

The NLN and Adult and Community Learning



"E-learning has the power to transform the way we learn, and to bring high quality, accessible learning to everyone - so that every learner can achieve his or her full potential"

Charles Clarke in Towards a unified e-learning strategy, DfES 2003

This is the fifty-first in a series of briefing sheets, which aim to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues

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50. Fees charged to part-time adult students 2002-2003
49. Sources of funding for adult learners
48. Older people and mentoring
47. Young adult learners, disaffection and social inclusion
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41. European initiatives and lifelong learning
40. Increasing participation and raising achievement of black and minority ethnic group adults in post-16 education

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Copies of this and other sheets are available from NIACE, 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GE.

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They are also available on the website at www.niace.org.uk/information

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Introduction

During the 1982 Information Technology Year, a number of reports were produced that looked at the potential role of information technology in education. Among these reports was the Advisory Council for Adult Continuing Education (ACACE) publication *Microtechnology and the education of adults*, which included the results of a survey on IT in adult education. One of the questions in the survey asked LEAs about their use of computers as a tool for teaching and learning in their part-time courses for adults. The results suggested that around fifteen to twenty percent of LEAs were actively making use of technology in teaching and learning.

Since 1982 there have been a number of initiatives to promote the use of information and learning technology. However, many of these initiatives were focussed on the use of Information Learning Technology (ILT) in schools and colleges or higher education. One of the largest of these initiatives is the National Learning Network, which has received £156 million of Government investment since its inception.

Background to the NLN

The National Learning Network (NLN) began in 1999 to increase the uptake of ILT, initially working with the further education sector and sixth form colleges. The NLN has since been extended to help in the transformation of the whole of post-16 learning and skills. The NLN is a national partnership and the constituent members are:

Becta (British Educational Communications and Technology Agency)

DfES (Department for Education and Skills)

JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee)

LSC (Learning and Skills Council)

LSDA (Learning and Skills Development Agency)

NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education)

NILTA (National Information and Learning Technologies Association)

UKERNA (United Kingdom Education and Research Networking Association)

During 2001/02, on behalf of the LSC, a group with members drawn from ACL (Adult and Community Learning) organisations worked on a strategic plan to introduce and develop the use of ILT within the adult and community learning sector. On the basis of the strategy the LSC is now funding a three-year programme to extend the benefits of the NLN to ACL. Some of the core elements identified in the strategy are:

- Learning content
- Staff development
- Infrastructure, support, and guidance
- Leadership and management

Learning Content

The NLN has, since its inception, developed a wide range of e-learning resources for the further education and sixth-form college sector. These materials have been made available to ACL providers. A new round of materials specifically designed for adult and community learning will be made available during 2005.

The Strategy Group recommended that materials for ACL should be developed using the approach pioneered by the NLN and based on a survey of learning needs within ACL. Part of this approach is to develop the skills of ACL practitioners in the creation of e-learning content. To this end the LSC created two funding strands administered by NIACE - TACL and TrEACL.

TACL (Tools for Adult and Community Learning) provided money for each LEA area to purchase software tools to enable the authoring of learning content.

TrEACL (Technology to Enhance Adult and Community Learning) is designed to encourage the development of innovative projects for using e-learning in adult and community learning. TrEACL offers eligible organisations the chance to bid under a number of different funding bands depending on how much they need for their particular project. Details of the projects funded under Round 1 of TrEACL can be found on the Community Learning Resource website www.aclearn.net. Bidding for Round 2 of TrEACL closed on the 7th of May 2004, although future bidding rounds are planned.

The Learning Content Resource Exchange

As well as the Community Learning Resource website, Becta have also launched the Learning Content Resource Exchange website: www.aclexchange.net. This allows ACL practitioners to share web-based learning content with one another.

Staff Development

In 2003, as part of the NLN-ACL initiative, NIACE carried out a training needs analysis with managers, tutors, and support staff from a wide range of ACL providers. The training needs analysis identified the areas where managers and practitioners would most benefit from staff development activities. The report concluded that:

“Training needs to focus on the practical application of E-Learning, its use in attracting new learners, and recognise the environments in which ACL is delivered”

E-Guides/Practitioner Training

The E-Guides programme, funded by the NLN, has been developed and delivered by NIACE in partnership with NLN partners. The programme has been developed to support ACL staff in developing the use of e-learning across the curriculum. Senior Managers in Local Authorities and former external institutions have been asked to identify individual members of staff to undertake a three day training programme to become E-Guides. Once trained, E-Guides will be expected to offer cascade training to fifty of their colleagues.

