Learning technologies in social care: a guide for employers

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"we identify new and innovative ways of working"

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Contents

1. Introduction

Learning technologies have much to offer social care employers. This introductory guide aims to help you make the most of them for workforce development. It does not assume any prior technical or e-learning knowledge.

1.1   What do we mean by learning technologies?

By learning technologies we mean any digital technology in any part of the learning process. This includes learner support and learning management, as well as modules and courses. Our focus is on digital products and services, not physical equipment or infrastructure, though we do touch on these. Throughout this guide we use the terms 'e-learning' and 'learning technologies' interchangeably.

1.2   Who is this guide for?

This guide is aimed at employers and managers in the care sector with responsibility for staff learning and development (L&D). Not every technology will be relevant or helpful, but we hope you will find information here that is of use whatever your organisation's size and type, and also whether you are new to learning technologies or already have some experience using them.

1.3   What is the aim of the guide?

This guide offers a non-technical) overview of learning technologies, with guidance to help you assess what might be useful to you. We provide sources of reliable information for topics you may wish to follow up.

Like all technologies, learning technologies work better in some circumstances than others – they are certainly not the answer to every challenge in workforce development. Learning technologies work most effectively when integrated into an overall learning strategy tailored to your particular circumstances. The case studies that accompany this guide show how a range of social care employers are using technologies alongside other approaches to workforce training and development – often called a 'blended approach'. We hope the guide will help you work out what might be a good blend for your particular circumstances.

A note on social care values
Values sit at the heart of social care and staff apply these values on a daily basis, often in challenging circumstances. Whilst e-learning can help staff to develop the knowledge that underpins judgement and decision-making skills, it should always be supplemented with face-to-face guidance, supervision, feedback and discussion. This allows staff the opportunity for reflection and development, and gives managers the opportunity to gauge the ability of staff to apply social care values in practice.

Please note that we do not recommend any particular commercial technologies or resources, but we do offer guidance on how to evaluate e-learning products and services, as well as some guidance on assessing the business case for e-learning.

We also provide a list of free technologies and resources relevant to the social care sector in the UK. Introducing learning technologies does not have to be a grand or expensive project. The ever-increasing amount of free or low cost services and products give you great scope to explore the potential of e-learning for your organisation.

2. Learning technologies: an overview

Digital learning technologies have three main functions:
1. delivering learning content
2. supporting collaborative learning, and
3. managing the learning process.

2.1   Tools for delivering learning content
E-learning content varies greatly, from the simplest of website pages to full 'whizz bang' online interactive simulations. All types of e-learning content are used in the social care sector, though some are much more common than others. Below are the main kinds of e-learning content.

Free access e-learning modules
These are self-contained pieces of online learning, with specific learning outcomes, available free on the web. They are generally short – anything from 5-minute 'bite-sized learning' to an hour or so of learning time. They are often supplied by national organisations with a remit in social care – for example the Social Care Institute for Excellence – or by educational bodies such as the Open University. This type of e-learning content can be accessed by anyone. The only requirement is a connection to the internet.

"We plan to make more effective use of free e-learning, particularly to support specialist areas such as dementia. To guide managers to quality, up-to-date materials, we plan to create pathways on our intranet to vetted free e-learning from external sources that staff can use to support face-to-face training."
Alton Hobbs, Mencap
Learning technologies in action at Mencap

- Advantages of free access e-learning modules
  - No cost to access
  - Low-risk way to try out e-learning content
  - Good way to support informal learning or professional development
  - Can be accessed direct by motivated learners
  - Can be accessed anytime and anywhere with a connection to the internet
  - Can be undertaken at learner's own pace, and in private.
- Disadvantages
  - Quality and/or how current the content is can be variable
  - Assessment rarely included, so hard to check learning/understanding
  - Often no way of tracking or recording use by learners
  - Can be hard to locate on the web
  - Modules may not be accredited or mapped to standards or qualification frameworks
  - Usually no technical or tutor support provided – the learner is 'on their own'
  - Content and messages may not align with organisational culture or values
  - Content cannot be amended by employer

- May not be compatible with employer's learning management systems.

Free access e-learning courses
These are entire courses, delivered online and free to the learner. Also known as MOOCs (massive open online courses), this approach to delivering learning is rapidly increasing globally. The largest collection of MOOCs is available via Apple's iTunesU (iTunes 'University'), and this is a good place to start browsing.[1] MOOCs are often created by educational bodies, many in the USA but also notably by the Open University in the UK. As with free e-learning modules, this type of e-learning content can be accessed by anyone.

The advantages of free online courses are similar to those of online modules. The disadvantages are also comparable, although courses are more likely than modules to include some form of assessment so that learning/understanding can be checked. However, a lack of comprehensive technical or tutor support, or lack of accreditation, may be bigger deterrents if you are taking a course than if you are doing a short module.

'Off the shelf' e-learning content
There are dozens of commercial providers of e-learning content. This ranges from short modules to longer courses, and usually incorporates some form of online assessment. The content may be generic and relevant to many sectors or specific to the care sector. A lot of off-the-shelf content focuses on statutory and mandatory training. Many social care employers use off-the-shelf e-learning content for this type of 'compliance' training. There is also off-the-shelf content designed to support induction (i.e. mapped to the Common Induction Standards), as well as the achievement of health and social care qualifications from level 2 upwards.

Some providers enable a degree of customisation (sometimes called 're-skinning') of off-the-shelf content; the core content remains the same, but individual customers can, for example, insert organisational branding or specific links to organisational resources. There are also some providers who offer even greater flexibility, allowing core content of off-the-shelf products to be amended to suit your particular circumstances.

Most providers of e-learning content also provide access to a learning management system (LMS) for their customers. This allows you to track learner use of the material – useful if you don't have your own LMS, particularly for induction or the achievement of qualifications.

- Advantages of purchased content
    - Can be accessed anytime and anywhere there is a connection to the internet.
    - Can be undertaken at learner's own pace, and in private.
    - Can be easier to administer and monitor than face-to-face training.

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[1] You don't need to have Apple technology to access iTunesU; you can download iTunes onto most devices.

- Can involve less time away from service delivery than face-to-face training
- Can be a cost-effective way to deliver training.

- Disadvantages
  - Quality of content and/or design can be variable.
  - Often cannot be amended by employer.
  - Poor quality content or design may limit learning
  - Content and messages may not align with organisational culture or values.

"Face-to-face courses are usually seven hours, but the longest e-learning course is three hours. Plus staff don't need to finish it in one go. They can close and save their work so they can do it in several sittings when it's convenient for them."
Barbora Stepankova, Yarrow Housing Ltd
[Learning technologies in action at Yarrow Housing Ltd](#)

"For five new staff starting at the same time in the same place we would do induction face-to-face. But often we have just one worker starting, and it's simply not practical to run a training course for one learner. Being able to offer online learning is really valuable."
Liz D'Arcy Malone, Leonard Cheshire Disability
[Learning technologies in action at Leonard Cheshire Disability](#)

To find suppliers of good quality e-learning content for social care, consult:
- Your local care providers association
- Your local authority
- The National Skills Academy for Social Care's list of endorsed social care training providers, some of whom provide e-learning content.[2]

"[E-learning content] is important in social care because of the diversity of the market: different types of learners have different access needs for learning; for example foster carers accessing training outside school holidays or at weekends, domiciliary care workers on the road, people working nightshifts and people working very few hours part-time. Effectively there are eight or nine different markets for social care training."
Charlotte Dawber, West Sussex County Council
[Learning technologies in action at West Sussex County Council](#)

Bespoke e-learning content
Some social care employers develop their own e-learning content to address staff training needs. They may create this content themselves in-house, or commission an e-learning company to do it for them, or do both. The decision to 'make or buy' will depend on your circumstances and resources, as well as the type of e-learning content you need. The advantages of e-learning content that you have created yourself include all the advantages of off-the-shelf content, plus control over the

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[2] https://www.nsasocialcare.co.uk/providers

learning material, the quality of design, the frequency of update, and the compatibility with your existing learning management and other IT systems.

