Figure 1), including both informal and formal, and accredited learning.

## Q13

Have we identified all the underpinning elements for e-learning implementation?

## Q14

Do you agree that these elements form the basis of the action areas for our strategy?

## Q15

Are there any additional elements that need to be included in our action areas?

## 9 Action plans

61 The action areas outlined above are interdependent, but require differently formulated plans in different parts of the sector. Hence we have considered e-learning in social work higher education and e-learning in the wider social care workforce as two separate elements in our plans. Negotiating the interface between higher education and the workforce is a critical part of the sector-wide approach. It poses one of the main challenges to the strategy, and it also offers some of the biggest potential advances.

### 9.1 Higher education

62 The first phase in our higher education e-learning programme consists of projects and initiatives in support of the new honours degree in social work. Sixty-six universities in England can now offer the new degree-level professional qualification in social work, in a phased development that started in autumn 2003. Individual HEIs each have their own strategic approaches to e-learning, which will be the primary influence/driver for social work departments. Our initiatives therefore need to build on existing provision and provide resources compatible with existing approaches.

63 Our programmes in support of the degree will focus on three action areas:

- content development
- skills development
- delivery platforms and systems.

Our work will take account of the work of HEFCE and its associated programmes in this area.

#### *Content development for the social work degree*

64 A content development programme in support of the social work degree needs to provide the kinds of flexible materials that support educators in their own teaching approach: overly prescriptive course-based materials are not well received in the higher education context.

- 65 A development programme must incorporate a scoping and auditing function to assess what materials currently exist. The programme could have both an originating and an enabling role. This would involve both direct commissioning of materials and funding others to develop theirs, subject to quality assured standards. All supported and developed materials should be freely accessible – careful consideration must be given to issues of intellectual property rights management and commercial exploitation.
- 66 We also need to ensure that the content addresses clearly defined learning needs. We will therefore aim to:
- develop learning objects and other flexible resources addressing specified learning outcomes, rather than entire e-learning courses
  - ensure educators are involved in commissioning and drawing up specifications
  - ensure both educators and learners are involved in testing/trialling
  - design resources to solve particular educational problems
  - accompany each resource with educator/tutor documentation.
- 67 An e-learning strategy for social care must support both quality and innovation in learning content. Quality assurance processes need to take account of technical standards and specifications supporting interoperability, accessibility (so that resources are accessible to students with special needs as far as possible) and usability. The strategy must also support pedagogical innovation in e-learning in both content provision and assessment. Different specialist areas will call for different forms of learning and teaching resources; in particular, a focus on quality content should go hand in hand with the development and support of learning communities and communication networks – teacher to learner, teacher to teacher and learner to learner.
- 68 Negotiating the interfaces and barriers between learning systems within higher education and systems within the wider workforce will be a significant challenge for this strategy. The PLTF and the TopssEngland-led Learning Resource Centres have potential roles to play in supporting learning networks that span both higher education and workplace environments, including e-learning networks.

#### *Skills development: students and educators*

- 69 The requirements of the social work degree for students to be competent in ICT skills to the level of the ECDL or equivalent (GSCC 2002) are a significant step in preparing social workers not only for the use of ICTs in social work practice but also for the use of ICTs in further learning. Additional information literacy and 'soft' communication skills using electronic means are also required by the degree. The development of these skills should be done in a framework that is specific to social work. Institutions are taking a variety of approaches to addressing these requirements, although it is too early to assess their impact overall on student skills.

- 70 Enhancing the skills and understanding of social work educators and trainers in effectively embedding digital learning resources into the social work degree curriculum is key. Some initiatives within higher education generally seek to do this, but only the Social Work and Policy (SWAP) subject centre of the Higher Education Academy has a social work-specific remit.
- 71 SCIE is planning to commission training programmes for HE educators in England. These programmes should include training in:
- developing and using high-quality content
  - inclusive learning
  - planning and managing online events and places (e-moderating)
  - planning and managing online assessment (e-assessment).

The Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education is currently developing a programme of educator support for the nine Scottish institutions offering the degree (Stor Curam 2004).

