

Flexible/blended approaches: Thematic Review



March 2010

Skills for Life Support Programme

1. Context

1.1 Background

Developing and delivering flexible, responsive Skills for Life learning is one of the three key priorities for the Government, as stated in *Skills for Life: Changing lives* (DIUS, March 2009).

In this policy document, it states that providers should be 'delivering flexible and responsive Skills for Life provision which:

- meets learner and employer needs
- is high quality
- is delivered in innovative ways
- is embedded in wider skills provision where that is the best way to meet individual learners' needs.'

As these needs change in response to shifts in economic and personal circumstances, providers will need to develop the capacity to respond adequately.

The Skills for Life Support Programme has a brief to support providers to address this priority. Specifically, this means supporting them in developing more flexible models which allow individuals to learn when and where it suits them. This includes :

- opportunities for 'blended learning', whereby a mixture of learning approaches such as classroom-based, independent and e-learning are used, and
- how to make better use of technology so that people can access learning and assessment when and where they want it.

1.2 Aims of this review

This report aims to capture examples of how the support has been used to good effect, and in particular will focus on how effectively providers are embedding the Move On approach, which encourages a range of flexible models of delivery, including a blended learning approach.

A separate report has been carried out by LSN on Embedded models of delivery, which could also fall within the parameters of flexible models. This report will therefore only make light reference to such models.

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To obtain information on methods and resources and their effect in improving providers' flexibility and responsiveness in activities across Whole Organisation Approach (WOA), Action Research and Development (ARD), and work with large employers, a questionnaire was sent to CfBT/LSN Development Advisers (DAs), and CfBT Learning and Skills Advisers (LSAs) (*Appendix 1*).

'*The Learner Route and the e-learning fan*' (*Appendix 2*) and the document '*Making it Work*' were distributed with the questionnaire as additional reading and support material.

21 responses were submitted. The questionnaire was followed up with telephone calls to some of the respondents, and in some cases with the providers themselves.

Responses covered 33 organisations: large employers; work-based learning organisations; Further Education (FE) Colleges; Adult and Community Learning, (ACL) provision; offender learning organisations and a voluntary and community sector organisation, and described models that are being developed and trialled for learners in all contexts including apprenticeships and employees – particularly low-skilled staff in a range of settings; and to support the development of staff skills – relating in particular to NVQ and work-based learning assessors.

Other managing partners provided separate information relating to their own activities, in addition to the questionnaire.

2. Activities

2.1 Briefing regional teams

At their initial residential briefing, CfBT/LSN regional teams participated in workshops on flexible models of delivery, blended learning and the Move On approach. They were signposted to the Move On E-Tutor Guide which explores creative use of the Learner Route to support a blended delivery model.

Resources to support their work included:

- a briefing sheet on using the e-tutor guide to support a blended learning model to be customised for their own use with providers (*Appendix 3*)
- a handout on using the learner route to support blended learning to encourage discussion with providers about roles and responsibilities in relation this and some suggested teaching and learning resources in the form of a case study (*Appendix 4*).

They were able to share these approaches and resources in their work with:

- providers receiving support under WOA activity
- in ARD Projects, particularly those working specifically on 'blended learning' as a specific theme for development.
- large employers in developing staff skills.

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2.2 National Skills for Life conferences

Innovative practice and use of ICT was a key theme of last November's national Skills for Life conferences and to support the events, CfBT staff who had been involved in Move On and other consortium partners led on a number of activities.

In 'Ask the Conference', delegates were invited to vote on a series of questions that included attitudes to blended learning and what organisations were offering to Skills for Life learners.

The results from the three conferences were collated and displayed a great deal of consistency.

The plenary voting session asked five key questions:

Question 1 asked about the audience's understanding of blended learning.

80% of the audience felt it was a mixture of class teaching and distance learning.

Question 2 asked whether organisations offered a blended learning option to learners.

86% said they provided some kind of blended learning offer.

Question 3 asked about the audience's opinions about the biggest barrier to blended learning, with a choice from:

1. Staff expertise
2. Inadequate access to equipment
3. Learners don't like to use IT
4. We don't have the resources to develop a virtual learning environment.

Identified barriers related either to ILT (63%), or staff capability and expertise (37%).

Question 4 asked the participants what they considered to be the biggest benefit of blended learning, with 56% voting for 'building independence and confidence as well as literacy language and numeracy skills'.

Finally the participants were asked their opinions on the levels of teacher support learners have stated they would like in a learner survey. Over half the audience voted for the right answer – 79% of learners – demonstrating clearly that teachers have a strong role to play in e-learning.

For a more detailed analysis of the responses, see *Appendix 5* for the full report, 'Ask the Conference' report.

In addition to the above, CfBT and LLU+ supported the Internet Learning Zone where the new 'Brain Games' resource was on show alongside Move On updates and the new on-line Skills for Life curriculum.

The conferences also hosted workshops specific to blended learning and flexible models of delivery, again supported by Consortium partners.

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2.3 Support for embedding literacy, language and numeracy through a Whole Organisation Approach

Key themes in implementing flexible and blended approaches relate to:

1. the benefits for staff in developing their own skills, and
2. developing more responsive provision for learners.

1. Developing the personal skills of staff across the wider workforce is integral to the embedding of literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) through a WOA. Non-specialists need the confidence and competence to support their learners or trainees with the LLN that form an integral part of their programmes of learning or training. However it has often been a challenge to find a successful model for organisations to support the necessary staff development, particularly where staff:

- are part time
- are workplace assessors, or
- have few opportunities to come together to develop their skills and confidence.

Jo Wedgwood at Utilise Training organisation based in Wigan said, *'We have 35 staff – a mix of administrative and sales staff, directors, and trainers who work all over the UK; the chances of efficiently organising a programme bringing those staff together is impossible, so flexibility is critical.'*

Flexible models have come into their own in addressing this challenge. Staff are being offered the opportunity to develop their skills in their own time and at their own pace, and signposted and supported to use resources specifically designed for the purpose. The added value of this approach has often led to vocational teachers and assessors using this approach and these resources with their own learners and trainees, thus supporting an embedded approach.

Nine of the questionnaire respondents cited examples of emerging and/or successful models of support for staff, predominantly assessors, but also vocational tutors and in some cases, uniformed staff working in prisons.

Below are some examples:

In **Utilities Training Northern (UTN)**, a specialist construction training organisation, where assessors need to upskill to support their learners as part of their development on PTTLS, the DA has supported *'the development of a programme of learning, which is a mix of blended learning, differentiated pace and differentiated programme.'* The main challenge for the assessors is *'lack of confidence in their own abilities and worry about being exposed'*. The model using the Move On Learner Route for individual assessments and action planning, incorporating specialist support for specific areas of development, has helped overcome this challenge.

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The Chairman of UTN has truly embraced the signing of the Skills Pledge, encouraging the 12 staff across the organisation to take up Skills for Life and initiating this by using the Learner Route himself to assess his own skills.

The success of the model has led the Skills for Life specialist to adopt the approach with a textile training centre in Huddersfield with similar impact. She feels that using self-access resources has *'helped to keep the staff as learners on track'*, and that as a result of using the Learner Route, they are now confidently showing their learners how to use the resource.

The strength of the model using a combined use of the self-access resources with the relevant embedded learning materials on construction and health and safety, has enabled the assessors to understand the relevance of Skills for Life for their industry and has, in turn, removed the stigma of 'basic skills'.

A DA working with offender institutions in the Midlands reports on a blended model of 1:1 tuition of Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) for uniformed staff who are working towards Level 2 in Custodial Care and need Level 2 literacy and numeracy qualifications to progress at work. Education staff at the prisons support their colleagues during lunch breaks and they are encouraged to use websites such as Move On, BBC Skillswise, etc. to support their learning. Limited access to these resources does impose a challenge of sharing this model with the learners.

