

# e-learning in the workplace

a union negotiation and implementation guide



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# 1 Introduction

Employers are increasingly introducing e-learning to the workplace, and their plans make it central to their internal training delivery, either now or in the future. This is particularly the case for larger enterprises, which usually have significant IT infrastructure that they can exploit for delivering e-learning to employees.

This guide is aimed mainly at union negotiators, and others in the trade union movement who have a stake in work-based learning. It provides information and advice to help them represent union members' interests during consultations or negotiations with employers about the introduction of e-learning at work by the employer.

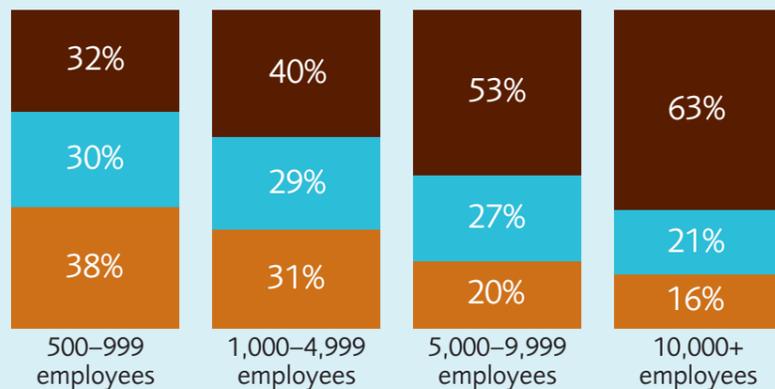
Unions, the TUC, and the Scottish TUC are also active in promoting e-learning in the workplace, mainly in partnership with Ufi/learnirect or the Scottish University for Industry. However, the main focus of the guide is how unions respond to employer-led e-learning initiatives, rather than how they develop their own.

The guide covers the basics of what e-learning is and what employers and others see as its attractions. It describes different ways in which employers might choose to implement e-learning, together with their implications for the workforce. It is illustrated with examples and case studies of how unions and union officers are engaging with e-learning in their workplaces.

The guide identifies a range of potential issues that may arise with the implementation of e-learning, including:

- **advice** – making sure members of the workforce are well informed about the best learning options for them;
- **access** – ensuring everyone can take part in e-learning, regardless of working patterns, physical, sensory or cognitive impairments, environmental or language constraints;

**Proportion of organisations using/planning to use/with no intention of using e-learning**



Source: *Embedding e-learning in large organisations*, a report commissioned by **learnirect**, available from <http://mmdesign.co.uk/research/index.htm>

- **terms and conditions** – ensuring that members of the workforce doing e-learning can take an appropriate share of the time and expenses of learning;
- **support** – understanding minimum and ideal support arrangements to deliver effective learning;
- **control** – ensuring that individual employees can make informed choices about what and when to learn;
- **quality** – ensuring that what is on offer is educationally effective.

The guide gives brief advice on how to assess which issues are most important in their workplace and how these issues might be successfully addressed. Given the lack of a wide range of precedents on which to build, the guide does not include detailed pro forma agreements.

The guide does not repeat in any detail general guidance about the use of ICT (e.g. health and safety issues associated with computer use) but does include signposts to where this guidance can be found. Nor does it aim to provide a comprehensive coverage of all approaches to e-learning.

The guide is illustrated with case studies and examples, and contains references to further reading.

## E-learning – what is it?

E-learning enables people to take up courses at a time, place and pace that suits their needs. It is called 'e-learning' because it involves using technology to deliver learning and improve the learning experience.

Employers are increasingly using e-learning as a means of providing work-related training to the workforce, and employees may also use e-learning to pursue their own learning goals.

*In general* e-learning allows learners to schedule their learning time flexibly, at a time and place that suits them. And in general the learners access the course materials and support via the internet. Other technologies such as CD-ROM, DVD and Interactive TV may also be used.