"We wanted to create custom e-learning modules, specific to our own organisation. We knew commissioning an e-learning company to develop these things for us would be too expensive. So we took a punt and recruited our own e-learning developer as an intern through our local university. There was a bit of funding attached, it was a safe, low-risk way to try it out, for us and for the intern. We were very lucky with the intern, they had a fantastic combination of design and technical skills and are now on a permanent contract."
Velda Barnes, Addaction
[Learning technologies in action at Addaction](#)

Video content
Digital technology has made video cheap to create and easy to share. YouTube, by far the most popular video hosting website globally[3], contains free instructional and training videos from many sources relevant to UK social care, including (non-commercial) sources such as SCIE's Social Care TV, the Alzheimer's Society and the Open University. As with the e-learning content described above, videos for training purposes can be free to access, purchased off-the-shelf or bespoke. There are also suppliers of subscription-based video content for the care sector. The advantages and disadvantages of each approach to video content are similar to those for e-learning content. Learners who feel uncomfortable with text-based information may find video attractive, though it may not be ideal for conveying information that needs to be retained in detail. One additional issue with video can be the lack of a sufficiently fast internet connection to deliver it smoothly.

"We made a video the other week with one of our receptionist's doing some reminiscence work with a resident with dementia, using an iPad. This is a good way of showing other staff what's possible. It's quick and immediate. We don't do anything cutting-edge in terms of how we design the content, just simple videos. But getting information out that supplements and extends what people need to have as mandatory training – this kind of technology is ideal for that."
Mark Greaves, Ideal Care Homes
[Learning technologies in action at Ideal Care Homes](#)

E-books
E-books, at their simplest, are digital versions of books, and offer a number of practical advantages in terms of portability and ease of access. They can also make use of multimedia to offer a much richer experience than paper books, as well as linking to the internet. You don't need a special e-book device such as a Kindle, you can read many e-books on your desktop computer or laptop, although you may need to get some free software to do it. E-books are popular with students who need to access textbooks and reference books. Within the care sector some local authorities,

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[3] Other video sharing sites include Vimeo and GoogleVideo

for example, have subscriptions to e-book suppliers for a range of social work and social care titles.

E-learning authoring tools
Authoring software enables non-technical users to create a piece of learning content. At their simplest, authoring tools include word processing and other types of software in common use, e.g. for creating presentation slides. Used appropriately, these can create effective e-learning, but tools specifically designed to author e-learning may make it easier to create engaging content. 'Udutu' is an example of a free authoring tool.[1] A number of commercial tools also exist. Some e-learning content providers also provide authoring tools. To use any of these tools effectively, be prepared to invest some time in learning how they work.

"Some of us in the learning development team looked around at available software for building your own e-learning. We downloaded some free versions, and started to experiment, making a few simple things. Looking back they were very naïve, but really they got us going."
Sheldon Carolan, MacIntyre
Learning technologies in action at MacIntyre

2.2 Tools for supporting collaborative learning
Collaborative learning, sometimes called social learning, means encouraging open communication networks amongst learners and between learners and trainers. It may be part of formal or informal learning. It has been a hot topic in learning technology in recent years, sparked, in large, by the astonishing growth in digital 'social media'. Social media are simply digital products or services where the content is generated by the users of the service, in order to be shared with others; for example YouTube, Wikipedia, Facebook and Twitter.

Video conferencing
Video conferencing uses internet technologies to allow two or more locations to communicate by video. Recent technological developments mean that videoconferencing can be done using handheld mobile devices. Many social care employers have embraced services such as Skype, often to support service users. Examples include using Skype with people in residential care to communicate with loved ones, or for sign language with deaf people.[4]

"There are lots of ways to introduce discussion to e-learning. For example I use Skype sometimes to discuss with learners the evidence they have submitted. I record those discussions and add them to the learner's portfolio as additional evidence of understanding."
Derek Wagle, Archer Business Solutions

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[4] SCIE (2012) 'Using ICTs in activities for people with dementia' http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/ictfordementia/; SCIE (2011) 'How technology helped our deaf service in Surrey' Social Care TV http://bit.ly/Y00HIo

Webinars

Webinars are 'seminars on the web', also known as online workshops or web conferences. Webinars allow trainers or presenters in one place to reach learners in another location or many locations in real time. Text messages, slideshows, voice and video can all be shared simultaneously. The technologies on offer support one-way presentation approaches, and also more interactive group learning approaches. Webinars are increasingly popular among social care providers with geographically dispersed work sites. Most webinar technologies are commercial products for which you buy a licence; a number of webinar systems are included in the 'Top 100 tools for learning 2012' compiled by the Centre for Learning and Performance Technology.[5]

"We've been exploring the use of webinars and intend to increase these as they are working well. We use them mainly for updates on policy and procedures and a way to share information such as HR issues and internal system implementations. For example, the finance team runs webinars on a different topic each month, as part of information sharing and continuing professional development."
Natasha Furness, United Response
[Learning technologies in action at United Response](#)

Blogging and micro-blogging

Blogging is short for 'web log', and basically a blog is an online diary, which anyone can set up. You don't need technical knowledge[6]. Blog sites also allow other people to comment on blog posts, so they are more interactive, informal and personal than, for example, a company website. Wordpress and Blogspot are two free blogging tools in the Centre for Learning and Performance Technology's Top 100 Tools for 2012.[7]

Micro-blogging means sending, receiving and replying to short messages with other people in real time. The most common micro-blogging tool is Twitter, a free service limited to 140 characters! Twitter, which divides opinion like few others, was voted top of the Centre for Learning and Performance Technology's Top 100 Tools in 2012.[8]

Professional networking sites

Professional networking sites, such as LinkedIn, enable users to create a profile of themselves and their professional experience and interests, and to connect with others within a given field of interest. They also support special interest groups, where members can raise questions and discuss issues. On LinkedIn, for example, there are a number of open groups related to UK social care.

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[5] http://c4lpt.co.uk/top100tools/
[6] The BBC provide a useful guide to starting a blog: http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/guides/how-to-get-a-blog
[7] http://c4lpt.co.uk/top100tools/
[8] http://c4lpt.co.uk/top100tools/

Related to this there are also online 'communities of practice' such as the Local Government Association's 'Knowledge Hub', which allow users to share knowledge as well as to network.[9]

2.3   Tools for managing the learning process

The third group of learning technologies are systems for managing various aspects of the learning process. We use the term learning management systems (LMS) to describe these types of technology, but you may also have heard the term virtual learning environment or VLE.[10] Broadly, LMS used by social care employers fall into two categories:

1. those supplied by vendors of e-learning content as a means for social care employers to track learners' use of content the employer has purchased
2. those supplied by software developers to address a wider range of employers' information management requirements linked to workforce L&D.

LMS for tracking learner activity

Most social care employers who purchase e-learning content want to track their learners' use of it. Where the employer does not have their own system for this, the content vendor can usually host the content on their (the vendor's) own LMS, and give the employer access to the system to view data on, for example:

- learner module/course log-ins
- time spent on a piece of e-learning
- assessment (e.g. test) scores and completions
- modules or courses completed.

For many employers, this provides them with sufficient information to maintain their in-house training records, and no other LMS technology is needed.

"We have a HR system which includes staff training records. For e-learning it's separate. We can log onto the provider's website and the administrator can run different reports. It's very easy and you can manipulate the data. It helps because you see how long someone takes and what the most problematic questions are."
Barbora Stepankova, Yarrow Housing Ltd
[Learning Technologies in Action at Yarrow Housing Ltd](#)

LMS for wider L&D information management

Other social care employers use LMS technology for a wider range of purposes. For example they may want to:

- purchase e-learning content from a range of providers, and manage it all in-house in one place
- develop their own e-learning, deliver it to learners and track its use
- schedule and keep records of face-to-face training events as well as e-learning programmes

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[9] https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/web/khub
[10] Some people say a VLE is simply an LMS in the academic sector, and some say a VLE is a sub-set of an LMS, with a narrower range of functions associated purely with learning delivery. We use the broad term LMS to refer to all these types of systems

- set up their own online assessment or test attached to a piece of e-learning
- enable learners to include digital media such as audio or video as evidence of learning, for example in working towards qualifications
- set up training or personal development records for all their staff
- enable learners themselves to monitor their training records
- produce aggregated records of all training completed, as evidence for inspectors or for commissioners
- monitor and report on progress towards attainment of Common Induction Standards
- monitor and report on progress towards formal qualifications for individual learners.