The programme is 'completely flexible for individuals depending on their role and their starting points, giving them a multi-faceted approach and encouraging ownership and staff being completely in control of their own learning.' Skills for Life Specialist at Utilities Training Northern

In the northern area, a work-based learning (WBL) provider – **Utilise TDS in Wigan**, another organisation who have signed up to the Skills Pledge – has used the Move On Learner Route to support 10 staff from across the organisation, aged 19–63 – to develop their numeracy skills and gain qualifications. Support is provided via email, telephone and 1:1 face-to-face. The organisation also partners with the nearby learndirect centre to supply registration and testing opportunities on a very flexible basis.

For this organisation, the impact for staff has enabled them to carry out their jobs more efficiently and without asking for support from other staff members.

It also means the staff have more confidence in raising the issue of LLN with employers they are offering training to as part of an embedded offer. These staff have been given time in work, but many have chosen to work in their own time at home. According to Jo Wedgwood, added value has been that staff working at home have engaged their

'Staff are more positive; they offer peer support for learning and it has heightened their awareness that their skills were sometimes rather out of date and in need of a brush-up, enhancing their opportunities for employability should they have to seek work in the future.'

Jo Wedgwood, Trainer, Utilise TDS

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families in using the online resources, and many staff want to move on to the next level and on to literacy.

Staff at **Rochdale Training**, when shown skills checklists that clearly identified the literacy, language and numeracy within an engineering context, recognised the value of developing their own skills to support and embed. The instructors and assessors were then shown the Move On website and had a go at the mini-test before using the Learner Route as part of their personal development.

At **Trafford College** in the North, a 'Skills for Life Toolkit' is being developed to support assessors working with Train to Gain learners. The toolkit enables assessors to signpost NVQ learners to supporting resources for Skills for Life development, and in order to do this confidently, the assessors need to develop their own skills and understanding of the relationship of the LLN skills underlying the vocational workplace and NVQ qualifications. The Move On iRoute has helped develop this understanding, and both Move On learner resources and BBC Skillswise have supported their personal skills development, all of which have been accessed in their own time following an induction.

Similar models were cited in the Southern area. **Care Learning Centre** offer work-based learning for the care sector. They acknowledged that the lack of LLN support by the assessors meant little progress onto further training was being made by the learners on their NVQs. Bespoke training and workshops arranged for assessors to train them and develop confidence to support learners with the online resources available, should lead to increased opportunities for the learners' progression.

There are examples of providers at a very early stage of developing flexible models of delivery of the type described in *Making It Work*¹, Chapter 3 'Flexible ways of delivering learning'. However, the starting point again seems to be developing a model with tutors and assessors for their own skills development, with a plan to roll out a similar programme for their learners. Again Move On is cited as being the predominant resource used in achieving this.

All the examples here are following a similar model; that of developing staff confidence to support their own learners more effectively with LLN, using a range of online resources that can be accessed at any time, along with specific skills development opportunities and support from a specialist provided face to face, by email or telephone.

2. Developing more responsive provision for learners was also captured in 12 of the responses and represented settings ranging from offender learning, employees, unemployed adults, apprentices and learners in both ACL and FE settings. Below are some examples of these:

¹ *Making it work: A practical guide to effective delivery of skills for life in workplace learning.*
Skills for Life Support for World Class Skills Programme, 2009
www.excellencegateway.org.uk/255255


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In some cases, the organisation is at a very early stage of development. A provider in the North offering Customer Care NVQs has recently shifted its thinking from assuming that 'flexible' meant offering contextualised worksheets, to registering its learners on the Move On website and offering them a more flexible model. This was in direct response to being introduced to models of flexible learning and being shown the e-learning fan outlined in the e-tutor guide and on the handout (*Appendix 2*).

Leeds City College has developed a supplementary work route in addition to the two hours a week of provision for a group of learners doing the Level 1 and 2 literacy qualifications. This provides anytime learning for the group. Many of the learners have progressed from ESOL and want to move on to further training; some are low skilled and employed and others are on benefits and unemployed. A staff guide is being developed and a range of internet based resources are being used: Move On Learner and Teacher Routes; Skills Workshop and Video Jug (a host for instructional videos).² Staff will be trained on using a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), as well as on how to develop a learner progress tracking system and strategies to support learners using this model.

Many organisations now appear to be using a VLE for supporting a more flexible model for both staff as learners and for learners themselves. A good example of this is **Castle College** in the East Midlands. They are using the VLE (Moodle) site for functional maths, with tutorials at the commencement and set times during the learners' period of study. It is aimed at work-based learners, particularly apprentices, and again is being established by being used first with assessors as professional development to support their learners.

Offender Learning is another priority group that requires a degree of innovation and flexibility. A Category C prison which was judged to be inadequate in all key judgement areas at an Ofsted inspection in February 2009, has been praised for its considerable progress, since the Skills for Life Support Programme grant has enabled them to spend time looking at online resources and working on ways to be able to use them with their learners in this setting.



'The site brings together established resources in a way that supports functional maths, i.e. an emphasis on the problem solving/process skills development needed, supported by development of the coverage and range of skills.'

Trainer, Castle College

Flexible models for learners who are currently employed can be a huge motivator as well as offering an opportunity to be cost effective, particularly where the employees are self employed and working shifts. **ABA Training Ltd**, an organisation which delivers training to taxi drivers and fleet drivers, brings together the group for induction and workshops. The rest of the delivery is offered through 1:1 coaching sessions (face-to-face plus telephone, email and Skype) and self-directed practice tests as well as self-teach online and paper-based materials. The aim is to recruit 14% of its learners to Skills for Life this year. None of its learners are currently on

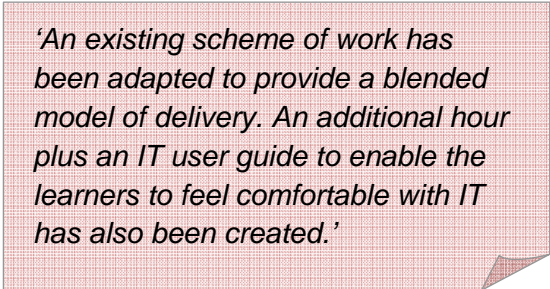
² www.videojug.com

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Skills for Life programmes. The target for achievement for LLN qualification by these participants is 90%

VLEs are being used in workplace settings as well as within learning organisations. One such example is where a VLE is being used to support low skilled manual workers within a County Council in the East Midlands to access resources to support their face to face course in adult literacy.

Another example is a work-based learning provider supporting low-skilled care workers in residential/nursing and domiciliary care where numeracy levels are considered to be inadequate for work requirements of administering medications. The additional numeracy support is being offered alongside an administering medication course. Learners are given a self study guide with web links to Move On Learner Route and other online resources, as well as a numeracy text book and specifically created resources to accompany the course aimed at Level 1 numeracy.



'An existing scheme of work has been adapted to provide a blended model of delivery. An additional hour plus an IT user guide to enable the learners to feel comfortable with IT has also been created.'

2.4 Peer Exchange Groups (PEGs)

In these groups providers have been able to share ways of implementing flexible and blended models of delivery and to explore the Move On resources and others that can support this. Some groups have selected this area as their 'hot topic' including, for example, a group of ACL providers and a WBL group in the North, and a mixed group of providers in the South East. Activities have included how blended learning and distance e-learning can support vocational learning and LLN development on programmes like Train to Gain; case studies and guidance on funding models.