#### *Delivery platforms and systems for the social work degree*

- 72 Well over 80% of HE institutions have VLEs or MLEs. Take-up and use of these environments for teaching is by no means uniform between institutions and between faculties and departments. We do not have detailed data on how many social work departments currently use VLEs/MLEs as an integrated part of their provision. Nonetheless, institution-wide teaching and learning and ICT strategies are increasingly converging in all subject areas, including social work.
- 73 The programme will support educators in the use of the systems already existing in their institutions, and ensure that the content we develop is readily available to educators for import into those systems. This is likely to require the use of a learning object repository/ies, purpose-built databases that allow the storage, cataloguing, searching and retrieval of items of learning content that can be seamlessly integrated into institutions' own learning management systems.
- 74 We need to recognise the limitations of institution-specific learning management systems in higher education. As one example, practice-based educators and assessors are a critical part of the education partnership for the social work degree. Two hundred days of practice-based learning are required for all social work students, managed and supported by practitioners. However, in many instances, practitioners cannot easily access the VLEs hosted by the HE institution, often due to restrictive licences and/or terms of use from the commercial suppliers.
- 75 A strategic approach to e-learning across the sector must support a strong commitment to joining up and non-duplication wherever possible, to facilitate communication between organisations and to open up access to and re-use of learning materials.



SCENARIO:  
Teaching social  
work degree  
students about  
genograms

### Nigel

Nigel is a lecturer in social work teaching the social work degree. His first-year students need to learn about genograms. Genograms are family diagrams – similar to family trees. They are used by social workers to show an overview of service users' family relationships.

### Nigel's teaching

Nigel locates a web site that provides teaching resources for the social work degree. He searches for 'genograms' and is pleased to find a specific learning object about them. The learning object is a series of animated pictures illustrating each of the elements and symbols in a genogram, their meaning and how they build up a picture of a family. The students then use a 'drag and drop' self-assessment about their understanding of the symbols and their use. Nigel downloads the object from the web site and places it within the university's own online learning environment.

Nigel decides to add two additional tasks. After students have worked their way through the learning object, they are then asked to develop a genogram of their own family and to place this on the online course discussion board. He also asks students to consider the issues of sensitivity and confidentiality they encounter when developing a diagram of their own family, and to think about how this might influence their practice. Finally, Nigel asks the students to consider a case study – which he had previously downloaded from the social work learning website – and to develop a genogram representing the family in the case study. These genograms are discussed in class, and are posted with comments on the class online discussion board, so that students can see how their peers have approached the task.

### Benefits for Nigel

The genogram learning object provides Nigel with a much quicker route to giving students the basics on the topic, and enables him to spend more time thinking about tasks that help students put the techniques into practice and consider some of the contextual issues surrounding the genogram tool itself.

The sharing of the genograms online and the discussion surrounding them also enables students to learn from each other and to think critically about the genogram and its use.

*This scenario is based, with permission, on an existing learning object under development by the Stor Curam project. For more information see [www.storcuram.ac.uk](http://www.storcuram.ac.uk)*

SCENARIO:  
Information  
literacy for the  
social work  
degree

### John

John is a 28-year-old student who has enrolled for the social work degree. English is his first language, and he has good speaking, reading and writing skills, as well as computer skills.

He used to work in a bank, but had often considered social work, and when he read about the new degree option, this persuaded him to make the change.

### John's learning

As part of the social work degree, John is required to develop his information literacy skills. In his first term, he does a social work information literacy module, which has been developed jointly by his university social work and information management departments. The module assesses and develops the students' ability to locate, evaluate and use information for a task specific to social care – in this case, find information concerning a specific client group from a range of sources.

This module is conducted through a combined lecture series and web-based programme. First, John completes a 'diagnostic' test – a questionnaire that asks him to complete a number of tasks, such as basic word processing, sending of e-mails, basic web navigation, basic and advanced use of search engines, evaluation of the relevance of search engine results – in order to assess his ICT, searching and evaluative skills.

The results of this diagnostic test create a learning profile for John. He is interested to see that while he is competent in most areas of ICT use, he is less skilled in his use of search engines and in his ability to evaluate search results.

John pursues an online learning programme to address the skills gaps assessed in the diagnostic test.

At the same time as pursuing this individual programme, John is assigned to a group of fellow students who must jointly produce and electronically submit an essay. The group's task is jointly to explore and evaluate the social construction of specific service user groups using resources found online. The group must communicate only via e-mail and bulletin board in order to approach this task, and submit a single essay, jointly authored, for assessment.

### Benefits for John

John gains valuable experience in the dynamics of group working, improves his ability to use search techniques on the world wide web, better understands some of the social skills needed for online communication, and has the satisfaction of helping some of his fellow students improve aspects of their information literacy skills.

*This scenario is based, with permission, on an existing module at London Metropolitan University. For more information see [www.ilit.org/level2/swil.htm](http://www.ilit.org/level2/swil.htm)*

SCENARIO:  
Resources for  
service user  
teachers

### Surinder

Surinder is a thirty-five-year-old woman who has used mental health services for fifteen years. She is a member of a network of mental health service users and their allies involved in teaching and research. Through the network, Surinder has been involved with the social work degree, jointly delivering sessions with social work teachers on mental health user perspectives. The social work programme is developing its online learning environment and wants to ensure that its service user teachers can play a full part in this development.