Employers who want this level of information management often find that an LMS is a valuable tool. Some employers who do not use a great deal of e-learning content nevertheless make extensive use of technology to manage their overall L&D provision.

"Our learning management system enables more accurate reporting of induction training of all types completed within 12 weeks. In the past, local records would record only that an employee had been signed off by the manager having looked at their workbooks. Now we have a system where we can accurately record not only completion of workbooks, but observations completed and face-to-face training completed."
Alton Hobbs, Mencap
Learning technologies in action at Mencap

Remember though that whilst large-scale LMS are a dominant force in the e-learning industry, it is by no means necessary to have an LMS in order to engage with e-learning.

E-portfolios
Whilst an LMS is a system designed around the employer's requirements, an e-portfolio is designed around learners' needs. Typical functions include:
- collecting and organising documents or other digital resources (e.g. images, videos) that evidence an individual's learning
- sharing of selected resources with selected audiences. This might include college tutors, workplace training assessors, or current or future employers.

Most people who have studied at college or university in recent years will have experience of using e-portfolios. E-portfolios are now used widely for the delivery of health and social care qualifications.

"The use of the e-portfolio has streamlined the learner journey for vocational qualifications. Assessments can be turned round in a matter of days rather than weeks or months, and this greatly reduces the amount of time learners are on the

training programmes, as well as being far more convenient and flexible for assessors and verifiers. No more chiropractors needed after humping paper-based portfolios around! And also it means things don't get lost, which was a real problem with paper-based evidence."
Maggie Little, Four Seasons Health Care
[Learning technologies in action at Four Seasons Health Care](#)

The ability to use evidence other than the written word can be very advantageous for some in the sector:

"Staff at all levels can sit and talk about their job. But if you ask them to write about what that point is, then they may struggle to put it into words sometimes, in the context of the actual qualification unit. So I've found that you can have a good conversation with the staff member and an audio recording of it is good evidence of their knowledge. They might not see it as 'evidence' because they would just talk about what they do. It is very useful at level two, for example, where maybe literacy or numeracy or confidence are issues."
Derek Wagle, Archer Business Solutions

E-portfolios are also offered by some of the social care professional associations, including the National Skills Academy for Social Care (which focuses on care leadership skills self-assessment) and the College of Social Work (which focuses on social workers' professional development.) Many e-portfolios are owned by educational or training or professional organisations. Others are designed to be owned and controlled by the learner, as a support for lifelong learning.

3. Choosing learning content technologies

3.1   Blending e-learning content with other forms of learning
"93% of respondents to a survey by the Chartered Institute for Personnel Development believe e-learning is most effective if it is combined with other types of learning."
CIPD (2012) Survey report: Focus on elearning

Blended learning is the strategy of choice for delivering training for the great majority of employers, because online delivery is better suited to some forms of learning than others. But how do you work out when to blend?

First, consider what you want staff to learn:
▪ Factual information, underpinning knowledge, processes and procedures can be very effectively delivered using e-learning.
▪ Other kinds of applied knowledge are more difficult to learn solely online, and will need classroom training or on-the-job training as well.

Next, consider what types of skills you want to develop in your staff:
▪ Practical skills, such as moving and positioning
Whilst these skills can sometimes be simulated in digital learning – think of aircraft simulators – practice in a hands-on situation is often preferable. Use e-learning to explain the principles underpinning tasks such as moving and positioning, then face-to-face training for practice and feedback.
▪ Interpersonal skills, such as facilitation or person-centred planning
Once again, the principles of many inter-personal skills can be introduced via e-learning, but you need face-to-face situations to build up a proper understanding.
▪ Cognitive skills, such as report-writing
These types of skills are well suited to online learning and practice.

E-learning may be particularly beneficial when:
▪ delivering small, bite-sized chunks of learning
▪ learning content needs to be referred back to at regular intervals
▪ learning content needs frequent updates
▪ learners are geographically distributed
▪ learning needs to be highly consistent, so that all staff receive exactly the same training
▪ learners cannot easily attend classroom training
▪ there is limited time for learning: e-learning is generally accepted to be a more efficient method of training in terms of 'time to competency'. Research suggests a saving on learning time of approximately a third when a course is taken out of the classroom and delivered as e-learning.[11]

The blended approach is also one that provides maximum support for learners. Some social care employers use e-learning to present underpinning factual

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[11] Brandon Hall (2009) 'Reducing time to competency through training'

knowledge to learners in advance of face-to-face training. In this way, learners come to face-to-face training with some knowledge already in place, allowing trainers to reinforce and expand learners' understanding.

"We created a new appraisal policy recently. We designed an interactive version of the policy, a simple digital document with some graphics and visuals and a short quiz at the end about the basic principles, which staff complete before they come to the training day. Then managers run a really rich one-day face-to-face course, where they discuss with staff in-depth how the new policy will work, having done the basics in advance."
Sheldon Carolan, MacIntyre
[Learning technologies in action at MacIntyre](#)

Bear in mind too that on-the-job coaching and mentoring are also important aspects of the blended learning mix.

3.2   Evaluating e-learning content

Many of the factors that make e-learning materials effective are common to any good set of training materials, so your skills and experience in evaluating other types of training will help you evaluate e-learning. It is hard to judge a course's quality without taking at least some of the course yourself, so spending that time will enable you to judge if it hits the mark.

Below is a checklist of things to look out for in good e-learning.[12] Bear in mind that quality here is really about 'fitness for purpose'. Sometimes the simplest of content does the job perfectly, so not all the criteria below will be applicable to all situations or all types of e-learning content.

Meeting an identified need
- Does the e-learning provide relevant, accurate, up-to-date content, and appropriate for the learning outcome it is intended for?
- Is the content produced by an authoritative source? For example Skills for Care, SCIE or other established social care bodies or experts?
- Where relevant, is the content mapped to standards such as the Common Induction Standards, or to accredited health and social care qualifications?
- Is the content in line with the values, principles and processes of your organisation?
- Is there a good fit with your overall approach to L&D?

Inclusive design
- Is the content accessible for people with low confidence or little experience in using IT?
- Is it accessible to people with limited literacy and/or English language skills?

- Does the e-learning enable access for learners with disabilities? For example, is it possible to enlarge the text and are there audio versions of textual content and vice versa? Look out for reference to standards such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

Ease of searching and navigation
- Is the e-learning clearly titled and easy to locate for the learners?
- Can the learner easily search the content?
- Can the learner easily find their way? For example, is a table of contents or home page link always clearly accessible?
- Can the learner always see how far they have progressed in the learning?

Clear guidance for learners and trainers
- Is it clear what the e-learning is for? It might be for self-directed learning, just-in-time reference material, or a focus for group activity.
- Is there guidance on what types of device (computers, smartphones, tablets etc) the content will run on?
- Is it clear what kinds of content are in the resource (e.g. text, audio, video etc)?
- Is there a clear statement of how long the learning should take to complete?

Flexibility for trainers and L&D staff
- Can the e-learning be easily combined and integrated with other L&D activities?
- Are there notes or other forms of guidance to help trainers or tutors use the resource?

Engaging for learners
- Is the content directly relevant to the learner's experience and current concerns?
- Is it at the right level for the learner and sufficient to challenge and engage without being too difficult?
- Does the resource make use of stories or examples relevant to the learner?
- Does it make good use of graphics, images or video to stimulate the learner?