2.5 Action Research and Development (ARD) projects

There are a number of different themes that providers are working on as action research projects, one of which is blended learning. Examples of the types of activity involved are listed below:

Leicestershire Adult Learning Service set out its main aim as: *'To build the foundation to develop a high quality blended learning approach including use of a Moodle-based VLE to record learning and provide timely feedback to learners (for Literacy L1 and 2 and Numeracy E3–L2)'*. They are in the process of producing the following resources for dissemination:

- a Management Process Model for a Blended Learning Approach using a Moodle-based VLE to record learning and provide timely feedback to learners
- guidelines for learners and tutors on using the portal
- modified ILP for Blended Learning.

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The intended impact is that learners will be offered more flexible ways to learn which will enhance engagement; there will be improved learner and employer satisfaction by offering wider choice of learning routes to gain skills and achieve qualifications; improved staff skills and confidence in delivering through a blended approach, measured by the number of staff who volunteer to take on a caseload of learners (initial target by end of project is 10).

CPD provided by the Skills for Life Support Programme to support the process focused on communicating the vision, supporting the use of VLE and e-portfolio /portal, and familiarisation with Move On Learner Route and other resources.

Already, as a result of the project:

- staff expertise has increased – six staff are now able to add resources and continue development of the VLE
- 20 staff are confident to support learners on the Blended Learning programme as a result of CPD
- the service has moved forward to a point where they can offer a flexible blended learning model to learners with confidence.

The promotion of the model in the workplace has led to engagement being enhanced:

- So far 11 learners who would not previously have been able to access learning have been funded to use flexible learning.
- 19 employees are showing an interest in the blended learning option.

Some learners are from the community but it is mainly employees who cannot or choose not to access planned courses who select the flexible option.

In the South a DA is supporting providers with three different flexible models:

The first is a collaboration of the **London Work Based Learning Alliance** working with **Redwood Skills, Troy Solutions Ltd** and **Westminster Kingsway College**, to develop remote anytime/anywhere learning through the development of an online CPD toolkit for WBL assessors. This includes six assessor training modules to sit within an overall L2 English and maths CPD framework. The eventual output will be an e-toolkit which comprises eighteen discrete modules that cover the full L2 literacy and numeracy curricula, and include signposting to opportunities for initial assessment and summative assessment within the assessor's own organisation.

The modules will model effective practices and suitable approaches to support assessors to develop their own skills, with active approaches to support learning in the WBL context. The toolkit will also support assessors with the transition from key skills to functional skills.

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The rationale for this project is in the standards set out in the Standards Verification documentation,³ which sets out the mandatory element of the professional formation process of the Institute for Learning (IfL), enabling a teacher to gain licensed practitioner status.

Assessors working towards Qualified Teaching and Learning Skills (QTLS) may be working at or below Level 2 and aiming to progress to Level 3. This project will help them to develop pedagogic and personal skills to support learners at Level 1 and Level 2 by giving them the opportunity to experience active and engaging e-learning approaches to developing their own maths and English skills.

The overall framework that was used to initially structure the modules was based on the existing 'Move On with Your Learners' modules for teachers and tutors, which were developed for the WBL sector. Module content will be developed to provide up-to-date work based approaches, active learning pedagogy and interactive e-learning objects using commonly available and current tools and techniques. A guide to using the toolkit will be informed by the content of the Move-On E-Tutor Guide.

The second project has been working with **ACL provision in Essex** developing an online E3 numeracy course for adult learners hosted on the Moodle VLE platform. The rationale for the model was to develop resources and approach to engaging hard to reach learners, including young offenders and those with access difficulties such as remote location, childcare, and reluctance to admit to difficulties.

As in previous examples, there is a recognition that staff skills need to be developed to support the model. 'Brain Games' and other Move On resources have been used to support the learning.

The third is supporting a whole borough approach working with **Slough Borough Council's** 'Total Place Project'. This innovative project is hoping to involve the whole community linking digital inclusion, ESOL and developing numeracy through financial capability in its community. It links to work being supported by **BECTA**, a Government-funded scheme called 'Home Access', to help families who currently have no access to computers and the internet, giving them grants to enable them to get online at home. The action research and development project aims to support the families, as this extract from their application demonstrates:

³ *Evidencing Personal Skills in Literacy and Numeracy; Guidance to Teachers and Employers September 2008* <http://www.standardsverificationuk.org/evidencing-personal-skills-in-literacy-and-numeracy.htm> and *Evidencing the personal skills requirements for teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sector*

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'We are acutely aware that we and other public agencies are missing a trick at a time of challenge to public expenditure in not including the access by other family members to our learning offer at the same time as promoting to and engaging with the individual learner. We wish to maximise inter-generational learning and family peer support in delivery and we look for ways to close the digital divide for our most deprived citizens, facilitating access to broadband, internet and digital media by using the latest digital and blended learning solutions to develop the families' skills.

We seek support to develop the skills of our staff working with families to bring digital solutions and skills to the families and to refresh our curriculum to maximise the use of ICT in the deliver of family and informal learning.'

This sits well with the remit in 'Changing Lives' that *'LSIS will work in partnership with BECTA to support providers to help them deliver more flexible models which allow individuals to learn when and where it suits them'.*

A further example is that of PALS/Dyslexia Action @ Nottinghamshire Probation which has used web quest to guide learners through an internet based investigation of some aspects of 'Quick Reads'.

- A writing frame is used at the end of the web quest as the learners are expected to write their views and express an opinion about books.
- A paper-based 'top tips' sheet for tutors in the learning and skills sector that will inform them as to how the web quest can be used and how to go about producing a web quest.
- All of the resources will be uploaded onto a memory stick for internal dissemination to other tutors. The extension activities can be used as a stand-alone lesson or over a period of time.

BECTA guidelines for creating quality digital resources were used for the construction of the web quest.

The Family Learning strand is also supporting this work through its Digital families briefings and network meetings, and using Family Learning Impact Funding to support the financial capability, as well as the support available from the Family Learning Adviser.

2.6 Large employers

In our work with large employers, there is a positive response to the opportunities offered by flexible and blended models. For example:

At **Kwik Fit**, a Learning and Skills Adviser working with employers has supported a distance learning model with remote support for employees. This includes face-to-face mentoring and contextualised materials being developed to improve retention

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and achievement. A Learner Pack has been developed to enable employees to work independently. This links to an assessment tool and learning resources and encourages reflection and independent tracking of progress, as well as opportunities for preparation for national qualifications.

The same adviser is supporting **Princess Alexandra Hospital** in Cambridge, with models of delivery to exploit its new Learning Centre, to be opened in March for staff and members of the community. The Skills for Life provision will be flexible online learning with tutor support, using contextualised job specific materials alongside generic learning resources and encompassing test preparation opportunities to gain national qualifications in literacy and numeracy. Some specific subject priorities have been identified: those of fluid balance charts and care plans for managers. The planning for this work has been strongly supported by 29 union members from a range of unions.

A third employer, **Addison Lee**, a large taxi driver and fleet service are offering taster sessions to staff with vocational input, a blend of workshops with face-to-face support and online with remote support, with the potential to reach thousands of employees nationally.

2.7 Workforce development

LLU+ reported on the nine flexible models being developed under the 'Teacher Training and Action Research and Development Projects.

Two clear outcomes are emerging from the action research:

- Exactly which models might work best: i.e. how much face-to-face blended with what proportion of distance learning. The different proportions could mean that for national reach of a course, more collaboration and peer exchange is required leading to only the actual teaching practice being face to face, with the theory being exclusively carried out at a distance.
- How far do you use VLEs and social networking sites? – all the projects have found there is a lot of interest in using resources beyond VLEs.

Another implication for these models is the need to take into account the different learning styles, not just for the learning itself, but also for assessment of learning. Anglia Ruskin University has been identifying different models of assessment to account for those who have different requirements and perhaps wish to avoid the need for academic writing.

