

we must be able to plan for staff time involved. Although the costs in terms of staff time were high we are already seeing benefits in terms of increased return on investment in our library resources as use by students on this course is having a substantial impact on activity levels. For example in the first 2 months of the course use of websites in ROUTES (the library of on-line resources for OU students) has increased from 158 to 1030 over a similar period last year.

What lessons have we learned?

At the Open University we are about to change the title of our Subject Information Specialists to Learning and Teaching Librarians. This reflects the extent to which the role has evolved, as has the working partnership with academic colleagues. E-learning has been the major catalyst, allowing librarians to move from supporting roles to centre stage.

As our academics wrote their units we were delighted to see how enthusiastic many of them became about the e-learning elements. This experience and the data we have collected in researching this article suggest to us that the aspects which they find most attractive are the flexibility, the ease of updating material and, most important of all, the ability to personalize the student's experience by empowering them to make choices.

Conclusion

The success or otherwise of the rewritten course will, of course, be judged on the basis of the results from the first cohort and the feedback from the student survey. Whether these are positive or negative, both the academics and librarians on the course team will acknowledge that they have learned a great deal from the experience. We all had the opportunity to develop our own skills and knowledge base and were energized by the experience of working in partnership with colleagues to develop new learning activities. We also have the satisfaction of knowing that this work is already providing a platform and a model for future developments in Health and Social Care education in the University.

Key Messages

Implications for Policy

- It is easier to demonstrate the importance of information literacy skills if they are contextualized within a continuing professional development framework.
- Commitment of library staff time to develop sustainable e-learning models can achieve longer-term beneficial outcomes for the library in terms of sustainable models and increased use of library services and resources.

Implications for Practice

- Working in partnership with academic colleagues can lead librarians to challenge their own assumptions about teaching information literacy skills.
- Librarians may need to wait for the right time to change practice but when opportunities arise they have to be willing to challenge but also to be flexible.

e-FOLIO: using e-learning to learn about e-learning

Anthea Sutton, Andrew Booth, Lynda Ayiku & Alan O'Rourke, School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR), University of Sheffield, UK

Background

The Department of Health report, 'Working Together—Learning Together'¹ outlined a vision for lifelong learning for all National Health Service (NHS) staff, both professional and nonprofessional. In seeking to equip the NHS with a flexible and continually developing workforce, designed to meet a radical agenda of modernization within the service, this landmark document aspires to an NHS that would become a 'consistent, high commitment, learning organization'.¹

Correspondence: Anthea Sutton, School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield, Regent Court, 30 Regent Street, Sheffield S1 4DA, UK. E-mail: a.sutton@sheffield.ac.uk

This vision provides a considerable challenge for librarians working in support of the needs of staff working within the health service.² Such information professionals occupy a dual role, first as facilitators and enablers of local lifelong learning strategies and, second, as potential recipients of ongoing training required to keep ahead of an ever-expanding array of electronic information resources. Potential roles range from the traditional resource provider function through to innovative responsibilities for initiating and instigating learning.³ Nowhere is this challenge more acute than in the domain of e-learning where librarians need to acquire a knowledge of the available methods and new technologies while, at the same time, placing previously opportunistic approaches on a sounder educational footing.

It was against this emergent strategic approach to lifelong learning that the Facilitated Online Learning Interactive Opportunity (FOLIO) Programme was conceived in August 2002 by Andrew Booth, Director of Information Resources, School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR), University of Sheffield and Alison Turner, Library Partnership Co-ordinator for the National electronic Library for Health (NeLH). Specific drivers for this initiative included: the need to equip health librarians with a broad base of skills to support the 'roll-out' of the National electronic Library for Health;⁴ a demand for bite-sized learning opportunities within a busy workplace; and a desire to coordinate at least one component of an otherwise fragmented approach to continuing professional development.

The overall aim of the FOLIO programme is to provide a flexible alternative delivery mechanism for continuing professional development (CPD) for the NeLH Librarian Development Programme (NeLH LDP). Following a successful pilot (January–May 2003) the NeLH commissioned a team at ScHARR to deliver a 2-year programme (February 2004–January 2006) of 12 courses for health librarians who support staff within the UK National Health Service.