### Further reading

*Logging onto Learning – the union contribution to learnirect centres in the Trade Union Hub.*  
Available from [www.learningservices.org.uk/tuhub](http://www.learningservices.org.uk/tuhub)

There are many different approaches and styles of e-learning. For example, quite a few large organisations have devised 'blended learning' programmes, which combine traditional face-to-face training sessions with flexible e-learning materials, so that learners can use one approach to reinforce the other.

## Why employers are choosing e-learning

Throughout the developed world, employers are making increasing use of e-learning. For example, the CIPD's 2004 Training and Development Survey reported that 'despite its relatively recent entry, e-learning appears to be making some significant headway', showing a much larger net increase in usage than formal classroom-based training.

If you will be working with employers on how e-learning might be implemented in a workplace, it helps to understand the issues that may be driving organisations to consider e-learning.

Often the drivers for e-learning will be complex and will combine a range of factors including:

- reducing costs;
- getting learning to employees more quickly;
- making learning programmes more standardised and controllable
- increasing the organisation's general sophistication in using ICT (including better exploitation of assets like company intranets);
- needing to prove to an external agency that staff have received required training;
- widening access to course provision for shift workers and others with non-standard work patterns.

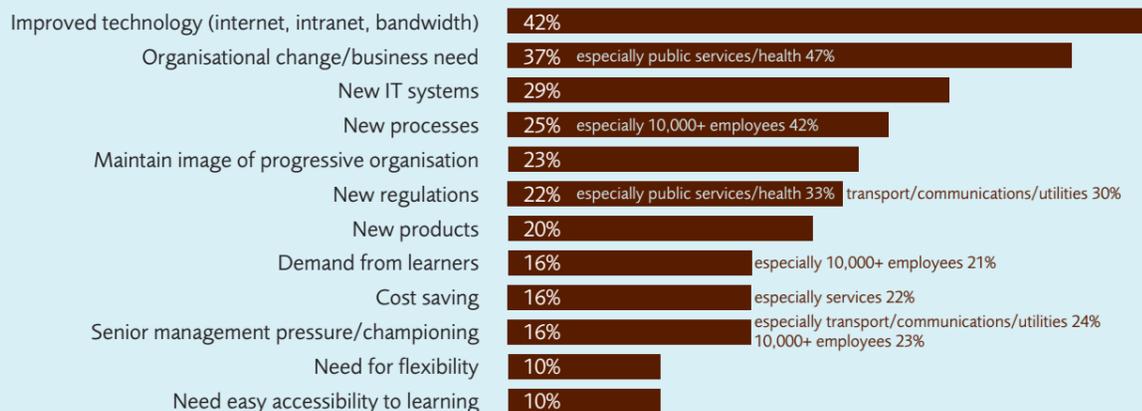
In the NHS, a large proportion of staff in nearly every health service establishment will need to be able to deal with electronic patient records. E-learning provides a feasible way of delivering standardised ICT training to a large number of employees, as well as keeping track on which staff have completed their training.

*'One of the joys of e-learning is the removal of barriers for those who cannot attend normal courses. On our ECDL course 3 out of 14 work shifts, yet with group email they are feeling just as engaged as everyone else on the course.'*

Michael, Development Manager,  
Magazine and Newspaper Printing Business.

For obvious reasons, the workplaces of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency are spread right round the country. In the past training for new systems and procedures was organised through 'roadshow' training programmes that visited several locations in turn. This could be slow and costly. Compared with this, e-learning offers the promise of a cost-effective and immediate means of making training available across the country. As all 1,200 employees have access to the Agency's intranet, e-learning can be provided as an extra menu item on this system.

### Key drivers for adopting e-learning



Source: *Embedding e-learning in large organisations*, a report commissioned by **learndirect**, available from <http://mmdesign.co.uk/research/index.htm>

Government policy encourages e-learning in several ways, including its support for the **learndirect** service. The TUC published its own Online Learning Strategy in 2003, which aims to offer all its core courses via e-learning to any learner who chooses this method of study.

The Royal Mail has delivered 22,000 home PCs to postal workers as part of a joint initiative with an e-learning supplier.