Enabling effective learning
- Are there relevant examples of new concepts or principles in action?
- Does the e-learning support the learner to reflect on their own experience and performance?
- Does the resource point the learner to activities and resources that will enable them to continue their learning?

Tracking progression and achievement
(NB: Does not apply to entirely passive resources such as video or podcasts)
- Does the e-learning provide the learner with feedback on their performance, during the learning and on completion?[13]
- Does it provide opportunities for self-assessment or reflection?

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[13] E-Learning producers tend to have a vested interest in learners passing, so tests can be very easy. As well as sampling the course yourself, try the assessment. If the testing isn't up to scratch, or testing isn't provided, consider supporting the course with assessment of your own.

- Can the learner bookmark their place and return at a later date?
- Can the resource exchange tracking data with learning management systems or other systems (using standards such as SCORM)?[14]
- Does progression contribute to the meeting of Induction Standards or progress towards qualifications?

Skills for Care and Development is currently developing a website 'Learn from Learning', which will enable care employers to find and rate social care training content, including e-learning content.[15]

3.3   E-learning content: 'make or buy'?

Some social care employers develop bespoke e-learning content to address their own staff training needs. Bespoke e-learning can be created in-house ('make') or commissioned from external developers ('buy'). The right 'make or buy' decision will depend on your circumstances and resources. Use the questions below to help you decide whether to 'go it alone' or involve an external supplier.

Considerations for 'make or buy' decisions

- What is the purpose of the learning material?

Is it to broadcast new information, to transfer knowledge, to transform behaviours/ attitudes, to learn new skills, or to achieve some level of professional qualification? If the requirement sits at the 'new information' end of the spectrum, the need can often be met in-house with simple content created using mainstream tools like word processing software, pdf and email.

- Will the learning be assessed – and if so how?

If you want assessment to be part of the e-learning, then you may need to use external developers to provide tracking and scoring. You may decide, however, that assessment will be done separately (face-to-face or on paper), or that it is not necessary for this particular piece of learning anyway.

- How large is the target audience?

Large target audiences often encompass a wider range of literacy and IT skills. This may mean you need a more sophisticated and user-friendly design than you are able to produce yourselves.

- How easy are learners to engage?

Difficult-to-engage audiences may require more design effort in the learning materials, so external developers may be a better bet.

- How is the learning to be delivered?

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[14] SCORM is the most commonly used technical standard in e-learning, intended to ensure different systems can 'speak to each other'
[15] http://www.skillsforcareanddevelopment.org.uk/KeyProjects/learn_from_learning.aspx

Do you have the internal IT infrastructure to host the e-learning? If not, then you need external hosting of the learning, as a minimum. If mobile delivery is required, this might require technical and creative resources you do not have in-house.

- What is the timescale for delivery?

Where timescales are tight, rapid development can enable much faster delivery. However, if you are inexperienced at developing materials, it can take a lot longer than you anticipate.

Going it alone

- Resource implications

Does your in-house team have skills in instructional design, graphic design, multimedia e.g. video and audio and project management? If not, then you may find that developing anything but the simplest e-learning content to a reasonable standard very difficult. Poor quality e-learning is a false economy, as it has low completion rates and poor learning effectiveness, and generally turns learners off.

Remember you also need to understand copyright and intellectual property rights if you are going to use text, images, videos or other content from third parties when you are developing your own materials.[16]

- E-learning authoring tools

If you are considering going it alone, you may want to find out more about the kinds of tools available for authoring e-learning content. These range from generalist mainstream tools for producing slides to specialist e-learning authoring tools. They all require skill to use well. See 'Guidance on using learning technologies' at the end of this guide for sources of more information on authoring tools.

Commissioning bespoke content

If you are considering commissioning external developers, start by asking around. For example, your local care providers' association for some suggestions for suppliers. Once you have identified some possible suppliers, here are some things to do.

- Check references

Ask for references and talk to the referees. Ask them about what the developers did (it helps if the work is similar in nature to yours), and whether it was completed on time, on budget and to the required standard. How flexible were the developers in making changes? Ask the referee about the developer's strengths and weaknesses, and whether they would use them again.

- Have a clear idea about what you want your learners to learn
  You may already have a set of learning outcomes you want addressed. Make sure

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[16] For an accessible introduction to digital copyright, see http://digitalunite.com/guides/using-internet-0/searching-browsing/guide-copyright-online

the supplier understands them. If you have not worked this out exactly, your supplier should be able to help you identify learning outcomes and express them clearly.

- Have a clear idea about what kind of e-learning you want developed

Do you want basic or sophisticated, do you want audio or video, quizzes or other forms of assessment. Will the e-learning sit inside a learning management system? If so, is it yours or do you want the developer to manage this too?

- Have a clear idea about how much control you want over the content

You are very likely to want to create e-learning that you can update yourselves, without having to return to the developer. Ask about how they would facilitate this.

- Have a clear idea who is providing the subject matter expertise

Do you have the expertise in-house, or will you be asking the developer to source this? If the latter, do they have experience in finding subject matter experts, and what do they charge?

- Ask about prices

Is the price calculated on learning time or number of screens? Are different roles, e.g. instructional design, writing, graphic design, coding, priced differently? What is the cost for changes and how are changes defined? What are the arrangements for updating content?

- Ask about e-learning standards

Make sure the developer can give you a clear and plain English description of which technical standards they use, and what the standards mean.

- Ensure needs analysis and testing are included

The supplier should have a robust process for ensuring they have understood your needs, and for testing the e-learning at different stages of development.

- Ask about intellectual property

You should be the owner of any material that you pay to have developed, unless you expressly decide otherwise. In some circumstances you may share the ownership, for example if the e-learning might be sold to third parties. Make sure the terms of ownership are clear and do not limit what you can do with the e-learning if your relationship with that supplier comes to an end.

3.4 Using mobile technologies in workplace learning

The social care workforce is a very mobile one. Many workers are on their feet and many are working at more than one location, for example in people's homes or a range of settings in the community. The advantages of being able to access information and learning on-the-go are clear, particularly for just-in-time and on-the-job learning, and for job aids and resources.

There are now a range of mobile devices, including MP3 players, e-readers, smartphones and tablets. The use of smartphones and tablets in particular is

increasing rapidly, including amongst those people who have never had a desktop computer or laptop.

Ways to use mobile technologies in workplace learning
All social care staff will receive induction training when they begin a job, but being able to deliver short refreshers or job aids via smartphone or other mobile devices can be a very helpful supplement. These may take the form of a text document, presentation, or even a short video. Often the learning content relates to an organisation's particular systems or processes.

"We created e-learning for Sony PlayStation Portable (PSP) consoles to give on-the-spot training in a joint Scottish Social Services Council and Glasgow City Council pilot. The aim was to improve the learning retention of staff. The PSPs were pointed at barcode icons either in workbooks or stuck to the physical environment, such as on a medicine cabinet to trigger training videos on the PSP screen via special software."
Keith Quinn, Scottish Social Services Council
See http://www.guardian.co.uk/publicservicesawards/just-point-and-learn

A mobile survey can be a good way to understand what situations employees are encountering in the course of their jobs, where skill gaps exist and where new training could be of benefit. Short assessments can be used to understand whether employees have retained information and whether it is being applied on the job.

If you are considering delivering learning content on mobile devices, start by asking some basic questions:
- Where and when would your staff prefer to undertake their training and learning?
- What kind of learning would they like to access on a mobile device?
- Do they already own a mobile device?
- If so, what makes and models are preferred?

If you think you have identified a clear area where mobile learning would be beneficial, you need to consider what kind of content you want to deliver. Content can be very simple. Often straightforward text is the right solution, provided it is short, or a short video. If you want a really rich and interactive piece of m-learning however, you will need to use expert developers.