### Surinder's learning

Surinder has the opportunity to acquire some basic skills in using computers, utilising an introductory module for students and staff devised by the programme's e-learning manager. This module is provided through a face-to-face basic introduction, followed by online opportunities to consolidate and build on basic skills. Surinder uses a computer in the user network office to do this, as she does not have facilities at home.

### Benefits for Surinder

Surinder gains new knowledge and skills from the module.

She finds that she is able to access information on social work programme modules and use a number of relevant websites to update her knowledge and prepare for her joint teaching on the programme.

She is also able to interact with students and colleagues online to help them develop their knowledge and understanding of service user issues outside of classroom hours.

Her CV as a trainer is enhanced, reflecting her successful completion of the introductory module and the new ways she has found of using her knowledge and skills. Because of her learning, she finds herself being used as a resource by other service user colleagues in the network, as well as with the students and staff that she is working with.

*This scenario is based, with permission, on an existing module at the University of Birmingham School of Social Sciences.*

*For more information see*

*[www.socialresearch.bham.ac.uk/Programmes/MHs.asp](http://www.socialresearch.bham.ac.uk/Programmes/MHs.asp)*

## 9.2. The social care workforce

- 76 Our ultimate vision for e-learning in social care is to develop a high proportion of the workforce capable of using ICTs to update their knowledge and skills continually in order to deliver an improved service for users and carers. Achieving this is a long-term task and requires significant inputs from a range of stakeholders in all our key action areas.

### *Infrastructure in the social care workforce*

- 77 The diversity of the social care workforce, with a mixture of provision from statutory, voluntary and private sectors, and over 25,000 employers in the sector, means that, unlike in the NHS, a sector-wide approach to supporting ICT infrastructure is not in place.
- 78 Information on the state of hardware and connectivity is scant, and an initial priority is to establish some benchmarking data upon which to build. Understanding what infrastructure – both hardware and connectivity – is available to which practitioners is a prerequisite to planning provision. An audit of sector capacities in this area is proposed, and it is possible that existing reporting mechanisms such as the Delivery and Improvement Statements required from councils with social services responsibilities by the DH could be extended to include ICT infrastructure and connectivity data.

### *Content development for workforce training and education*

- 79 E-learning content for the social care workforce is in its infancy. Some providers are addressing the need, but awareness is limited, and it is hard therefore for providers to stimulate demand. Content needs to address several distinct but overlapping areas: basic skills, induction, vocational qualifications – including National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) – in-service training and continuing professional development. The learner profile in each of these areas will be different, and the approach must vary accordingly.
- 80 Learning needs assessments should be conducted on a regional basis for the sector, so that subsequent content development initiatives are co-ordinated across a mix of providers, and are learner driven rather than product driven. The aim is to encourage a mixed economy of provision. SCIE itself will have a role in commissioning the development of e-learning materials in response to recognised need, and commercial providers will also have a significant role to play in serving the market.
- 81 It is important that e-learning strategy in social care supports the implementation of quality and technical standards and specifications for content. Interoperability, accessibility and usability must be requirements, as must a demonstrable understanding of instructional design and an innovative pedagogical approach.

- 82 We also need to ensure that content is developed in line with national qualifications frameworks, occupational standards and regulatory requirements. E-learning in social care needs to be part of a consistent national credit accumulation and transfer system. This system is an important way to provide incentives for learners and for employers, by making explicit the value of learning. This will also enable learners to plan future career progression and understand what learning is most appropriate for them. We will need to work closely with partners such as the QCA and with City and Guilds and others who accredit qualifications for social care.

#### *Skills development: workers and trainers*

- 83 Research suggests that parts of the social care workforce need support in acquiring basic skills. Basic skills include literacy (including ESOL) and numeracy. These skills form the foundation for further development of vocational skills. This must be preceded by thorough scoping, feasibility studies and learning needs assessments. Partners in the learning and skills and adult and community learning fields such as Learndirect are already addressing the provision of basic skills development through e-learning. There is potential for partnerships with social care organisations at regional and local level to ensure that this existing provision is made available to social care workers. There is also further potential for partnership with the NHSU, LSCs and FE colleges in the provision of basic skills training.
- 84 The e-learning training needs of educators/trainers in social care - whether in voluntary, statutory or private organisations, offering basic skills training, vocational training or continuing professional development - are fundamentally the same. They all require support in:
- developing and using high-quality content
  - understanding how people learn online
  - understanding learner diversity and the principles of inclusive learning
  - planning and managing online events and places (e-moderating)
  - planning and managing online assessment (e-assessment).