Their 'Learning for All' scheme takes advantage of tax breaks provided under the government's Home Computing Initiative (HCI), which seeks to encourage IT literacy among UK citizens.

The Royal Mail's supplier provides employees signing up for the scheme with a fully installed and supported internet-ready PC in return for modest weekly payments.

Source: news story from vnunet.com, 17 September 2004

Employers in white-collar sectors are gradually building more features into their organisations' network or intranet. As personnel records, appraisal forms and personal development plans are stored and processed via an intranet, it is a small step to provide training courses or other learning materials online. HR managers may then be interested in monitoring learners progress towards achieving development goals. In this case e-learning may be used as an adjunct to a 'performance management' initiative within the organisation.

## The vital components

To provide effective e-learning, organisations need to have access to several of the following components:

- course materials or 'learning content' – this is the instructional material, such as text, audio, video and interactive materials that is provided via the internet, DVDs etc;
- ICT infrastructure – the central computers where the materials are stored and the personal computers that employees use to access them (these could all be owned by the employer, or it could be that the materials are on the internet and employees access them from work or home PCs);
- learning administration and management – the processes and systems that allow learners to register for an e-learning course, tutors or managers to track learners' progress through the course;
- learner support – including automatic help and feedback, as well as messages passed between learners and tutors or between learners and each other;
- assessment and testing – the systems to enable learners to take an online test or exam.

Organisations have considerable flexibility over how they combine these components. At one extreme, the organisation may come to an arrangement with an

e-learning provider or broker such as **learndirect** (either through a corporate agreement or via a union and the Trades Union hub). **learndirect** provides materials, learning management support and most of the infrastructure needed: learners access the courses over the internet from work or home PCs, or from a **learndirect** centre.

### Further reading

**learndirect** website – [www.learndirect.co.uk/aboutus/](http://www.learndirect.co.uk/aboutus/)

**learndirect** Scotland website – [www.lds4partners.com/](http://www.lds4partners.com/)

TUC Trade Union Hub website – [www.learningservices.org.uk/theme/index.cfm?theme=theme-27](http://www.learningservices.org.uk/theme/index.cfm?theme=theme-27)

At the other extreme, the organisation may buy in, or design, its own learning materials and learning management system. It could run these exclusively over its own intranet, with support provided in-house. This option is probably only within the means of very large organisations with extensive in-house ICT and HR resources.

Between these extremes there is a mix of alternative approaches, each of which may involve different kinds of agreements with suppliers. One other key factor is whether the course materials are bought 'off the shelf' from suppliers' catalogues of courses, or whether they are designed from scratch to a bespoke specification.

Table1

Table 1 shows some examples of different approaches, together with the agreements the organisation will need to make and some of the issues that unions may want to check. Details of these issues are in the next section.

E-learning supply	Key agreements	Likely issues
All in-house	Changes to terms of in-house training staff	Training needs analysis
Systems and management in-house, materials bought off the shelf	Agreement with materials supplier, including any ongoing support	Learner support arrangements
Systems and management in-house, materials commissioned to bespoke specification	Agreement with materials designer and developer	Accessibility
All provision outsourced to commercial supplier	Agreement with supplier covering all provision	Learner support
Provision through <b>learndirect</b>	Agreement with <b>learndirect</b> about range of courses included	Accessibility of materials
		Training needs analysis
		Learner support arrangements
		Accessibility
		Involving the TUC Trade Union Hub

Often e-learning is not developed separately, but alongside some other organisational change initiatives. In this case the contracting and agreements may be part of a wider set of negotiations.

In a major multinational financial services company, extensive use is made of e-learning to deliver in-house training for staff who are required by law to have received training about particular financial products prior to selling them or providing advice about them. The company needs to be able to prove to the Financial Services Authority that staff have received training, so the e-learning system keep detailed, auditable records of which member of staff has been trained in which products, and when.

A public sector agency is commissioning a major new IT system that will become central to how the it conducts its core business. The agency invites suppliers to tender not just for designing and building the IT system, but for a suite of e-learning materials and support that can be delivered alongside the system to help staff learn how to use it. It is possible that the main IT supplier could subcontract the e-learning development to another specialist supplier.