'The flexible/blended distance delivery is changing and aiming to reach an increasing number of people who can "attend" any course.'

John Sutter, LLU+, South Bank University

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Asked whether these models were likely to impact on the models offered by these teacher trainers to their learners, it was acknowledged that it is too early to definitively capture that impact, but John felt he could predict that there is an assumption that if these trainees are having to engage with IT for their own learning, they will have the means of communicating those methods to their learners.

'The concept of distance learning is changing before our very eyes. It has the effect of personalising learning which has led to what counts – not the use of IT and websites, but the processes for using IT; the relationships required, the support and the communication.'

John Sutter, LLU+, South Bank University

3. Challenges

The key challenge identified throughout all the projects, whatever the context, was that of staff skills. Developing staff skills is a requirement in many cases to enhance the use of multi-media, Virtual Learning Environments, the Move On Learner Route with its many components, and to meet the needs of different learning styles and learner settings.

A significant barrier identified by participants at the national Skills for Life conferences related to lack of staff capability and expertise (37%). This is clearly an area that could benefit from investment in Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Concerns about access to equipment and having the resources to develop a VLE may be based on a perception that developing a blended model requires a high degree of resources. Yet time and money spent on developing VLEs can be a waste if what is available already is not used to the full.

The solution for this is ongoing professional development and opportunities to gain confidence in using learner resources that can then be passed on to learners. Development is also required for a range of teaching approaches or strategies for supporting learners that offer more flexibility and meet the needs of different learning styles. Examples such as the case study of Hartlepool College literacy and numeracy support for remote learners, available through the Skills for Life Support Programme CPD, can also give additional support and ideas.⁴

A second challenge identified in one of the models was for the learners needing to absorb additional information and expectations into busy lives. This can be overcome by more focused marketing about the course content and information at induction to the course on the range of models and resources to be used, with clear guidance and opportunity for discussion, clarification and support.

In Offender Learning and sometimes in workplace and community provision, lack of access to internet and IT generally can create difficulties. Models have been developed and case studies are available to demonstrate how these barriers have been overcome. Peer exchange groups can work well in sharing practice and there

⁴ SfLSP Module 2c CPD trainer pack: 'Literacy, language and numeracy in the Self-Assessment Process'

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is support available from organisations such as JISC⁵ to support the use of e-learning in all settings for all learners. In one case the development grant from the Skills for Life Support Programme has enabled tutors working in a prison setting to explore resources and email relevant ones to each other in the form of peer exchange. These can then be used on a laptop for learners.

Learners sometimes have very low IT skills. This has been addressed in the workplace by making IT more accessible at work along with support. Free IT tutorials are also readily available and could be built into the blended model; for example BBC RAW materials have video clips and step-by-step instructions for beginner learners. With IT becoming an increasing part of everyday life and work, it is essential that this challenge is addressed to avoid a further discrepancy in the digital divide.

Funding blended models was also cited as a barrier. Clear guidance is available from the LSC on how to support these approaches and again a range of case studies have been written to demonstrate how effective practice can be funded. The Move On E-Tutor Guide, the Effective Practice Projects reports and information available on the Excellence Gateway offer several examples.

The costs of developing e-learning and the cost of time for collaboration between providers have been addressed during the Skills for Life Support Programme with grants and expert practitioner support to enable the work to take place.

4. Impact

In many cases, it is too early to gauge the full impact of the models being tried and tested on the programme this year.

The impact of developing staff skills to support the models is already apparent however. The following impact statements were extracted from the questionnaires:

- Achievement of Skills for Life qualifications by WBL staff
- Improved support for Skills for Life workplace learning
- Improved take-up of courses
- Learners more in control of their own learning
- Skills for Life learning is de-stigmatised as all employees are being offered the opportunity and there has been a reduction in the need for confidentiality about the learning taking place
- Wider range of models available for uniformed staff in offender learning context to achieve their learning aims
- Provides further opportunities for learners to consolidate their learning

⁵ <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/> Aims to further the development of communication technologies

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It is hoped that the increased range of flexible models will improve engagement, retention and achievement. For example:

- In ABA Training the pilot aims to recruit 14% of learners for Skills for Life support by mid-March (current recruitment is 0%), and for 90% of learners to achieve qualifications in literacy and numeracy by October 2010.
- At Trafford College, the hope is that there will be an increase in timely completions on NVQ qualifications.
- For West Midlands airport and hospital staff the aim is that the numeracy levels of staff will be increased by one level.
- At Castle College of FE, that there will be a smoother transition from key skills to functional skills as the learners will have assessors who are more confident and more access to maths specialists.
- At Midland Technical Services, it is hoped the employer will see the gains made from learning as added value rather than an extra time commitment.
- ACL Essex aims to assess the cost implications of the model as well as its effectiveness and its ability to reach hard-to-reach learners.

During the Move On programmes, it became evident that there was a distinct correlation between the extent to which providers had adopted, established or embedded the Move On approach and an increase in their achievement rates. Providers on the current Skills for Life Support Programme have all been asked about their use of the Move On approach and resources to support their delivery and the degree of 'embeddedness'. The aim is that the same question will be asked at the end of the programme and performance measured to identify if the embedding of the approach has had any effect on their achievement rates.

The starting point is as follows: of 432 providers, 44.7% providers are Move On aware; 16.7% have adopted the approach; 11.6% have established the approach; and 11.8% have embedded the approach.

5. Conclusions

There is clear evidence from the research carried out that the offer of flexible/blended models of delivery continues to add value to Skills for Life and wider teaching and learning. This reinforces previous research carried out by NRDC and LSIS-funded effective practice research projects. Additionally, this piece of work has focused on the value of the Move On Learner Route and a few other key resources, such as BBC Skillswise and RAW materials that make these models more accessible for workforce and ongoing professional development, as well as for learners in different contexts with a wide range of learning needs. The models reviewed have increased learner autonomy; improved access to learning and effectively broken down many barriers to learning in a Skills for Life context that have existed for many years.

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Teachers are, by necessity, required to increase their knowledge and understanding of ICT to support learning and this will become ever more important if they are to support equality and diversity and help to reduce the digital divide. A promising, if unsurprising, conclusion is that assessors and teachers from vocational contexts have valued the opportunities to use these models to improve their confidence and therefore competence and ability to develop similar models and strategies for their learners.

The Skills for Life Support Programme project funding and grants have given the time and support for identifying opportunities in Schemes of Work where blended learning can take place; to create resources and to trial them with learners for feedback. The Action Research funding has allowed for expert practitioner support and time for collaboration between providers, which has had an impact on activity taking place and wider opportunities for learners being made available.

6. Recommendations

- Ongoing professional development and opportunities to gain confidence in using learner resources that can then be passed on to learners.
- Development of a range of teaching strategies or strategies for supporting learners that offer more flexibility and meet the needs different learning styles.
- Adding a CPD module around supporting flexible models of delivery, similar to the one used during the last phase of the Move on programmes: 'Using the Move On Learner Route to support blended learning or Using the Move On Learner Route to enhance teaching and learning and maximise learner success'.⁶
- Revising the 'Introduction to the Learner Route' power point presentation with guidance on how to use with all learners as well as for staff development.
- Focused marketing about course content for learners and information at induction on the range of models and resources to be used, with clear guidance and opportunity for discussion/clarification/support.
- Case studies to demonstrate methods and impact from the models described in this review to be placed on the Excellence Gateway, particularly those that identify overcoming barriers in offender learning⁷
- Ensuring all learners are given opportunities to access IT and support to use it effectively to support a blended learning model
- Opportunities for further support to providers to develop their own expertise in developing flexible models of delivery and blended learning approaches.

⁶ There is already an extensive range of developed and fully funded Skills for Life online learning content such as the Move On Learner Route (www.move-on.org.uk) and Skillswise (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/>).