The Improvement and Development Agency for local government (I&DeA) has begun some initiatives in these areas, but there is no co-ordinated social care-specific provision across the sector. Educator support is best provided via regional and local networks, and the Learning Resource Centres currently being piloted by TopssEngland are a possible conduit for workplace educator support programmes.

### SCENARIO: Basic skills and ICT skills for social care staff

#### Denise, Gary and Shona

Denise is a care assistant in an independent care home. Gary is an administrator for a council adult social care department, and Shona is part of a housekeeping team in a voluntary sector care organisation.

All three learners are close to a large city on the south coast, which has a centrally located learning centre sited in an NHS trust rehabilitation centre. The centre provides government-subsidised learning to all unqualified staff in local NHS trusts, local government adult social care departments and independent and voluntary sector care organisations.

#### Their learning

The centre offers the option of either learning on site using computers with face-to-face tutor support, or at work or at home with tutor support by phone or e-mail. Denise and Shona both opt to go into the centre. Because it is open very flexible hours, Denise can attend around her shifts at the care home, and Shona is able to come one afternoon a week on release from work. Gary opts to learn from his workplace and has time allowed by his employer.

The staff at the centre have experience in supporting adults who lack confidence in their learning skills. Most of those attending the centre have received no education or training since leaving school. All three learners receive important and supportive advice and guidance at enrolment that helps them to choose the right course.

Denise wants to boost her writing skills so she can complete work for an NVQ in care. She opts for 'skills for life' literacy training, and decides she will also take the new literacy national tests so she has accredited proof of her learning.

Gary wants to do some ICT training, in particular how to create and use spreadsheets using a computer. He has been getting increasingly frustrated at doing by hand work which he knows would be done much more efficiently by computer. He opts for an online course in the most common spreadsheet package.

Shona wants to learn how to use the internet. She knows that if her organisation was able to buy its supplies over the internet, it would make both cost and efficiency savings. Shona opts for the introduction to computers and the internet course.

#### Benefits

All three learners complete their courses and rate the teaching as very good and the tutors as supportive. For their employers, their learning contributes towards the achievement of training targets for both NVQs and ICT qualifications. The learners' improved writing, accounting and procurement skills also contribute to improved record-keeping and auditing.

*This scenario is based, with permission, on LENS, an existing learning centre in Brighton. For more information see [www.careconnectlearn.co.uk](http://www.careconnectlearn.co.uk)*

40 **sector portal:**  
a web site that provides a gateway to a wide range of information related to a particular sector such as social care

41 **skills audit and skills gap analysis:**  
identifying the skills held by staff and comparing them to the skills required

### *Delivery systems and platforms for workforce training and education*

- 85 Some delivery platforms and systems already exist within the sector. For example, some councils with social services responsibilities have their own VLEs, as do most HE institutions delivering the social work degree. However, at present there is no co-ordination in procurement at either regional or national level, nor any clear sense of what kinds of systems might best suit the sector. Solutions might range in ambition and scope from:
- repository platforms – these could provide quality e-learning content for social care educators and trainers to use in their teaching
  - VLEs – these could support the interaction between educator and learner, including content delivery, assessment, communications, tracking, tutor support and curriculum mapping
  - MLEs/learning management systems – these could support the whole range of information systems and processes that contribute directly or indirectly to learning and learning management; for example, including student registration and accreditation, as well as VLE functions
  - sector portals<sup>40</sup> – these could provide learning management systems functions and in addition capture workforce development data; for example, learning needs assessments, skills audit and skills gap analysis<sup>41</sup> on a local, regional or national basis, providing a central reference point for services for learners, educators, training providers and employers right across social care.
- 86 Delivery systems that are targeted to specific stakeholders within e-learning – for example, that are aimed mainly at supporting education providers, or mainly at learners, or that target specific specialisms at all levels – are likely to be the best way forward. Such procurements may best be left to regional and local stakeholders, who can customise systems to their own local needs.
- 87 The critical issue for systems implementation is extensive needs assessment, scoping and piloting to ensure buy-in from all groups of potential users. The success of any implementation lies not in the range of functions it offers, but in the content it delivers and how well this addresses the needs of its intended users. Social care has 1.2 million workers with learning needs ranging from basic skills to post-qualification continuing professional development, across a range of specialisms and working in both the public and private sectors. Given this huge diversity, significant scoping work needs to be undertaken before any large-scale implementations are attempted.

### SCENARIO: Online assessments for social care NVQs

#### Jenny and Kelly

Jenny is a peripatetic assessor for a large social care training provider in northern England. She is responsible for a large number of candidates who are employed in care homes across the region. They are completing either Level 2 or Level 3 NVQs in Care. Getting people to complete a whole award in the required timescales is always a challenge, and the volume of paperwork and administration is, at times, overwhelming. An 'alternative assessment methods' pilot opportunity, using an electronic assessment tool, is offered to Jenny, and is accepted.