3.5   Using social media in workplace learning
More and more organisations are using social media as part of their learning blend, with social media tools such as Twitter and YouTube climbing the ranks of the most used tools for learning and development professionals. The change has, in part, been driven by learners themselves. Social media tools are generally user-friendly and part of the mainstream, and your staff may well be already using them.

Ways to use social media in workplace learning
Here are some ways social media can support or enhance formal and informal learning for your staff:

- Blogging (e.g. Wordpress): managers and trainers can create a blog following a learning event. Learners can comment and share their views, and additional learning can be posted so that the training remains an ongoing process, not a one-off event
- Micro-blogging (e.g. Twitter): managers and trainers can keep staff up to date with course news and information, or provide a training tip, or a 'word for the day' to keep learners engaged
- Photo sharing (e.g. Flickr): managers and trainers can source images to use in training resources. Make sure you have the right to reproduce it.
- Presentation sharing (e.g. Slideshare): share presentations by managers, trainers or teams with the organisation
- Screencast sharing (e.g. Jing): share tutorials on new software or admin processes, or on basic office applications for new learners
- Social bookmarking (e.g. Delicious): build a library of links relevant to a particular course which can be updated before, during and after learners attend courses
- Videoconferencing (e.g. Skype): present in real-time to staff in a range of different locations
- Video sharing (e.g. YouTube): create short instructional or inspirational videos for sharing with staff. You can make a short video about a new development or a part of your service you are particularly proud of, to encourage recruitment.

"We can see that things like Twitter and LinkedIn have potential to supplement e-learning courses, and to support staff learning more generally. We need to learn how to use the services and websites that staff are already familiar with in their personal lives to provide a positive benefit in the workplace."
Liz D'Arcy Malone, Leonard Cheshire Disability
[Learning technologies in action at Leonard Cheshire Disability](#)

Research on IT use in social care suggests there are still problems for some organisations in accessing and using social media. This is particularly the case in larger organisations, where restrictions may be imposed by IT departments citing capacity or security issues.[17]

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[17] For a useful discussion, and advice on how to address such concerns, see
http://comment.iriss.org.uk/content/social-media-social-services

4. Choosing learning management systems

Learning management systems (including virtual learning environments) vary enormously in their scale and complexity, but there are a number of core functions that all learning management systems have in common:

- organisation, cataloguing and delivery of learning content
- registration of learners
- assigning learners to courses/activities
- tracking of learner activities (views, interaction, assessment scores)
- completion status
- learning management reporting.

You may feel that some of these functions would be very useful to your organisation. But choosing a learning management system can be a daunting task! The sheer number of systems on offer makes it difficult to know where to start, which technology would be appropriate, and how best to use it in your organisation.

It may be tempting to jump straight into the detail of which system has what 'bells and whistles'; but first outline your main organisational needs. And then bear in mind that a learning management system may not be the answer. For example, if your main requirement is to have a more systematic way of recording the qualifications and training of staff, then consider using Skills for Care's NMDS-SC system, which is free to use, customised for the sector, and enables you to record a range of information about staff training and qualifications.

If, however, you are looking for more complete management of the learning process, then an LMS may be a good option. To understand what you want from an LMS, start by mapping out your current learning processes:

- What types of learning do you currently use, and are considering in the future?
- Where do your staff prefer to learn, and using what types of device?
- What reports do you currently have on learning, and what would you like?
- What critical training compliance issues need meeting, and how (e.g. statutory and mandatory training)?
- Are staff working towards accredited qualifications? If so, what e-learning do they already use?
- Do you have any existing learning technologies that would need to integrate with any new LMS?
- Do you have any other systems (e.g. HR system, care management system, NMDS-SC) that currently use training data?

Next, consider your options as to how to access an LMS. You may want a 'share' in someone else's, or a system of your own, or LMS functions within a wider enterprise management system.

4.1 Share of a third-party LMS

Also known as a hosted service, this may come as part of the service provided by a training or e-learning content provider. Or it may be provided by a vendor who just supplies LMS services. The advantages of using a hosted service are that it:

- costs less than procuring your own LMS
- means you don't have to worry about providing technical support
- is a good way to 'dip a toe in the water' and get a feel for what an LMS can do.

"We sub-license a Moodle-based LMS, externally hosted and supported by the learning consortium of which we are members. It tracks online learning provision and books face-to-face training. It gives each learner their own space – 'My Learning Record' – listing the e-learning they have started and completed. The LMS generates reports at individual, service and organisational levels. This makes compliance reporting for CQC much easier, as well providing data for performance management and development plans at individual and service level. It also supports interactions with commissioners."
Velda Barnes, Addaction
Learning technologies in action at Addaction

The disadvantages are that the LMS is not designed for your specific needs, so for example it may not:

- integrate directly with any other information systems you may have
- be able to produce reports on learning in exactly the way you would like.

4.2 Buying your own LMS

There are a great many specialist LMS on the market. Depending on your organisation's capabilities, you can have varying degrees of technical responsibility for any LMS you purchase directly. Most suppliers offer a sliding scale of technical support to follow any installation.

Generally, standalone LMS are commercial products developed and sold by a particular provider. There are also some non-commercial systems, the best known of which is Moodle, a free product which is usually customised by specialist providers to suit an employer's needs.[18] There are some advantages to the latter, as it means you can change to a supplier down the road as there are many companies that support Moodle.

4.3 LMS as part of a larger system

Some organisations do not have an LMS as such, but have LMS functions within a larger HR or care management system. If you already have an HR management system, or a care management system, it is worth checking whether it has learning

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[18] Moodle is an 'open source' product; this means that the core product itself is freely available to anyone who wants to use it. However, you need technical expertise to install, customise and maintain Moodle, so it is not free in real terms for most social care employers.

management functions already built in, or which can be added on. This may be a cheaper and less disruptive approach than opting for a separate LMS.

"We use a care home management information system that supports staff management, account, payroll and care planning, as well as providing learning management functions tailored to the Common Induction Standards. The system tracks training required and training completed, and integrates with HR records."
Mark Greaves, Ideal Care Homes
[Learning technologies in action at Ideal Care Homes](#)

4.4   The qualities of a good LMS

- Ease of maintenance

The ability to maintain your LMS over the long-term is critical. If it is difficult for you as the managers or administrators to add new users or delete old ones, or hard to add e-learning content, the technology will be quickly abandoned. Problems will also arise if it is hard to perform updates or increase capacity.

The system should be easy to administer and simple to update. Check out the help system to make sure that it is, indeed, helpful. Look for the ability to recycle a course by removing users and test results but not course content. If a course is used over and over again, you want features that allow you to quickly move the old learners out and the new learners in. You also want the ability to archive records of past learners.

- Compatibility

Look for an LMS that is compatible with other e-learning products on the market. You do not want to end up with a proprietary product that links you and the supplier together for life. Select a supplier that uses software and standards that are widely recognised. One way to support compatibility is to seek systems that adhere to certain standards within the e-learning industry. The most comprehensive standard for e-learning is SCORM. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that even compliance with SCORM automatically ensures interoperability between systems, so don't take it for granted. If you're in any doubt, ask a supplier to give you a working example.

Make sure you have definitive answers to the following questions:
- Can we move content from one learning management system to another?
- Are we going to use any authoring package that comes with the LMS we purchased?
- If so, are we able to create content that could work in other LMS?

- Accessibility

There are two levels to accessibility. Firstly, the LMS and any courses held on it must be accessible to all individuals regardless of physical or sensory impairment. You will need to plan to provide the information in more than one format if you have learners with disabilities.

Secondly, you have to make sure that the technology you are purchasing is available to all your users. For example, if some of your learners do not have the latest software, will they be able to see the brilliant simulation you created using the latest version of whatever?

You need to know that your learners can gain access to e-learning without any technical obstacles. Your LMS and any content within it needs to be checked in the browsers that are going to be used by the learners. You need to check several scenarios to make sure e-learning works the way it should on the relevant platforms. If you can't control the technical environment of the learners, you must make clear recommendations about the configuration of their equipment.