⁷ The Move On E-Tutor Guide and Effective Practice Projects reports and information available on the Excellence Gateway

7. Resources

E-Tutor Guide

The e-tutor guide is designed to support Skills for Life practitioners and managers who are exploring ways of incorporating e-learning into their skills for Life offer; and it demonstrates how the Learner Route can be used as a flexible and creative resource to improve engagement, completion and achievement of Skills for Life learners.

http://www.move-on.org.uk/downloadsFile/downloads1596/E-tutor_guide_Oct08.pdf

Making it work: A practical guide to effective delivery of Skills for Life in workplace learning

Organised in five sections which reflect the processes a training organisation has to work through to deliver Skills for Life learning in the workplace. Chapter 3, 'Flexible ways of delivering learning' will be of particular value.

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/255255

Case Studies on the Move On website listed under A6 – 'Blended learning'

<http://www.move-on.org.uk/casestudies.asp?pagenum=2&strReferenceA=A6&strReferenceB=&strReferenceC=&>

Move On Learner Route

An interactive resource designed to help the learner prepare for the literacy and numeracy qualifications at Entry level 3, Level 1 and Level 2.

http://www.move-on.org.uk/ilr_php/literacy/welcome.php

BBC Skillswise

An interactive website for individuals to improve their maths, problem solving, ICT and communication skills. The materials are for people at Level 1 and Entry level 3.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/tutors/>

BBC RAW

An interactive website for individuals to improve their maths, communication and ICT skills. Everyday activities such as shopping on a budget are supplemented with workplace scenarios of coping with a new job or being made redundant.

www.bbc.co.uk/raw

Appendix 1

DA Briefing January 2010

Pre-event task: Flexible models of delivery

In order to respond to the Skills for Life refreshed strategy 'Changing lives', all providers are required to be more flexible:

“Delivering flexible and responsive Skills for Life provision which:

- meets learner and employer needs
- is high quality
- is delivered in innovative ways
- is embedded in wider skills provision where that is the best way to meet individual learners' needs.”

CfBT is required to write a thematic report to demonstrate how the Skills for Life Support Programme is supporting providers with flexible models of delivery, to allow individuals to learn when and where it suits them. This will include exploring what more can be made of blended learning. In particular the report will need to focus on how effectively providers are embedding the Move On approach.

As DAs or LSAs you are likely to be supporting providers to improve their flexibility and responsiveness as part of the Whole Organisation Approach and possibly on action research development projects, through CPD or PEGs.

It would also be useful to have any examples of where providers have adopted this approach in order to offer more flexible provision when working with employers. Please could you complete the following task and bring with you to the DA briefing. If you are not attending, please email your response to: kventris-field@cfbt.com

Below the task is a short questionnaire.

Pre-event Task

Attached is the document 'Making it work' which is the result of the Effective Practice Projects last year. Read the document, and in your own context, consider example/s of how flexible models of delivery are being used and how you are supporting them.

A. List some examples, using the headings provided.

B. How is the Move On approach being embedded into these approaches?

Use the E Tutor Guide on the Move On website as guidance for 'B'. The e-learning fan (also attached) is particularly helpful in identifying the models being offered along the spectrum.

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Please use the headings below when completing this task.

DA name and region:

Type of Provider (FE, Wbl, Vol/com, Offender learning focused, LDD):

Strand A1/A2/Strand B/CPD/PEG:

Description of the Model:

Rationale for the model:

Which learner group is the model aimed at? [Specifically those from priority groups – unemployed and on benefits; low skilled in employment; offenders and those supervised in the community; other groups at risk of inclusion]

Challenges:

Impact of using the model:

Recommendations/solutions:

List any useful resources that support the model:

Staff implications for delivery:

How is/are the Move On approach/resources being used to support this delivery?
You may have already answered this against some of the headings above.
(Consider staff training/CPD, engagement activities, delivery materials, Learner Route, ETG, etc).

Do you have any links with BECTA?

Appendix 2

Handout 3: The Learner Route and the e-learning fan

Learning option (including e-learning)	Elements of the model
Supporting learning	Additional activity to support in class learning, such as targeted skills development using Learner Route resources (Hot Topics or Skillswise activities).
Traditional teaching	In class activities, make full use of e-learning opportunities e.g. introduce use of Learner Route resources such as Hot Topics via interactive white board.
Blended learning	Tutor 'case loads' learner with selected activities from Learner Route, e.g. a timed practice test or Key Skills Trainer set tasks and activities.
Differentiated pace	Three hours' face-to-face induction and then learners proceed at their own pace on a set programme, possibly following a checklist of activities through the Learner Route from skills check to timed practice tests. (Less likely as a model for Skills for Life learning based on progress towards individual goals using an ILP.)
Differentiated programme	Agreed individualised programme for each learner that can be determined either face to face or remotely. Activities to address identified areas for skills development can be negotiated with individual learner. Tracking of individual progress can be electronic or paper based and is supported by the learner history facility on the Learner Route.
Anytime learning	A learner may be able to log on to the Learner Route at their PC at work, at home, in a library etc. for as little as ten minutes at a time increasing access and reducing barriers e.g. rural location or staff release issues in workplace.
Anytime anywhere learning	Learner accesses Learner Route at own pace and location. Learning can be fully directed by learner or with tutor guidance built in.

Reflective activity 3: The e-learning fan

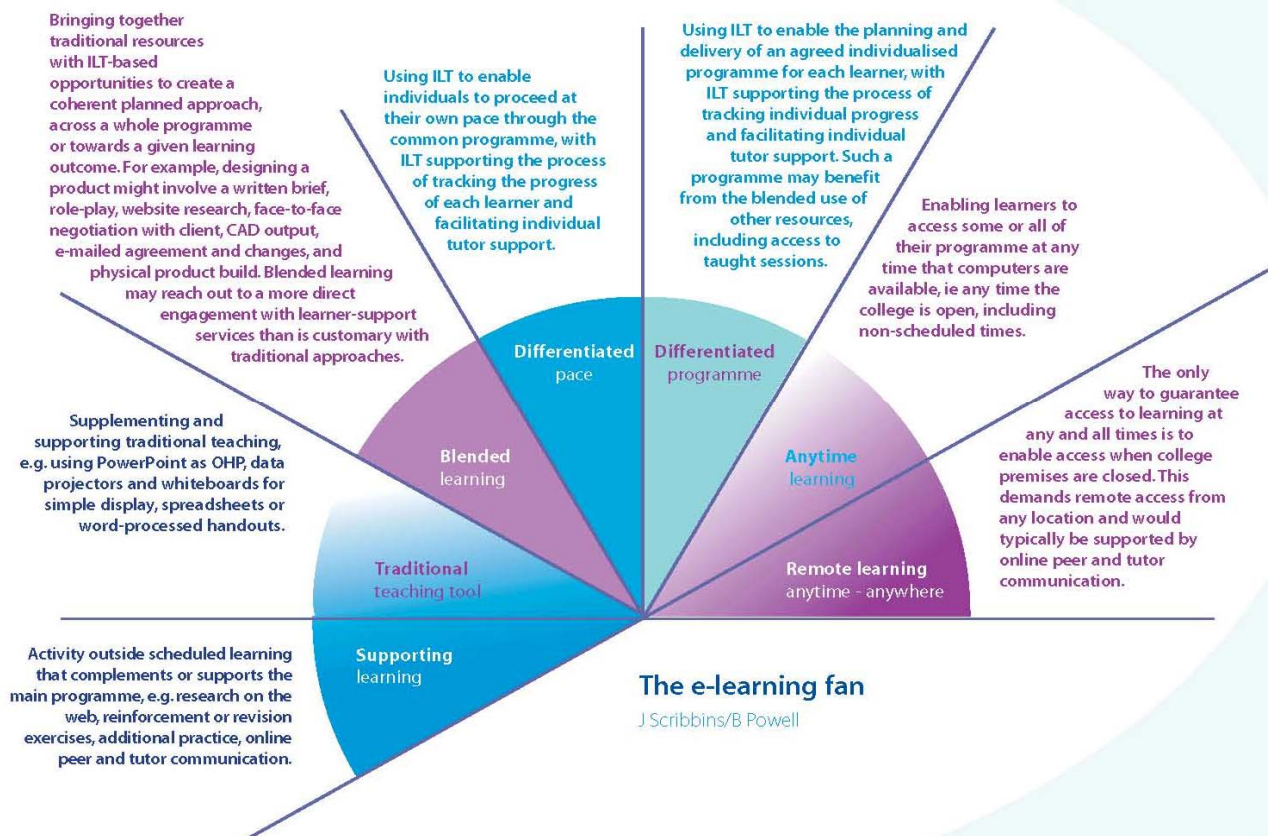
Look at the learning options and note where you or your organisation is currently using the learning model.