As part of the pilot, Jenny has to undertake a training course, where she is provided with a laptop pre-loaded with the software, a digital camera and a tiny audio recording device, with all the costs covered through the LSC's pilot funding. The training lasts for a day and a half, and gives her the skills to set up 'portfolios' for each of her candidates, as well as create and upload digital evidence of their skills using the camera, the audio recorder and the laptop.

#### Jenny's assessment visit

On an assessment visit to Kelly, who is undertaking the NVQ training, Jenny uses her laptop to review progress to date and add new evidence since the last visit. Jenny completes an observation of Kelly at work, and enters her comments directly onto the software programme as evidence. She can link the evidence to all the performance criteria that it applies to within the NVQ. This leads to a more holistic assessment, as each piece of evidence is linked wherever it is relevant.

At the end of the visit, Jenny and Kelly review progress to see how that day's evidence has contributed to overall progress.

Upon her return to the office, Jenny is able to upload the evidence on her laptop to the central version of the software. This way, all of the evidence and progress is held on one central version, which can be accessed by the internal and external verifier.

#### Benefits for Jenny

Both Jenny and Kelly find that the system reduces the amount of paperwork required for NVQ assessment.

Because each piece of evidence can be easily linked to multiple elements, performance criteria and knowledge, Jenny's candidates can complete NVQ units faster. Jenny finds that candidates' motivation has increased because they can actually see how each piece of evidence impacts on their overall progress.

*This scenario is based, with permission, on part of a pilot funded by the LSC. It uses proprietary electronic assessment software that is copyright protected. For more information contact bev.george@lsc.gov.uk*

- 88 Our e-learning strategy would seek to provide a clear sector-wide framework for more localised/specialised implementations, setting out the criteria and standards that will ensure a co-ordinated approach across regions and specialisms. Such an implementation framework could provide social care organisations with:
- a quality framework for technical and pedagogical standards and specifications
  - an interoperability framework to ensure seamless linking across organisations and sectors
  - a progress framework that allows organisations to assess their current e-learning readiness and measure progress in embedding e-learning.

#### *Centralised and decentralised services*

- 89 Our e-learning strategy needs to strike a balance between centralised and decentralised services. Not only is such a diverse sector unlikely to be well served by large centralised systems, but local innovation and responsibility needs to be maximised. Services best provided centrally might include:
- implementation framework – consistent guidelines on technical and pedagogical standards, plus guidance on assessing e-learning readiness and progress
  - learning needs research – evidence gathered locally and regionally, and synthesised nationally to aid development of appropriate learning provision
  - sector repository for learning content – delivering quality-assured content commissioned by SCIE and other sector-wide bodies, and potentially also facilitating the sharing of locally developed content with peer review
  - standards forum – to review technical standards and specifications, design and pedagogical good practice for social care learning to ensure the sector stays abreast of all aspects of e-learning.

#### *Organisational systems*

- 90 Commentaries on the adoption of e-learning in both workplace and academic contexts tend to show that success is as dependent on organisational change and 'human readiness' as it is on technical readiness. These organisational and culture changes are often hard, not least because e-learning has a way of highlighting barriers or cultural differences between disciplines, institutions and sectors. A strategic approach will not only highlight best practice and successes, but aim to encourage openness about what does not work and how we can learn from it.
- 91 Change in social care will be incremental. There may be scope within existing sector structures or as part of the Learning Resource Centre network to develop an 'e-champions' programme – local government and further education have adopted variations on this model. Individuals within existing organisations would be supported to become conduits for information and expertise about e-learning,

and encourage awareness about best practice amongst colleagues. As educator and learner support programmes gather momentum and the benefits of e-learning become more widely understood, this in turn will encourage managers and leaders to plan for and fund e-learning.

- 92 The incorporation of European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) or the equivalent in the social work degree begins the process of developing a culture of information literacy – and consequent skills for e-learning – in the sector. Including these types of skills in vocational standards and qualifications for the wider social care workforce can also be considered.

### Q16

Have we suggested the correct actions to address our priorities?

### Q17

Are there any other aspects of provision for support of social work in higher education we need to consider?

### Q18

Are there any other aspects of provision for the support of work-based learning that we need to consider?

