

# Employing Web 2.0 Tools to Deliver E-learning Across Hemispheres

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Successful delivery of work-based e-learning requires attention to mechanisms offering peer communication, flexibility and support (1) ScHARR Information Resources design, develop and deliver a programme of work-based e-learning courses for library and information professionals, in the UK (in collaboration with the Strategic Health Authority Library Leads (SHALL)) and in Australia and New Zealand (in collaboration with ALIA – the Australian Library and Information Association). The programme is entitled FOLIO – Facilitated Online Learning as an Interactive Opportunity.

Staff at the University of Sheffield use an online in-house tool to create online documents and to host files, discussion and blogging. After using external wiki tools such as PBWorks it was agreed to host supplementary resources on this platform named uSpace.

- Courses are delivered primarily by email, with supporting web materials – such as Wiki pages, discussion forums, podcasts, online quizzes, and other web resources. The focus is on ease-of-access, using online tools that are freely available.
- Peer communication, and indeed collaboration is an important element of the course, and contributes to an effective and enjoyable learning experience. Positive feedback regarding this aspect of the course, and use of Web 2.0 tools covered on our uSpace resource, indicates that learners benefit from being able to communicate and collaborate efficiently.

## Scenario

FOLIO courses target continuing professional development and include topics relating to management, professional, contextual, and learning and teaching skills. Examples of course titles include:

- Project Management
- Getting to Grips with Knowledge Management
- Designing and Delivering Information Skills Training Courses

Course participants are library and information professionals working in various sectors, including academic, public, and commercial libraries, in Australia and New Zealand.

## Rationale

Courses are delivered by email, with supporting web materials – such as Wikis, discussion forums, podcasts, quizzes, and other web resources. The focus is on ease-of-access, using tools that are freely available.

After employing the wiki tool PBWorks we moved course materials to an in-house resource called uSpace that allows online document creation, file hosting, discussion forums and blogging.

Factors determining the decision to go down this route were that it is a free resource, it is secure, and it has the ability to host multi-context media and attachments.

## Lessons Learned

- Ensure learners are aware of the tools available to them, the pros and cons of using each tool, and that instruction and help is available online.
- Outline a learning protocol at the beginning of the course.
- Be as sure as you can be, by doing your research, that the tools you employ and ask others to use actually do the job you want.
- Make online resources do the hard work for you. For example, embedding a YouTube video into e-learning support resources results not only in time savings for the course tutor but also the student. Such videos can be shared through embedding, forums, social bookmarking and networking.

## Findings and Implications

By employing online tools, course providers can effectively provide support to international work-based learners with these benefits:

- Help learners effectively communicate with peers across geographical and time zone boundaries.
- Learners can employ these tools in their professional careers, and aid their organisation and colleagues.
- Learners can build their own personal learning network (PLN) and begin to share ideas and concepts away from the official educational environment.
- These tools can be employed in reflective practice and store knowledge in a way that is easily transferable.



"I enjoyed working with my buddies and certainly the social networking sites and web 2.0 would come in handy in case I register for another course."

"Lack of access to Web 2.0 technologies in the workplace restricts my application of skills and experimenting with a variety of communication tools."

"I was disappointed that my group chose not to use a new tool - I felt it was a lost opportunity. Perhaps it could be a requirement to encourage participants to learn to use new tools as well as gain knowledge?"



(1) Booth A, Carroll C, Papaioannou D, Sutton A, Wong R. Applying findings from a systematic review of workplace-based e-learning: implications for health information professionals. *Health Information and Libraries Journal*. 2009 Mar; 26 (1): 4-21.