Learning option (including e-learning)	Currently used? Where? How?
Supporting learning	
Traditional teaching	
Blended learning	
Differentiated pace	
Differentiated programme	
Anytime learning	
Anytime anywhere learning	

Looking at the models that are not currently used, which could be implemented:

- immediately?
- in the medium term?
- in the long term?

Where and how would they be implemented? What support would be required (training, resources etc.)?



Appendix 3

Draft template for briefing sheets to be used at Skills for Life Support Programme DA briefing

Name of resource	Blended Learning and the E-Tutor Guide
Website link	http://www.move-on.org.uk/downloadsresults.asp?id=146
Guidance on use	<p>Growing interest in the literacy and numeracy teaching and learning opportunities available through the internet and by e-learning means that the E-Tutor Guide is very popular.</p> <p>This practical guide is designed to support Skills for Life practitioners and managers who are exploring ways of incorporating e-learning into their Skills for Life offer.</p> <p>It demonstrates how the Move On Learner Route can be used as a flexible and creative resource to improve engagement, completion and achievement of Skills for Life learners.</p> <p>All teaching and learning materials to support blended delivery can be accessed through the Teacher Route on the home page.</p>
Example of use	<p>Case Studies showing blended learning developments sit alongside the ETG at Stop 2 of the Teacher Route.</p> <p>For staff CPD:</p> <p>The Institute for Learning (IfL) recognises that: ‘keeping up to date with developments in technologies and using them effectively for teaching and learning is an ongoing activity’ – use the ETG and LR as part of CPD development.</p>
Notes	

Appendix 4

Using the learner route to support blended learning

Sophie works for a building materials company. Her job has developed over the last two years from picking orders to include handling some telephone enquiries from builders when her supervisor is absent. She is currently taking an NVQ in Warehousing at Level 2 and realises that she may have opportunities for promotion in the future. Sophie is prepared to develop her skills further. During an induction session, her numeracy skills were assessed as a mixture of Entry 3 and Level 1. She is thinking about working on these skills as part of the programme.

She says that she began to find maths difficult in secondary school and that she never really grasped fractions and wants to brush up her multiplication skills. She is conscious of not being very confident when working out quantities of materials. She is reluctant to commit to much more time away from work but knows she may need to attend some sessions with a tutor. She has a computer and internet access at home and is willing to work on her skills in this way.

Some roles of those responding to Sophie's e-learning requirements

The role of the vocational trainer/assessor may be:

At the start:

- Carry out the initial interview and skills check
- Motivate Sophie to see the link between her numeracy and workplace skills development and gaining a National Certificate in numeracy
- Identify numeracy skills which will be covered because naturally occurring in the vocational programme
- Provide Sophie with the opportunity to try out the learner route

The role of the Skills for Life specialist may be:

- Organise which elements of numeracy might be naturally covered by the vocational assessor and which need to be covered by the SfL specialist
- Select Sophie's initial and diagnostic activities and draw up her learning plan
- Take Sophie through the details of this and make sure targets in terms of skills and context are outlined and agreed
- Map her ILP to the Learner Route and other activities and resources and agree shorter- and longer-term activity. Show Sophie how to use the Planning Your Learning record in the Quick Links section of the Learner Route
- Ensure Sophie has enough ICT skills and confidence to get the most out of the Learner Route
- Brief the vocational assessor and share Sophie's ILP and activity plan
- Set up a communication link between voc. assessor, the SfL tutor and the employer
- Set the first tutorial date



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At ongoing tutorials:

- Check Sophie's perception of progress, teach specific areas of numeracy, formatively assess skills, plan further learning
- Agree future activities and access further on-screen and downloadable resources
- Signpost to sample test activity
- Enter Sophie for the national qualification when she is ready

Any others?

A sample of Sophie's e-learning

Sample target skills to be developed – N1/E3. 4, 5 and 6

N2/E3. 1, 2, and 3

MSS1/E3.5, 6 and 7

Some learning resources which Sophie might use, from the Entry 3 maths learner route:

- Quick Links – All about the Learner Route
- Quick links – Planning your Learning
- Quick Links – Pointers to Test Success
- Quick Links – All about Hot Topics
- Downloadable resources from the Other Resources section of the E3 Learner Route
 - [Multiplication: Learning and remembering times tables](#)
 - [Multiplication strategies](#)
 - [Multiplication: Stacking and packing](#)
- Hot Topic Fractions
- BBC Skillswise E3 Multiplication and fraction sections accessed from the link in Other Resources
- Hot Topic Length, Weight and Capacity
- Mini-task and progress check on calculating weights
- Sample E3 numeracy end tests

Discussion point

How might you introduce the learner route as part of your work with providers?

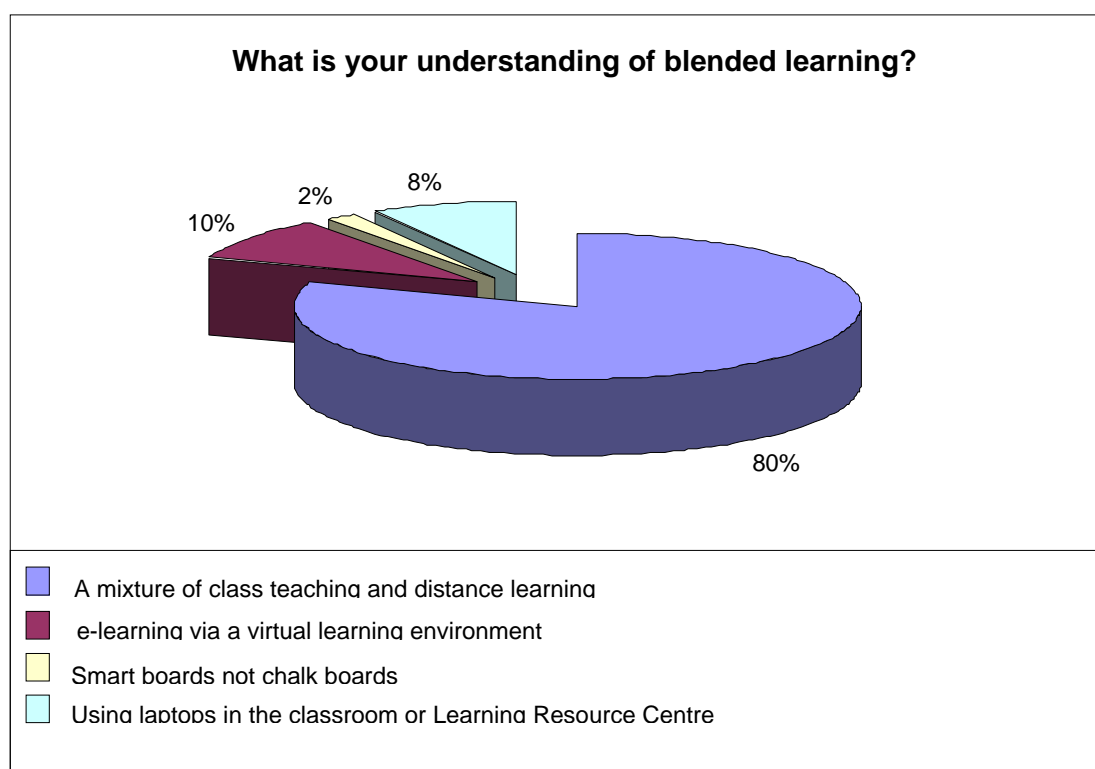


Appendix 5

Report on 'Ask the Conference' (Skills for Life conferences Autumn 2009)