## 10 Research and evaluation

- 93 Benchmarking data in social care is not easily obtained due to the sector's structural diversity. In order to underpin our e-learning work programmes, we need to undertake robust research in the areas of:
- e-learning readiness
  - learning needs
  - learning outcomes and their impact on services.
- 94 E-learning readiness research needs to focus on assessing the sector's current capacity and future needs in our main action areas:
- the 'kit' – what infrastructure (both hardware and connectivity) currently exists in the sector; what will be needed to support our aims in e-learning, knowledge management and workforce development
  - the 'know-how' – what level of e-learning skills do social care learners and educators currently possess; what levels do they need to make effective use of the opportunities e-learning offers
  - the 'subject materials' – what e-learning content currently exists in social care; what kinds of content does social care need now and in the future
  - the 'technical systems' – what delivery and support systems are currently in use; what might best suit the sector's future needs
  - the 'organisational systems' – what are the organisational, cultural and structural drivers and barriers to e-learning in social care, and how can they be addressed.

This data could be gathered in a variety of ways, including large-scale sampling and surveys of the sector 'as it is', or by initiating pilot programmes of e-learning and then assessing the drivers and barriers to its use. The pilot and evaluation approach has some advantages in an area like ICT provision, where large-scale research runs the risk of becoming out of date very quickly. There is also possible access to data through existing reporting mechanisms such as the annual Delivery and Improvement Statements provided to the DH by local authorities.

- 95 Learning needs assessments must assess the sector's training and education needs from the perspective of social care staff, social care employers, service users and regulatory bodies. Each of these groups may have differing perspectives on where current skills are lacking and which areas have the highest priority. A centralised approach to researching and evaluating these needs will provide the sector with a 'roadmap' for workforce training and development, monitored and updated to take account of increasing skills and also of changing service needs. Baseline data will allow us to understand more clearly 'where we are now' and to establish appropriate plans to achieve our objectives.
- 96 Once we are starting to implement e-learning on a wide scale, evaluation of learning outcomes will be the only way to assess the impact of e-learning on the sector. In turn, research on learning outcomes needs ultimately to be related to changes in practice and to improved outcomes for service users. These linkages are complex and currently not well understood.
- 97 A major evaluation of the social work degree is currently under way, which will incorporate evaluation of learning technologies and of e-learning approaches, and provide important information on the effectiveness of e-learning in the social work education context, as well as considering the links between learning outcomes and changes in practice.
- 98 Evaluations of the impact of e-learning on the sector will enable us to contribute to the wider body of knowledge on e-learning. The NHSU, relevant sector skills councils and HE institutions will be important stakeholders in evaluation research.

## Q19

Do you agree with our priorities for research and evaluation?

## 11 Next steps

- 99 Considerable informal consultation has underpinned the development of this discussion paper. The results of the formal consultation on this paper will be collected, analysed and published. A finalised strategy for the sector will then be developed, which in turn is intended to be incorporated into the TopssEngland workforce development strategy for social care 2005–2008. This will locate e-learning within the broader context of workforce development and will make explicit the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies and organisations in funding and implementation.
- 100 The finalised strategy will need to:
- incorporate agreed vision and long-term goals
  - present a shared awareness of what e-learning can contribute to the social care sector
  - set out the roles and responsibilities of partners in the social care sector
  - present a shared awareness of how we can best co-operate with partners in health and other allied sectors
  - give clear guidance as to which initiatives should be driven nationally and sector wide, and which are best achieved through regional and local actions
  - confirm funding avenues for all aspects of the strategy and business models for national and local initiatives, including guidelines on intellectual property issues for delivery systems and content
  - be clear about deliverables and timescales
  - plan for sustainability.

## Q20

Do you wish to comment on any other issues raised in this consultation paper?

## 12 Consultation process

- 101 You will find a questionnaire included in this paper. You can also complete the same questionnaire online at the consultation web site: [www.elfs.org.uk](http://www.elfs.org.uk). If you have access to the internet, it helps us in collecting responses if you complete the questionnaire online.

If you have any queries about this consultation paper, the questionnaire, or any other aspect of the e-learning consultation, please contact:

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## Glossary

(*italics* indicates a related glossary term)

**accessibility:** difficulties in accessing a product or service may be due to a number of reasons, including a user's disability or the environment in which they are accessing the product/service; making it accessible means it is easier for everyone to use, whatever their circumstances

**basic skills:** 'the ability to read, write and speak in English/Welsh and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general' (Basic Skills Agency 2004)

**blended learning:** using both electronic and face-to-face delivery and support of teaching and learning

**bulletin board:** a digital notice-board; messages posted on bulletin boards are visible to anyone who has access to the space on which the notice-board sits; they are often organised by themes (threads) so that people can follow the discussions

**chat:** electronic messages that are exchanged 'synchronously' between individuals or groups who are all logged on to the same 'chat-room' at the same time; chat-rooms allow senders' messages to be displayed to everyone in the chat-room immediately; chat is more ephemeral than *e-mail* or *bulletin board* messages