The Land Registry agency uses 'blended' learning, where staff learn partly through computer-based training modules at their own desks, and partly through face-to-face sessions in a study area. There are assessments at the end of each unit. Changes to the learning materials reflect changes in the law affecting land registry, and are written by staff internal to the agency.

Several hundred teachers from all of Scotland's 32 Education Authorities have enrolled on a modular online education programme leading, over a period of years, to Chartered Teacher status, provided by the University of Paisley in partnership with the Educational Institute of Scotland (the main Scottish trade union for school and FE teachers).

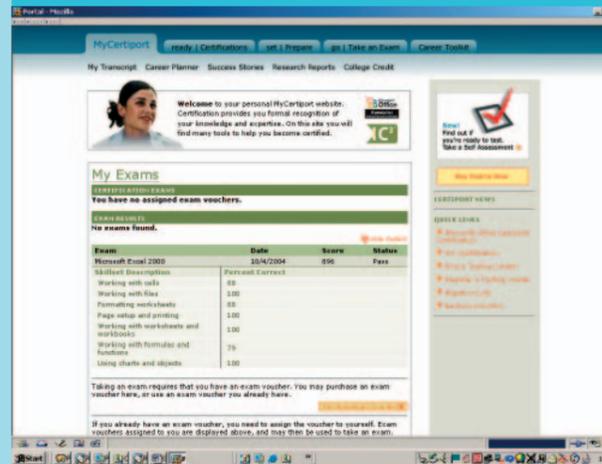
Members of staff at Remploy's Pontefract site have become the first people in the country to take an online literacy test at their workplace.

Ten employees at the West Yorkshire factory sat the 60 minute test which leads to a Certificate in Adult Literacy Level One. They completed the online test in a meeting room on the site using a mobile testing unit developed by Ufi Ltd.

These mobile units are networks of laptops which an invigilator can set up at any suitable venue before overseeing the tests.

Source: Reach Newsletter, July-August 2004 issue, from Ufi Ltd

Results of an online examination provided by Certiport, one of several suppliers of online systems that aim to accredit learning 'so that learners have verification of their skills and can progress in their careers'.



Thinking about your own workplace, do you know who is responsible for delivering each of the components of e-learning, and what union agreements might relate to each of these?

For learner administration and support there may be shared responsibilities. For example:

- learning centre staff may be responsible for enrolling learners and helping them get started,
- the learner database may be provided by an external company, and
- learner help during the course could be provided by a specialist tutor or automatically built into the course materials by their designers.

## A trade union approach

Trade unions generally support better education and training provision at the workplace, and there are many examples of trade unions taking the initiative in getting employers to make improvements. Whoever is initiating change, there are some underlying principles that this guide takes as read. These include:

- fairness** – learning needs should be fairly identified and opportunities should be fairly and openly allocated, taking account of the whole workforce, not just those in high skill or high status jobs;
- influence** – provision of training and education at the workplace is a legitimate matter for trade union involvement;
- choice** – individual employees should be able to make active choices about their learning, rather than be limited to a narrow set of options determined solely by the employer;
- partnership** – unions and employers have a joint interest in improving organisational performance, with workplace learning playing a central part in this;
- membership involvement** – decisions about workplace learning have a long term effect on individual members, so unions members should be involved in decision-making.

E-learning component	Responsibility of/provided by	Relevant union agreements or employer policies, if any
Course materials		
ICT infrastructure		
Learning administration and management		
Learner support		
Assessment and testing		

# 2 Implementing e-learning

E-learning can have a positive or negative impact on employees. Table 2 suggests examples of both kinds.

E-learning can have a positive or a negative impact on areas such as work/life balance, depending on how it is approached. The flexible scheduling offered by e-learning can give employees more control over how they organise their days and thus improve their scope to balance the pressures of work with the rest of their lives. In some instances, however, employees may feel under pressure to do e-learning in their own time, rather than work time, which would disrupt the balance.