The FOLIO Programme employs a low-technology method of delivery with each course primarily provided through 30 daily e-mail messages, administered through an electronic discussion list. Around this basic course skeleton

the course team constructs a rich and varied programme of events including icebreaker exercises, group and buddy interactions, case studies, briefings, guided reading, interactive PowerPoint presentations, quizzes and voting, competitions, guest telephone lectures, self-reflection, practical exercises and course summaries. Typically 40–50 participants share in each course supported by a small course team and guest tutor. Assessment, recognized by a certificate of completion not by formal accreditation, is conducted via a portfolio submitted at the conclusion of each course.

The fourth course in the FOLIO programme was an introduction to e-learning (e-FOLIO). This course was unique in the healthcare information field in that the participants were learning about e-learning through participation in an e-learning course (<http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/folio/efolio/home.htm>).

The e-FOLIO course

Delivery of the e-FOLIO course took place for 6 weeks during November and December 2004. Participants were then given a further 3 weeks within which to complete and submit their portfolios. This course aimed to provide an introduction to e-learning, drawing upon real-life examples and the experiences of the FOLIO team in delivering e-learning courses.

By the end of the course, it was intended that participants should be able to:

- Understand the potential benefits and disadvantages of e-learning.
- Identify the main ways of delivering e-learning.
- Carry out an e-learning needs assessment.
- Plan and deliver an e-learning course.
- Facilitate and support an e-learning course.
- Promote e-learning courses.
- Motivate e-learners.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of e-learning.
- Engage with fellow participants in discussing issues arising from e-learning.

The e-FOLIO course utilized a variety of tried and tested techniques in order to instruct participants, including briefings, individual and group exercises, self-reflections, guided reading, a quiz, voting, and two telephone lectures by external e-learning experts. To provide social interaction, necessary to prevent

Week	Content
1	Group icebreaker Introduction to e-learning (briefing) Methods of e-learning (briefing)
2	Introduction to creating e-learning resource task Identifying barriers & enablers to e-learning (group exercise) Group discussion on creating e-learning resource task Carrying out an e-learning assessment (briefing) Critiquing an e-learning resource (individual exercise) Self-reflection on creating e-learning resource task
3	Optional competition Planning & delivering an e-learning course (interactive PowerPoint) Telephone guest lecture Facilitating & supporting an e-learning course (briefing) Self-reflection on creating e-learning resource task
4	Promoting e-learning (briefing) Motivating e-learners (individual exercise) Quiz Guided reading Submission of e-learning resource
5	Telephone guest lecture Evaluating e-learning resources (group exercise) Self-reflection on above group exercise Competition answers & winner announced
6	Evaluating e-learning courses (briefing) e-learning bibliography Quiz answers Course summary e-learning resource vote

Table 1 Structure of the e-FOLIO course

potential isolation among e-learners⁵ e-FOLIO participants were allocated to small groups of 5–6 members allowing them to discuss and complete the group tasks. These groups were facilitated by a volunteer member of the group and each group was assigned a member of the FOLIO team to act as a group ‘mentor’.⁶

To complete their portfolio participants were asked to spend a substantive part of the course planning the creation of an e-learning resource—to serve as an introduction to their library and information service. These resources were submitted to the course team towards the end of the course and made available anonymously as a collective ‘gallery’ on the course website. Each group was subsequently asked to evaluate another group’s set of resources (5–6 per group) and nominate which single resource they felt had the most positive features. Nominations were collated and each participant was asked to vote for their favourite resource out of all the nominations. The

‘winning’ resource was feted to the participants and the creator contacted and offered private congratulations from the course team.

The course was structured as in Table 1.

Participant feedback

The e-FOLIO course had a significantly higher rate of completion than previous FOLIO courses (87.5% compared with 65–67%).⁷ Reasons for this may include ongoing enhancements to course delivery and the intrinsic content of the course itself. The introduction of buddy groups rather than buddy pairs meant that even if some participants withdrew, remaining group members were still able to complete the tasks without having to work alone. The workload of the e-FOLIO course was more realistic and more evenly distributed than previous courses, being comprised of one major task and a limited number of smaller tasks rather than the multitude of small tasks of its predecessors.

Activities were thus built around a dynamic where activity was increasingly sustained and augmented as the course gathered momentum and where incremental learning could immediately be applied to the major task in hand. Notwithstanding such improvements in course delivery, the FOLIO course team believes that the subject matter was the single most important factor in this improved performance. Participants apparently benefited from the fact that they were learning about e-learning by doing e-learning. This contrasts with previous courses where their motivation was primarily stimulated by the course content and where methods of course delivery were considered either a necessary adjunct, or even an impediment, to learning about the subject itself.