**communities of practice:** usually small groups of people who have worked together over a period of time, and through extensive communication have developed a common sense of purpose and desire to share work-related knowledge and experience

**connectivity:** the ability to connect, using telecommunications infrastructure (such as telephone lines, cable networks or mobile services), to networks such as the worldwide web

**database:** a collection of information that is organised so that it can easily be accessed, managed and updated

**distance learning:** where the learner is not geographically close to the individual or organisation delivering learning; distance learning is often thought to be synonymous with e-learning; in fact, e-learning can be used to support face-to-face learning (*a blended approach*), and distance learning can be conducted without the use of e-learning (e.g. a print-based correspondence course)

**educator:** in the context of social care, refers to both vocational trainers and educators in higher education and elsewhere; also includes service users and carers

**educator support:** the provision of services and products that help educators do their teaching; includes, for example, technical training or advice, provision of e-learning content, training in *e-moderating* or online assessment techniques

**e-GIF (E-Government Interoperability Framework):** guidance on internet and worldwide web standards for all UK government systems; aims to reduce the costs and risk of operating information technology systems, while keeping the public sector in step with the global internet revolution

**e-learning:** the use of information and communication technologies (*ICTs*) to provide, support or enhance learning via the internet, network or standalone computer

**e-learning courses:** also known as online courses; any structured set of digital materials addressing specified learning objectives, divided into meaningful sections and arranged in a sequence and/or hierarchy that promotes learning

**e-mail:** electronic mail; messages sent between individuals or to groups of individuals at specific addresses; they are 'asynchronous' – that is, held in a 'mailbox' and read whenever the recipient chooses; only visible to designated recipients of the message, in contrast to *bulletin boards*; each individual can do what they like with their messages (save them, delete them, file them etc.); e-mail was one of the first uses of the *internet*, and is still the most popular

**e-moderating:** the ability to plan and manage events online; this includes understanding the concepts of online social interaction, as well as having the technical skills to run events

**e-portfolio:** portable, electronic *databases* that are private, personalised and shareable and are easily accessible via the world wide web; an e-portfolio enables the user to collect and organise text, audio, graphic and video files that provide evidence of their knowledge, skills and training

**European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL):** a widely recognised certificate that shows the holder is competent in the use of a personal computer and common computer applications, and knows the essential concepts of information technology

**hardware:** the physical aspect of computers, telecommunications and other information technology devices; the term arose as a way to distinguish the 'box' and the electronic circuitry and components of a computer from the programs (*or software*) that make it do things

**ICTs:** information and communication technologies; an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application, encompassing: radio, television, cellular phones, computer hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as the *worldwide web*

**ICT skills:** those skills needed to take full advantage of the information and services accessible via computers and other digital communication devices; also known as e-skills; one aspect of *information literacy*

**information literacy:** the ability to locate, evaluate and use information to become a lifelong learner; includes *ICT skills* as well as information search and evaluation skills

**infrastructure:** the hardware, such as personal computers, servers and telecommunications networks, necessary to support information and communication technologies such as the internet and *worldwide web*

**instructional design:** the application of a systematic methodology based on instructional theory to create content for learning

**internet:** a worldwide network of computer networks; an interconnection of large and small networks around the globe

**interoperability:** the ability of learning content, a subsystem or system to work seamlessly with other systems, sub-systems or content via the use of agreed specifications and standards

**knowledge management:** an organisation acquires and manages its knowledge, both the explicit knowledge in its information systems and also the 'tacit' knowledge that resides largely in people's heads; knowledge management is the attempt to make tacit knowledge explicit, and to encourage sharing in order to improve effectiveness in achieving the organisation's goals

**learner-centred:** putting the end-user of e-learning at the centre of development processes; includes assessing needs from a learner perspective; trialling pilot materials and systems on learners; asking learners to evaluate e-learning experiences

**learner support:** the services and systems that enable learners to learn; includes, for example, guidance on choosing the correct learning; supporting learning skills such as information and communication technology skills, *information literacy*; and all the administrative processes that support progress through a learning experience

**learning content:** any form of digital material designed to address learning needs

**learning management systems:** software that automates the administration of learning; registers users, tracks courses, records data from learners and provides reports to those administering the system; often focuses on managing courses created by a variety of sources

**learning networks:** networks that use information and communication technologies to promote connections between learners and their peers and tutors, and between a learning community and its learning resources (Elearningeuropa 2004)

**learning objects:** small 'chunks' of digital learning, focusing on one, or occasionally two, learning objectives; often used as modular building blocks for e-learning content

**learning object repository:** a specialised digital repository holding digital learning objects described by specialised information called metadata

**managed learning environment:** a single software environment that supports the whole range of information systems and processes that contribute directly or indirectly to learning and learning management