- Usability

Finally, if technology is cumbersome or difficult to navigate, learners, administrators and trainers simply won't use it. The software must be intuitive for all user groups. This includes, not only the screens the learners will interact with, but also the 'back end' of the system which administrators will use, and any authoring software which trainers or subject matter experts will use to create courses.

"We need to learn to be better, smarter commissioners of learning technology. What we wanted at the beginning was quite simple. T he more you use it, the more you realise how you can use it and what you would like it to do. It gets more demanding. Working out what it needs to do in the future is harder as it is a process of exploration in a rapidly changing world. You need to plan. Don't go at it thinking 'the technology is out there so I need to use it'. It all needs to be driven by your own organisational priorities. And really you need to have a plan that is looking ahead a few years: 'What do I want to achieve, who with, over what length of time, and what is my current capability?"
Charlotte Dawber, West Sussex County Council
Learning technologies in action at West Sussex County Council

5. Embedding learning technologies

For e-learning to become an accepted part of 'the way we do things around here', people at all levels of an organisation must see it as both helpful and necessary. To achieve this, you will need to:

- integrate learning technologies into your organisation's learning and development (L&D) system
- promote e-learning to colleagues; and
- motivate and support learners.

5.1   Integrating learning technologies into your L&D system

Learning technologies offer opportunities to improve L&D. To realise those gains, however, it is essential that the learning technologies are fully integrated into your overall L&D approach. That means adjusting organisational practices, which can be a time-consuming and costly process, particularly if unforeseen problems emerge. It makes good sense to test the water with a small-scale pilot first.

During the pilot, consult as widely as possible with colleagues in your organisation. This should include senior management, managers responsible for services and staff, and staff themselves. Depending on the size of the organisation, it may also include IT managers, HR managers, L&D managers, internal and external trainers and union representatives. Depending on the learning technologies you are piloting, it might also include people who use services and others.

If you encounter resistance from colleagues, try to get to the bottom of any issues. You need to consider what implications it raises regarding the need for support if you roll out the learning technologies. Don't be discouraged if some staff reject learning technologies outright initially ie 'I don't do computers!' With the right support, these staff usually cope well with e-learning. Once over their fear of computers, many go on to become strong advocates for e-learning.

"Many of the champions were very sceptical at the start! We would get a room full of people with their arms folded saying 'this is not going to work'. But we worked really hard, both us as the training team and our e-learning supplier, to win people over. We found that the most sceptical people turned out to be the greatest ambassadors. By the time we actually launched the e-learning, we had trouble coping with the demand. Everyone wanted to be involved."
Maggie Little, Four Seasons Health Care
Learning technologies in action at Four Seasons Health Care

5.2   Evaluating the impact of learning technologies

It is obviously important to monitor whether the learning technologies you introduce are delivering the anticipated benefits. At its simplest, this involves specifying the benefit you are seeking and then finding a reliable measure of whether you have achieved the benefit.

Imagine, for example, that you are introducing learning technologies to increase the number of part-time staff undertaking the Health and Social Care level 2 qualification. First you establish the baseline and find out how many part-timers currently participate over a given period. Then you set a realistic target for participation through learning technologies over the same length of time. You need to set up a mechanism to track participation and review it at the end of the period.

A note on assessment
Much e-learning offers the option to track and report activity, making it easy to evaluate levels of learner use. E-learning courses that include assessment such as quizzes etc can deliver not only evidence of knowledge acquired, but also useful evidence of problem areas, i.e. questions that staff typically struggle to answer correctly.

E-learning assessment can offer many advantages, but it may also pose challenges. Apart from issues of quality (i.e. whether the assessment is a reliable indicator of learning), there are also issues of control to consider, particularly where staff undertake the learning in an unsupervised setting, at work or at home. In these circumstances, you may wish to introduce additional checks to confirm learning.

"I have heard staff giving each other the answer to online assessment questions. So someone may get it right but not really understand why they have. Or, the test might just want a one-word answer, 'Report' or 'Record'. It has to be that exact word with the right spelling. People who actually know the answer get it wrong and that worries them. I think e-learning can only work in a mixture where you have face-to-face as well."
Nilufa Somani, Roebuck Nursing Home
[Learning technologies in action at Roebuck Nursing Home](#)

"When you know that you will be tested at the end, you pay more attention to what you are learning. Yes, some people are apprehensive, but the sense of achievement is greater when you have to sit a test and pass. And if people fail, they can retake it so they are not very worried. When you retake it, the programme asks the questions you got wrong first time round, so you will succeed in the end.
Barbora Stepankova, Yarrow Housing Ltd
[Learning technologies in action at Yarrow Housing Ltd](#)

Bear in mind that certain limitations of assessment generally also apply to e-learning assessment. Passing a test at the end of a module demonstrates the learner's ability to pass the test then and there. It does not guarantee that the learner will retain the knowledge they have acquired or that they will apply it in practice. Use supervisory monitoring and on-the-job coaching and mentoring to reinforce learning and help staff apply it.

5.3   Promoting e-learning

Learning technologies will only succeed in your organisation if other colleagues adopt and use them. They are only likely to do that if they agree that learning technologies are helpful and necessary. Explain as concretely as possible:

- How the learning technologies will be used
- Why they are being introduced
- What will be required of staff
- What would happen if you did not use learning technologies.

Different groups may have different concerns, so be prepared to tailor your presentation to your audience. When explaining why the learning technologies are being introduced, make the connection to people who use services, e.g. show how cutting training costs will free up resources to support services to clients. There are many different mediums you can use for your launch promotion, including road shows, meetings, presentations and briefings, newsletters, posters, emails and web pages. Where possible, choose mediums that allow some degree of two-way communication.

Ongoing promotion

You will need to go on promoting the learning technologies after the initial launch in order to:

- maintain levels of commitment from senior management, service managers and staff
- ensure that new starters understand that e-learning is part of the job, and why.

Useful ways to do this include:

- regular reports to senior management on progress towards targets
- incorporation of e-learning targets into objectives for managers, also staff supervision and appraisal procedures
- consultation with service managers to report individual successes and resolve any practical issues
- celebration of learner successes through staff meetings, in-house newsletters, bulletins etc
- a section in induction devoted to expectations around use of learning technologies.

5.4   Barriers to e-learning

It is helpful to be aware of a number of common barriers to e-learning, including:

- Fear of computers: staff who are unfamiliar with digital technology may feel ill-equipped and consequently anxious at the prospect of having to use learning technologies.
- Skills issues: limited literacy, limited English language and limited IT skills may make it hard for learners to engage with e-learning.
- Impersonal nature of computer-based learning: the prospect of sitting down on your own to study may be off-putting and discouraging to staff who value personal interaction with fellow learners and trainers.

- Fear of being tested: the prospect of sitting an e-learning assessment may be alarming to learners, particularly if they associate it with previous negative experiences of being tested, e.g. at school.
- Poor quality content: learners will naturally reject content that they find boring, inaccessible, irrelevant etc.
- Lack of trainer input: less confident learners will look for guidance and reassurance from a trainer, whilst confident learners may wish to raise questions and go deeper.
- Fear of being monitored: staff may be put off by the fact that learning technologies record and report how the individual uses them.
- Technical issues: unresponsive or hard-to-navigate systems or faulty software can leave learners feeling powerless, frustrated and discouraged.
- Lack of timely support: this will exacerbate any problems and compound learners' feelings of frustration and discouragement.
- Attitudes to learning and to e-learning: the belief that 'proper' learning is led by a trainer and takes place in a classroom can undermine the commitment of both staff and their managers to e-learning, as will the perception that e-learning is just a way to cut costs. Equally problematic, in a different way, is the perception that e-learning does not require protected time, since it can be done at the learner's discretion, anywhere, anytime.

To address these barriers, it is important to develop strategies to motivate and support e-learners.

5.5　Motivating e-learners

It goes almost without saying that the first step towards motivating e-learners is to provide a quality e-learning experience. This means having reliable technology that delivers learning content that is relevant, accessible and engaging.