Manager Training

Alongside the training for practitioners, a series of national and regional residential training sessions are being run for senior managers. The aim of these sessions is to provide managers with the understanding, skills and knowledge to develop strategies for the adoption of e-technologies in teaching and learning in ACL.

Staff Development Events Database

To support staff development in relation to information and learning technology, the NLN has created an online database of ILT staff development events:

www.nln.ac.uk/events.asp

Infrastructure, Support, and Guidance

One problem faced by the ACL sector is the unevenness of the IT infrastructure currently in place. To tackle this, UKERNA are working to provide access to a high speed JANET (Joint Academic Network) 'point of presence' in each LEA area to support ACL. As part of this process, UKERNA are offering LEAs half-day consultations to discuss their particular needs.

The Community Learning Resource website www.aclearn.net has been created to support the NLN ACL extension and contains a number of sections providing technical guidance on different aspects of learning technology. It is also the home of the Apollo email discussion group. The Apollo group offers, amongst other things, the opportunity for practitioners to provide mutual support and guidance to one another.

The National Information and Learning Technology Association (NILTA) have set up a National ACL Special Interest Group. The aim is to provide the ACL sector with a consultative forum to supply advice, guidance and support for e-learning development.

JISC Regional Support Centres have recruited ACL specialists to their teams. These specialists will have a growing role in supporting the NLN in ACL.

Leadership and Management

A condition of the LSC funding of the NLN extension into ACL is the development of appropriate ILT/ e-learning strategies that show how ACL providers intend to use learning technology within their areas of work. Major providers such as LEAs are required to submit a high level strategy. Smaller providers may produce an ILT/e-learning plan if they wish, to submit to the managing agent such as the LEA that is producing the high level plan for their area. All ACL providing authorities will need to submit a final Strategy by March 2005. The Strategies will need to be agreed by NIACE who are acting on behalf of the LSC.

The NLN Programme Office, based at Becta, has been established to support the work of the Network by coordinating information about project planning.

Contacts

For further information about NIACE's work on e-learning, please contact:

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For details on SuperJANET connections, please contact:

- Robert Prabucki at UKERNA r.prabucki@ukerna.ac.uk

For information about NILTA, please contact:

- Mary Barker at NILTA mbarker@nilta.org.uk

Useful Websites

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

www.niace.org.uk

Includes a section for the NIACE ICT and Learning team

British Educational Communications and Technology Agency

www.becta.org.uk

Community Learning Resource

www.aclearn.net

Department for Education and Skills

www.dfes.gov.uk

DfES E-learning Strategy Unit

www.des.gov.uk/elearningstrategy/default.stm

Joint Information Systems Committee

www.jisc.ac.uk

Learning Content Resource Exchange

www.aclexchange.net

Learning and Skills Council

www.lsc.gov.uk

Learning and Skills Development Agency

www.llda.org.uk

National Information and Learning Technology Association

www.nilta.org.uk

The National Learning Network

www.nln.ac.uk

United Kingdom Education and Research Networking Association

www.ukerna.ac.uk

References and Further Reading

Adult and Community Learning Information and Learning Technology Strategy.

National Learning Network, Learning and Skills Council, 2003. Website:

www.nln.ac.uk/uploadedfiles/ACL_strategy.pdf

Microtechnology and the education of adults.

Advisory Council for Adult Continuing Education (ACACE), 1983

Report of the Learning and Skills Council's Distributed and Electronic Learning Group.

Learning and Skills Council, 2002

Towards a unified e-learning strategy.

Department for Education and Skills, 2003.

Website: www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations2/16

Training needs analysis for the extension of e-learning in adult and community learning.

NIACE, 2003. Website:

www.aclearn.net/skills/tna

NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient resources.

Registered charity number 1002775; Company registration number 2603322