**online communities:** the internet facilitates two-way communication between people, as well as being a medium for the 'one-way' publishing of information; online communities are groups of individuals who visit a designated online space to share a common interest

**pedagogy:** the theories, principles and practices of teaching, learning and education; ensuring that e-learning content has input from pedagogical experts is as important as ensuring input from technical experts

**personalised learning:** learning that is tailored to the individual learner's needs and preferences throughout the learning process; this is a key element of the Department for Education and Skills' Five Year Strategy

**practice learning:** social care skills learned through real-life practice in a workplace, and through simulation such as role play, action learning and case study analysis; includes supervised, assessed practice in the workplace using real-life experiences, including face-to-face work with individuals and families, groups and communities

**repository:** a specialised *database* that stores digital assets and artefacts of relevance to learning to enable easy retrieval, sharing and management across digital networks such as the *worldwide web*; also known as learning content management systems

**scalability:** the ability of a system to increase in size and/or complexity in order to address increasing demand or widening scope

**sector portal:** a web site that provides a gateway to information related to a particular industry, such as health or social care; it offers services to the various groups of people who have an interest in exchanging information about a particular sector

**skills audit and skills gap analysis:** skills audit involves identifying the skills and knowledge (both used and latent) held by existing staff; the determination of gaps involves comparing skills and knowledge held by the organisations (determined in the skills audit) with the skills and knowledge required (the established benchmarks)

**software:** computer programs; software is often divided into application software (programs that do work users are directly interested in, such word processing and spreadsheet programs, or internet browsers) and system software such as operating systems, which support the application software



**usability:** a measure of how effectively, efficiently and easily a person can navigate a system or product, find information on it and achieve their goals in using the product

**virtual learning environment (VLE):** 'an environment where on-line interactions of various kinds take place between learners and tutors' (JISC 2003)

**worldwide web (www):** a collection of documents on the internet linked by a common language called HTML (hypertext mark-up language); the most popular method of finding information on the internet

### Acronyms

**ADSS:** Association of Directors of Social Services

**ALI:** Adult Learning Inspectorate

**ASW:** Approved Social Worker (mental health)

**BASW:** British Association of Social Workers

**Becta:** British Educational Communications and Technology Agency

**DfES:** Department for Education and Skills

**DH:** Department of Health

**DTI:** Department of Trade and Industry

**ECDL:** European Computer Driving Licence

**EO:** Employers Organisation for Local Government

**FE:** further education

**e-GIF:** E-government Interoperability Framework (see glossary)

**ELFS:** E-learning for Social Care

**ESOL:** English for speakers of other languages

**EU:** European Union

**GSCC:** General Social Care Council

**HE:** higher education

**HEFCE:** Higher Education Funding Council for England

**HEIs:** higher education institutions

**HR:** human resources

**ICTs:** information and communication technologies (see glossary)

**I&DeA:** Improvement and Development Agency for local government

**IPRs:** intellectual property rights

**IT:** information technology

**JISC:** Joint Information Systems Committee

**JUC-SWEC:** Joint University Council - Social Work Education Committee

**LEA:** Local Education Authorities

**LGA:** Local Government Association

**LSC:** Learning and Skills Council

**LSDA:** Learning and Skills Development Agency

**MLE:** managed learning environment (see glossary)

**NATOPSS - Learn to Care:** National Association of Training Officers in Personal Social Services

**NHS:** National Health Service

**NHSU:** National organisation with a remit to provide learning and development opportunities for everyone working in UK health and social care

**NIACE:** National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

**NLN:** National Learning Network

**NOS:** National Occupational Standards

**NPfIT:** National Programme for IT

**NVQ:** National Vocational Qualification

**ODPM:** Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

**PLTF:** Practice Learning Taskforce

**PQ:** Post-qualifying

**QCA:** Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

**SCA:** Social Care Association

**SCIE:** Social Care Institute for Excellence

**SIESWE:** Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education

**SWAP:** Social Work and Social Policy Subject Centre of the Higher Education Academy

**TUC:** Trades Union Congress

**Ufi:** University for Industry (providers of Learndirect learning services)

**VLE:** virtual learning environment (see glossary)

## Acknowledgements

A number of sources have informed the development of this discussion document, in particular the DfES Towards a Unified E-learning Strategy, the NHSU 'E-learning for health: a discussion paper', the Scottish Social Work E-learning Strategy Group 'E-learning and the new social work degree' and the SWAP Building E-learning Capacity for the New Social Work Degree. See full references below.

Thanks for permission to base Figure 1 (Training pathways in social care) on an original diagram from TopssEngland South West.

Thanks for permission to base Figure 2 (E-learning systems in social care) on an original diagram from Becta.

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