The next step is to set out clearly what the learner is required to do, and why. Specify the time allowed to the learner to meet these requirements and outline the support available. Make the e-learning experience as sociable as possible. If possible have learners undertake the e-learning in small groups together. Use social media to link learners to other learners online. Where possible, make dialogue with others (either virtual or actual) a part of the e-learning. Encourage as much peer-to-peer learning as possible.

Provide as much feedback as possible throughout the learning process. If possible have someone on-hand to answer any questions that arise for the learner. Assign mentors and learning 'buddies'. Monitor learners to identify anyone who seems to be struggling to complete, and contact them to investigate and encourage completion.

"When people complete e-learning we are very aware that this does not mean they are competent. So we have built assessments and questions around all our digital learning content, so we can be sure that people have really understood what they have learnt, and also that it is reflected in their practice. Mentors, managers and

external assessors all have a role in checking that online content does actually lead to improved knowledge and skills."
Maggie Little, Four Seasons Health Care
[Learning technologies in action at Four Seasons Health Care](#)

Be as flexible as possible regarding when and where the learner undertakes the e-learning. Some learners will prefer to do it in their own time, away from work. If so, recognise that they are working when they do the learning and make allowances accordingly.

"We do a lot of community-based work, so computer access can be an issue for staff. We came up with an arrangement that staff could do e-learning at home, or at one of our area offices, and get that time counted towards their working hours."
Natasha Furness, United Response
[Learning technologies in action at United Response](#)

5.6   Supporting e-learners
Closely related to motivation is learner support. The key to effective learning support is high-quality personal contact. What that means in practice is one or more people are willing and able to:
- sit down with learners on a one-to-one or small group basis. Guide them through the process, building their confidence and equipping them with the IT skills they need to negotiate the course
- direct staff new to IT to a range of online resources designed to build up their digital confidence
- talk them through any issues with the course content
- support them with literacy and/or English language demands of the course
- reassure them about the assessment process.

Think of this support as an investment. The pay-off more than justifies the cost of providing it. It will deliver confident, independent e-learners who will encourage and support their colleagues.

"Some staff feel 'it's a computer, it doesn't talk to me, it's lonely'. So I tell them to come and ask me if there is something they don't understand, or to note down anything interesting so we can discuss it at the next staff meeting. Also, some staff are dyslexic and find it quite hard. I do one-to-one sessions with them or rewrite some of the questions to make sure that they can be understood."
Nilufa Somani, Roebuck Nursing Home
[Learning technologies in action](#) at Roebuck Nursing Home

Motivation and support for e-learning come together best through those blended learning programmes that combine learning technologies with face-to-face learning. That does not necessarily mean classroom training. Informal on-the-job coaching and mentoring offers many opportunities to reinforce and support e-learning. This is especially true of induction and qualification-based learning, where practical on-the-

job support shows staff how to apply the knowledge that e-learning can deliver so efficiently and effectively.

For a range of examples of embedding, see the case studies accompanying this guide.

6. Assessing the business case for learning technologies

A business case sets out the reasoning for an organisation to do something. It helps decision-makers in the organisation decide whether the case being put forward is worthwhile.

6.1 Thinking through the business case

E-learning is, of course, only a means to an end, not an end in itself, whatever your circumstances. Developing a business case will help you to decide whether or not it is the best way to achieve the end you have in mind.

Here are some questions to help you to think through the business case.

- What goal would learning technologies help you to achieve?
- How would learning technologies help you to do this?
- What practical steps would this require?
    - What equipment would you need?
    - What expertise would you need?
    - Where would you get this and what would it cost?
    - Once the learning technologies were in place, what resources would you need to operate them, and at what cost?
    - What might go wrong, and what would you do if it did?
- What is your timescale, and would it matter if things took, potentially much, longer?
- Once learning technologies were in place and operating effectively, what benefits would they deliver?
- How would you measure these benefits, and what would they be worth?
- Might there be any negative outcomes? If so, what impact might these negative outcomes have, and at what cost?

Answering these questions will help you to analyse the costs and benefits of using learning technologies. To complete your business case, consider whether there are any other, more cost-effective ways to achieve your goal. Remember also that doing nothing is always an option, so it is also important to calculate the costs and the benefits of going on as you are.

If you are satisfied that it makes sense to take action and that e-learning is the most cost-effective approach, then you have a business case for proceeding.

6.2 Analysing the costs and benefits

There are four steps to a cost-benefit analysis:
1. Calculating the cost of what you planned
2. Estimating the value of the benefits
3. Comparing these costs and benefits with the costs and benefits of alternative options; and
4. Reaching a decision and taking action.

Calculating the cost of e-learning

Costs associated with e-learning typically include:

- set-up costs
- delivery costs, and
- management and administration costs.

What these costs look like depends partly on whether you purchase 'off-the-shelf' e-learning or develop your own (or something in-between), and how you decide to access any learning management system. The table below suggests some of the costs to consider. Bear in mind that no two employers have identical set-ups, so the table is indicative only.

Costs to consider *NB: Individual circumstances will vary*	E-learning content			LMS	
	Off-the-shelf e-learning	**Bespoke e-learning**		**Share of third party system**	**Standalone system**
		DIY	**Outsource**		
Set-up costs					
Sourcing a supplier, including review and trialling	☑		☑	☑	☑
Sourcing the expertise required (subject matter, design, technical)		☑			
Supporting development: writing brief, subject matter expertise, reviewing		☑	☑		
Development time, including course design and technical development		☑	☑		
Any new computer equipment or necessary adjustments to your system	☑	☑	☑		
External supplier's fee to develop e-learning content			☑		
Cost of the e-learning (e.g. licence fees) and any customisation	☑				
Any training required to manage and administer the programme	☑	☑	☑		
IT expertise to install LMS, including linking it to other systems					☑
Subscription to third party LMS				☑	
Any training required to operate LMS				☑	☑
Delivery costs					
Web hosting		☑	☑		☑
Licence fees	☑			☑	☑
Management and administration	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
Learner time	☑	☑	☑		
Support, including learner support, IT support	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
Other costs					
Cost of updating content periodically		☑	☑		
Technology upgrades					☑

Estimating the value of the benefits
Learning technologies can offer benefits in two ways. One is by making savings and the other is by adding value. In other words, by enabling you to do what you are doing better or by enabling you to do things that you could not otherwise do at all.

- Savings

Many organisations find learning technologies offer savings in the areas of training delivery and training management. To decide whether this applies to your organisation, you must compare not only the cost of using learning technologies with the cost of other options, but also the results; in other words, not only the price, but also the product. The first step in any analysis of savings is therefore to satisfy yourself that e-learning can deliver what you require, as well or better, than your other options.

Learning technology can help reduce costs in a range of areas, including:
- Staff release to attend training, including cost of:
  - travel-to-training time, and any travel and subsistence costs
  - training time – e-learning is generally quicker than classroom training
  - backfill to cover staff released for training.

- Delivering training, including cost of:
  - external trainers
  - in-house trainers
  - designing and developing training
  - facilities, including classrooms and presentation equipment
  - learning materials
  - food and refreshments.

- Managing training, including cost of
  - commissioning training
  - administering training
  - monitoring, recording, analysing and reporting training.

- Added-value benefits

In addition to reducing costs, learning technologies can offer added value. Examples include:
- Increasing the number of staff who undertake training. It may be impossible to provide all staff with face-to-face training at a time and place they can attend.
- Ensuring that staff have access to the same learning.
- Increasing the effectiveness of training by:
  - making learning more interactive and engaging
  - assessing learners
  - allowing learners to move at their own pace
  - offering support, through text and pictorial cues, to learners whose first language is not English

- making learning instantly available to those who need it, as and when
- making learning available to staff at a time and place of their own choosing.
- Gathering reliable information about learning participation and achievement.
- Creating new learning opportunities, for example allowing staff in distant locations to share learning.