A straw poll asked trades unionists and managers involved in e-learning to rank the issues they thought it was most important for organisations to deal with when implementing e-learning. The result of this poll, based on 40 responses, listed the following issues:

- ▶ support during learning;
- ▶ analysis of workforce's training needs;
- ▶ information, advice and guidance prior to learning;
- ▶ accessibility of learning to complete workforce (including those with special needs);
- ▶ suitable environment for learning;
- ▶ implications for people with flexible working patterns (part-time, shift workers etc);
- ▶ paid time for workforce learning;
- ▶ selection of off-the-shelf e-learning materials;
- ▶ development process for bespoke e-learning materials;
- ▶ health and safety implications; and
- ▶ use of home or mobile equipment for learning.

Table 2

Positive Impact	Negative Impact
Part-time and shift working employees have much better access to learning opportunities.	The 'learning divide' at work could increase if people who already have strong ICT skills are more likely to take up e-learning opportunities.
There is greater scope to address Skills for Life issues in the workforce.	The learning experience could become more impersonal with less individualised support to cater for different learning styles and needs.
A much wider range of courses than could be provided by an organisation's training department can be made available.	e-learning may not be suitable for some subjects, particularly those which require hands-on practice.
There is greater scope for individual employees to make choices about their learning.	The employer may use e-learning as a way of transferring responsibility for learning onto individuals and away from the organisation, and, possibly as a way of encouraging workers to study in their own time.

## Learner support

### Why it's important

*'E-learning can be more flexible for our shift workers therefore its important for us to ensure that that they have access to provision, both in the workplace or through lending equipment for them to use at home. We operate a learndirect centre in partnership with our local Adult Education College, so staff can use facilities there as another option. We've found that running cohorts on courses provides a level of peer support which learners find useful. This supportive learning environment has also helped identify basic skills needs within the workforce and we are planning to run some numeracy classes in the near future.'*

Michael, Development Manager, Magazine and Newspaper Printing Business

The amount of support needed for e-learning depends on both the nature of the course and the learners. Different courses cover different skills and knowledge, some of which are easier to cover with e-learning than others, and the support requirements will vary accordingly. Also e-learning is itself a kind of skill, and people who have less experience of it are likely to need more support than seasoned veterans.

It is very important to ensure that adequate support is available to learners doing e-learning. There is nothing worse for learners' motivation, satisfaction and confidence than being stuck alone at a keyboard not knowing how to progress through the course. So lack of timely and effective support can end up putting people off learning, which is in no-one's interest.

### What's at stake

Learners are likely to need different types of support as they work through an e-learning course.

- ▶ Support for working through the course itself – which could mean the basics of logging in and getting under way or navigating between sections.
- ▶ Help in understanding the concepts of the course – for example, when a learner gets stuck and cannot figure out the ideas that the materials are trying to communicate.
- ▶ Hints for improving performance on tasks – as when the course provides learners with the chance to practise skills and they want suggestions for how to do better.
- ▶ Support for discussing learning points with others – some courses invite learners to communicate online with tutors or with other learners, and they may need help with this.

In e-learning, there may be several ways in which support is provided:

- ▶ **automatically** – the designers of the e-learning course materials may anticipate some of the support that learners will need and build in automatic responses to those needs;
- ▶ **in learning centres** – staff in learning centres may be on hand to help with general questions about doing an online course, though they are unlikely to be able to answer specialist questions;

- ▶ **by online tutors** – in some e-learning courses, trained online tutors sometimes guide learners through the materials and review their work using email;
- ▶ **through other learners** – online 'conferences' and bulletin boards allow learners to exchange ideas, problems and solutions with each other.

Several factors make automatic support attractive to people who commission and provide e-learning: it is usually cheaper than other methods, and it is available around the clock at no extra cost. Automatic solutions are generally less flexible and less friendly than human support, so in most cases it's a good idea to have a mix of both.

### What you can do about it

In 2003 a new British Standard, BS 8426: *A code of practice for e-support in e-learning systems*, was produced to provide recommendations for how learner support should be provided in e-learning. For any case of e-learning, it is possible to check whether the provision conforms to this British Standard. The standard is also written in such a way that organisations commissioning e-learning can ask their suppliers to ensure that what they provide conforms to the standard.