The course evaluation invited participants to identify how they planned to use what they had learnt on the e-FOLIO course.⁷ The majority of participants stated motivations connected with the development of training courses within their own organizations. Being required to create an e-learning resource had established a clear relationship between the learning outcomes and how they might adapt this resource for re-use in their organization:

‘The course has provided me with a lot of useful material and guidance on aspects I can follow-up. Although I won’t be able to utilize my e-learning resource exactly as I presented it there will be elements that I can progress and incorporate into planned work.’

‘I certainly intend to keep abreast of e-learning developments. On a practical level, I will certainly post (and promote) my PowerPoint presentation onto our PCT intranet site as a basic induction to our department.’

Creation of the e-learning resource was rated highly on the course evaluation, coming second as the most useful and most enjoyable type of course material, after the briefings that equip participants with contextual knowledge.

In addition to meeting the learning needs of those who are required to support e-learning within their organization the e-FOLIO course had other intended outcomes. It certainly seemed to fill a gap

for many participants who were already involved in e-learning as part of their job but had not previously received any training to support this:

‘I think that e-learning will become much more prominent in the future and while I have been involved in putting materials onto VLE (virtual learning environments) in the past I never had any underpinning knowledge to guide my decisions so I certainly expect to use what I have learnt on the course in the future and feel more competent and confident in designing and delivering training using e-learning.’

Again the fact that this e-learning course actually involved undertaking e-learning was outlined as a very positive aspect:

‘Very enjoyable, have a much better feel what e-learning is about and “doing” is my preferred learning style, so it has met my personal learning outcomes.’

There were also instances where reflection occasioned by the course materials appeared to operate at a deeper level than that typically encountered on other FOLIO courses. ‘Learning from reflection on doing’ is recognized as a valuable feature of experiential training and development:

‘By reflecting on their experiences, learners are more likely to heighten their awareness of the need for change and to achieve valuable and lasting changes in their attitudes and actions.’⁸

For example, after listening to a guest lecture on supporting the needs of the distance learner one participant was able to directly relate what was being said to her own experience in engaging with the e-FOLIO course and to record this insight in her portfolio:

‘From my experience of this FOLIO course I have not felt overwhelmed by information, as it has been presented in a timely manner. I have not been aware of a large number of students on the course as the group contact is within a small group. The main task has been developed over the course, which has reduced the pressure. These have all been key issues to me.’

Another aspect of the course that was frequently cited as successful was the variation in course material. This is a common feature of FOLIO courses. In designing the courses, the FOLIO team strive to keep them fresh and interesting by providing a mixture of tasks and activities, ranging from more formal approaches such as briefings and guided readings, to more informal quizzes, voting and fun competitions:

'I can appreciate the amount of thought, work and planning that went into the course. I thought the content of the course both in terms of material, different activities and instructions was clear evidence of this.'

'Thanks very much for the opportunity to participate and to have learned so much variety, i.e. theory and practice.'

'I liked the variety of activities and the chance to work with other people on interactive tasks. Thanks for an enjoyable and informative course!'

Conclusion

In delivering this FOLIO e-learning course about e-learning, the course team have themselves learnt more about those factors which may contribute to the success of a distance learning course. The practical nature of using an established e-learning course structure to deliver e-learning about e-learning seems to have engaged the participants and appears to have contributed to a higher rate of completion compared with topics where the emphasis was almost exclusively on course content. Working in groups during e-learning also helps in overcoming isolation and to motivate and encourage. Buddy groups are also far more resilient than the buddy pairs previously used, in the face of participant withdrawal, with all groups managing to continue despite the loss of group members. The fact that participants also completed the course with a tangible deliverable of an e-learning resource of their own creation is also a positive feature as participants could point to the existence of a product which they could adapt/reuse as they wished.

Key Messages

Implications for Policy

- e-learning can help to overcome barriers to accessing continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, i.e. not being able to attend face-to-face training away from the workplace due to staff shortages, limited budgets, travel time, etc.
- e-learning can provide a flexible alternative mechanism for delivering CPD, by offering learning in bite-sized chunks to be accessed at a time and place convenient to each individual learner.

Implications for Practice

- An e-learning course where participants learn from 'reflection on doing' seems to contribute to a higher completion rate.
- e-learning course workloads should be realistic and evenly distributed, and course material should be varied.
- When including social interaction in e-learning courses, course developers should consider the extra resilience of small groups over pairs.

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