"People are really keen when they have just accepted a new job, so we make good use of this enthusiasm. We make our induction more efficient and effective, by enrolling new-starters on our online induction training in advance of their arrival. So we can have people arriving on their first day, having already got up to speed with the underpinning knowledge on safeguarding, for example."
Sheldon Carolan, MacIntyre
[Learning technologies in action at MacIntyre](#)

To factor these benefits into your calculations, you must value them. First, decide what difference they make to your organisation. For example, do they enhance your organisation's reputation with clients and commissioners, or service quality, or recruitment, retention and ability to promote from within? Or some combination of these? Then decide what any enhancement is worth to the organisation.

Finally, decide to what degree e-learning contributed to the enhancement. That is the value of the benefit. Remember that some benefits may:
- take place over an extended period of time
- be caused by a number of different factors
- happen anyway.

A fictional example of how to quantify the overall benefits of e-learning
We introduced e-learning to increase the numbers of learners moving from induction to a level 2 qualification. Since then we have increased our new business by 15%. There were other factors involved, but we could not have done this without e-learning. After weighing up the importance of the various factors, we think e-learning was at least 20% responsible for us gaining the new business. We will attribute 20% of the value of the new business to our e-learning programme.

Making your decision
Having analysed the costs and benefits of e-learning, you are in a position to compare it with your other options and reach a considered decision.

"For learning technology costs we would include the license costs for software, the staff to look after the management side, monitoring and generating reports etc. The costs of updating content are included. These can vary a lot depending on whether it is commissioned externally or developed in-house. Then we identify not just savings, but also the impact of particular solutions. We are very focused on the outcomes, so for example we look at the learner outcomes and how they feel about the learning, how the manager feels about the learning and whether it has impacted on practice in

the workplace. We can look at CQC inspection outcomes and our own internal monitoring of contracts with providers."
Charlotte Dawber, West Sussex County Council
Learning technologies in action at West Sussex County Council

6.3   Return on investment

Return on Investment (RoI) calculates the value of doing something in relation to the cost of doing it, and can be helpful when deciding whether to invest in learning technology. RoI is often expressed as a percentage or a ratio, for example:

1. Add up all the costs involved – e.g. £1500
2. Add up the total value of all the benefits it delivers – e.g. £3750
3. Subtract the costs from the benefits (to find the net gain) – £3750-£1500 = £2250
4. Divide the answer (i.e. the benefits that remain after the costs have been recovered) by the costs (to find out how much each £1 of investment has returned) – £2250÷£1500 = 1.5
5. Multiply the answer by 100 to convert it into a percentage – 1.5 x 100 = 150

So, in this example the RoI is 150%.

This means that, after recovering the cost of the investment, every £1 invested generated benefits to the value of an additional £1.50.

See the case studies at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/learningtechnologies for a range of examples of how individual organisations approach the business case for learning technologies.

7. Further resources

There are many sources of guidance about learning technologies on the web. A selection of organisations and publications is listed below:

7.1   Guidance on learning technologies

Centre for Learning and Performance Technologies
Advice, guidance, lists and tips about learning technologies and other forms of software to support workplace performance; information about free and commercial technologies http://c4lpt.co.uk/

Common Craft videos
Beautifully simple short animations introducing key technologies and concepts including blended learning, social media, apps, copyright, podcasting and many more.
http://www.commoncraft.com/videolist

E-learning Age
Trade magazine for the e-learning industry; magazine is subscription-based but webinar programme is free to access and showcases use of learning technologies in a range of workplaces (focus on larger organisations).
 http://www.elearningage.co.uk/webinarprogramme/online.aspx

E-learning Guild
US-based network for e-learning professionals; some free information resources for non-members.
http://www.elearningguild.com/

E-learning Network
UK-based network for e-learning professionals; some free information resources for non-members.
http://www.elearningnetwork.org/

E-learning Stuff
Blog reviewing the latest technologies to support learning; written from an education rather than workplace perspective.
http://elearningstuff.net/

E-learnity
Independent learning and talent analysts who have a 'Knowledge Centre' with free reports on a wide range of e-learning technologies and processes; aimed at larger corporate audiences.
http://www.elearnity.co.uk/EKC.html

Learning and Skills Group
Large collection of resources to help learning and development professionals make use of learning technologies, including regular webinars; free to join.
http://learningandskillsgroup.ning.com/

Learning in hand
Website (aimed at educators) with useful resources on how to create simple mobile learning content.
http://learninginhand.com/

Social Care Institute for Excellence
'Get Connected to e-learning for Social Care Providers'
Short introduction to accessing learning via the internet for care sector SMEs, written to support the Get Connected IT grant scheme administered by SCIE 2010-12.
http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/getconnectedtoelearning/index.asp

Skills for Care
'Making e-Learning Count: A Good Practice Guide'
Short report on 2008 project examining the benefits of online content delivery and e-portfolios for vocational qualifications.
http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?lID=8718&sID=2149

Skills for Care and Development
'Mobile Knowledge and Learning Solutions'
A range of short videos including guidance on using mobile technologies for social care learning, and an animated video on how to use social media responsibly in the social services sector.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymd75wUTPws

'Getting Started with Mobile'
An e-book highlighting good practice and how to develop mobile knowledge and learning solutions for the early years, childcare and social care sector.
https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/mkls-getting-started-mobile/id569854293?mt=8

Towards Maturity
Industry-sponsored research and benchmarking organisation. Large collection of guidance documents and case studies, many free to access. Tends to focus on larger organisations with specialist L&D staff.
http://www.towardsmaturity.org/

A useful series of checklists produced by a range of technology vendors from the 2013 Learning Technologies conference is available at
http://towardsmaturity.org/article/2012/12/30/bright-ideas-towards-maturitys-ambassadors/

7.2   Free technologies that support learning

The free technologies below can all be used to enhance and support workplace learning. Some of them are specialist learning technologies, and some of them are more generic productivity or office tools. Most of the tools are intended to be used by anyone, but some do need a certain level of technical knowledge to set up (see those with asterisks*).

Audio creation: Audacity
Audio sharing: Audioboo
Authoring tools: Udutu
Blogging: Wordpress
Bookmarking: Delicious
Curation (webpages): Scoop.it
Curation (images): Pinterest
Document collaboration: Google Apps
Email: Gmail
Enewsletter: Mailchimp
Eportfolio: Mahara*
Event management: Eventbrite
File synchronisation: Dropbox
Flyer/booklet creation: Simplebooklet
Learning management system: Moodle*, eFront*
Live communication (one-to-one or small group): Skype
Meeting scheduler: Doodle
Micro-blogging: Twitter
Organiser: Livebinder
Photo organising: iPiccy
Photo sharing: Flickr
Polling tool: Polleverywhere
Presentation creation: Prezi
Presentation sharing: Slideshare
Professional networking: LinkedIn
Read it later tools: Instapaper
Screencapture: Jing, Screenr
Survey tools: Survey Monkey
Video editing: Wevideo
Video sharing: YouTube

CommunityHowTo

Cataloguing and peer review website covering digital tools to help community groups work smarter; not specifically about learning, but event management, project management and communication tools reviewed. Many are free to access, can all support workplace learning.
http://www.communityhowto.com

Bear in mind that almost all commercial products offer free trials, and these are a really good way to understand more about what tools can do and what might work for you.

"Be an online learner yourself: sign up for webinars to see what the experience is like, and how it might work in your organisation. Take advantage of free trials of software and services to really understand what is out there and how it might contribute to learning in your own organisation."
Liz D'Arcy Malone, Leonard Cheshire Disability
[Learning technologies in action at Leonard Cheshire Disability](#)

7.3   Resources for learners new to technology

BBC Webwise
Collection of quality resources on basic online skills, safety and privacy, etc.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/0/

Digital Unite
Free learning content aimed at novice users, plus a tutor network, organisational training and qualifications for aspiring digital champions.
http://digitalunite.com/

Learnmyway
Portal with a collection of resources for new online learners.
http://www.learnmyway.com/

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