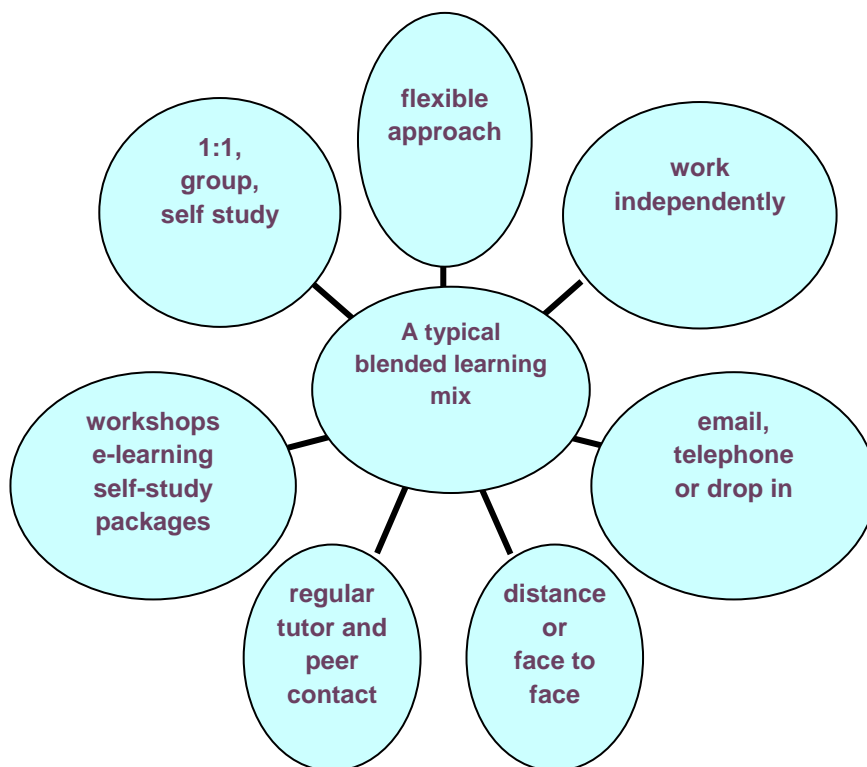
During each of the conference opening sessions, participants were invited to vote on the questions listed below and the results from all three conferences were pooled. The responses across the conferences displayed a great deal of consistency in terms of answers.

The responses and comments below were published in the February 2010 *Update* magazine.

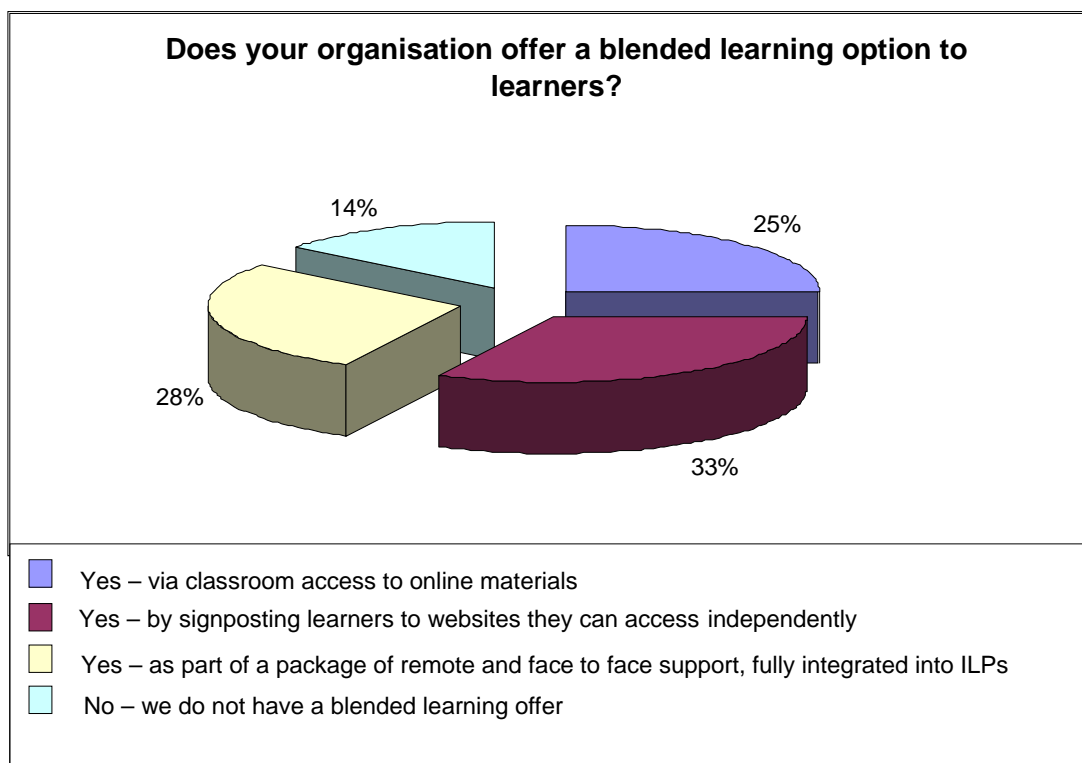


There are many definitions of blended learning – all include a combination of the use of ILT (Information Learning Technology) and elements of learner support (Skills for Life tutor and/or peer support). This could mean on the one hand using laptops linked to learning content in a virtual learning environment (VLE), or accessing information at home.

Blended Learning: what it might be



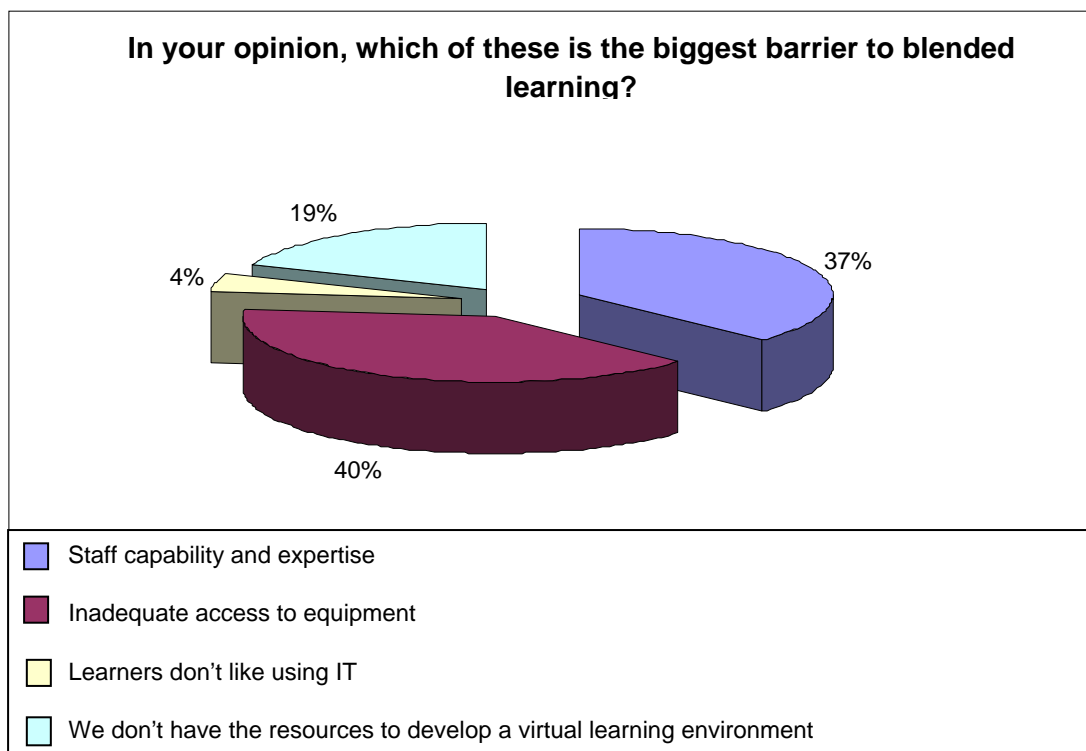
Mixing or 'blending' the media gives variety to the learner. It supports a broader range of learning styles. Importantly, it also supports the development of ICT skills alongside literacy and numeracy skills. Furthermore, it provides greater flexibility of provision for the learner.



Skills for Life Support Programme

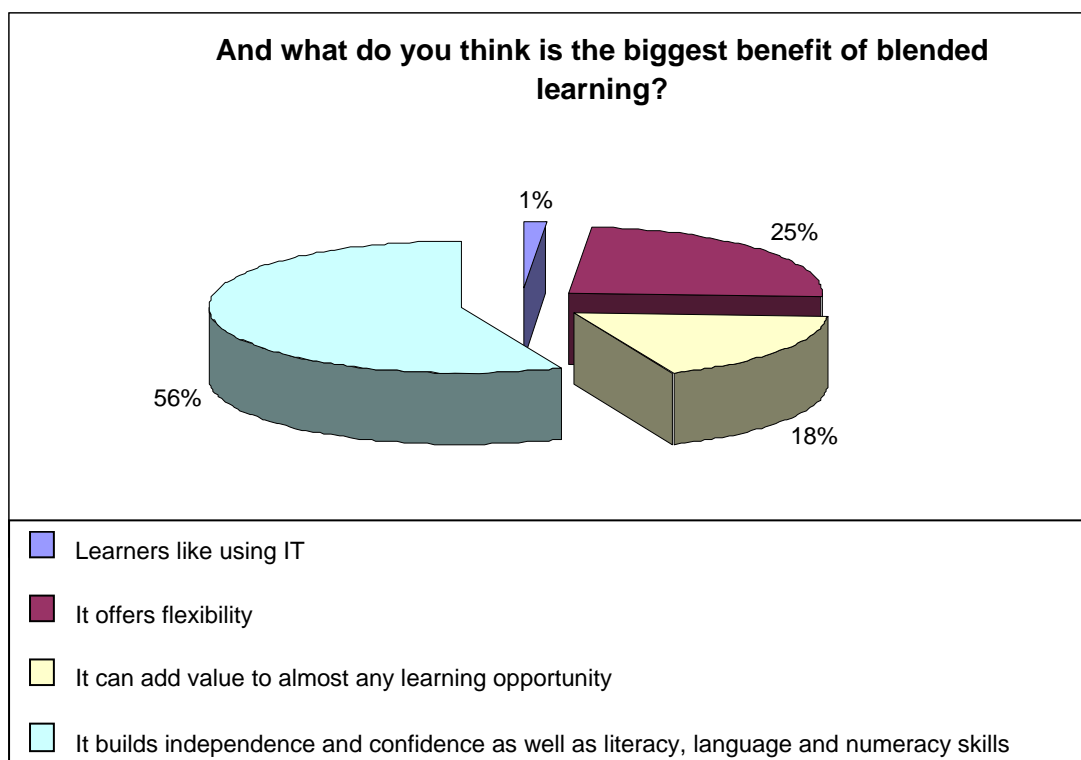
The list of options for this question was by no means exhaustive. The blend is as varied, potentially, as the learner audience.

It was interesting to see the responses across the conferences. Only 14% of respondents did not have a blended offer for Skills for Life learners. Variations of answers 1 and 2 were the most popular models currently used but answer 3 reflects best practice where the blend is fully integrated into the learner's ILP.



Identified barriers related either to ILT or staff capability and expertise. This is clearly an area that could benefit from investment in CPD as staff rather than learners appear to need greater awareness and confidence with ILT. Concerns about access to equipment and having the resources to develop a VLE may be based on a perception that developing a blended model requires a high degree of resources. Yet time and money spent on developing VLEs can be a waste if what is available already is not used to the full.

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56% of respondents saw the value that blended learning gave to developing independent learners.

In addition to this, providers taking part in a recent Skills for Life Improvement Programme's flexible delivery project were confident that involvement would lead to an increase in student numbers and improved retention and achievement. Evidence from the project's report *Developing Models of Flexible delivery of Skills for Life Provision* (Hinman and Fletcher August 2008)⁸ shows that providers started to turn perceived barriers into action points. Involvement 'raised awareness of the issues across the organisation and enabled them (*as providers*) to make step changes in their approach to flexibility.'

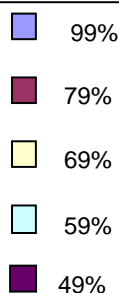
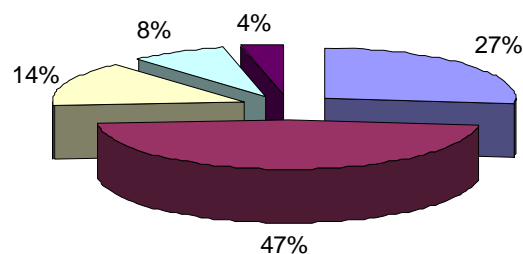
The report goes on to highlights benefits through both qualitative and quantitative project feedback such as:

- It allowed access to literacy/numeracy for learners who otherwise would certainly not have been given time in the workplace.
- They liked the fact that the flexible resources for Skills for Life also enabled them to produce evidence for their NVQ.
- An achievement rate of 88% for City and Islington's Train to Gain cohort compared with 60% on previous programmes.

8

<http://sflip.excellencegateway.org.uk/PDF/Flexible%20Models%20of%20Delivery%20final%20report.pdf>

Currently, nearly 1m people are brushing up their skills online using the Move On Learner Route. In a survey, what % of learners said that they would welcome extra tutor support whilst learning?



The final question gave the chance to stress that learners would welcome a blended approach to learning. A large percentage of conference delegates knew the correct answer – 79% of learners surveyed on the Move On Learner Route positively welcomed the idea of extra tutor support.

The conclusion is quite simple. Learners like a blend.

Conference Workshops

In addition to the 'Ask the conference' sessions, there were two workshops focusing on blended learning and flexible models of delivery at the Skills for Life conferences:

1. 'Effective blended learning for the individual using the Move On Learner Route' focused on the personalisation of learning, based on a successful model at Northern College, a residential college for adults.

Feedback from the workshops stated that it gave: '*Lots of practical tips for implementing the ideas in a variety of contexts/settings*', '*Some pockets of inspiration*' and '*Very practical*'.

2. 'Flexible models of delivery: designing and managing blended learning delivery' was presented by NRDC and had a 90% rating of excellent or good. '*Gave innovative ideas about blended learning – something that could be taken away and implemented*', '*Has given me new ideas and inspiration for how to develop my Moodle online learning site.*'