#### Further reading

BS 8426, *A code of practice for e-support in e-learning systems*. Available via <http://bsonline.techindex.co.uk> (current price £94 for non-members of BSI, £47 for members)<sup>1</sup>

Like most British Standards, BS 8426 is written in fairly formal language and is not an exciting read. But it is worth trying to pick out the main points from it, since these cover many issues to do with the progress and well-being of learners on e-learning courses.

<sup>1</sup> Many organisations are members of BSI, or are members of trade associations which are. Some organisations subscribe to the entire BSI standards catalogue and can access individual standards at no extra cost.

The sorts of questions you might want to ask when e-learning is being implemented in your workplace include:

- a) What learner support is on offer, or planned, to help people progress with e-learning?
- b) What support do union members, and other staff, feel they need? Have they already been consulted?
- c) Do the support arrangements make provision for learners with special needs? (see also Accessibility, below)?
- d) Is there an appropriate mix of automated and human support to ensure that learners get the help they need when they need it?
- e) Are managers aware of BS 8426 and, if so, what steps are they taking to conform to its recommendations?
- f) Can you get access to BS 8426 yourself, possibly via your union, to familiarise yourself with which recommendations apply to your workplace?
- g) Have online tutors been trained in how to tutor online?
- h) Will people learn alone, or will they be organised into a group or 'cohort' with people in the cohort able to provide each other with some support and motivation?
- i) How will the employer react to a member of staff for whom e-learning is not suitable? (For example if she does not have the necessary ICT skills.)

## Analysis of training needs

### Why it's important

A sound analysis and understanding of training needs is key to ensuring that e-learning does what it's supposed to do.

The importance of training needs analysis for e-learning is no less than for any other training initiative. In fact it is arguably more important, for two reasons. Firstly e-learning has the potential to give learners more control over what they learn, so a well-conducted training needs analysis will enable learners to express

choices and preferences. Secondly learners also have to have the skills to learn effectively online.

Training needs analysis helps the organisation by ensuring that their investment in e-learning is well-targeted and effective in getting the right skills on the job. It helps union members and all staff by ensuring that no-one is left out by e-learning: the learning on offer should fill the gap between existing skills and the new skills that learners want to acquire. In this sense, getting a thorough understanding of training needs is a win-win approach.

Analysing training needs often also helps identify issues in job design and organisational factors that affect the smooth introduction of changes in the workplace.

### What's at stake

Training needs analysis involves:

- 1 **a clear understanding of the future 'desired' functioning of the workplace and the skills this will need, and**
- 2 **a sound knowledge of existing skills and knowledge in the workforce, leading to**
- 3 **an analysis of the gap between these two.**

The first of these steps is often the most complex to do well, because it depends on a picture of the workplace that does not exist yet. Frequently there is a tendency – particularly with the introduction of new IT systems, for example – to focus on the obvious 'surface' skills that will be needed. This could mean the ability just to operate a new IT system, and work through its features screen-by-screen. However, many complex systems also have subtle but deeper impacts on job design and how co-workers co-ordinate their work with each other. Training needs analysis should aim to assess all these changes on how people work, and what skill gaps there may be as a result.

Step 2 above is also important. New ways of working may expose skill gaps that were hidden previously. For example, new systems may require people to read more complex instructions, or perform mathematical operations, so that people with poor literacy or numeracy skills will not be able to get by effectively, when previously they were able to. Training needs

analysis needs to be comprehensive and candid to ensure that it does not miss these issues.

To repeat an earlier point: people need particular skills (familiarity with computers, the internet, and associated literacy) to be able to learn effectively with e-learning. Any analysis should also take this into account.

### What you can do about it

The sorts of questions you might want to ask when e-learning is being implemented in your workplace include:

- a) What training needs analysis has been done, or is planned?
- b) What areas of skills needs has the analysis concentrated on (or what areas will it concentrate on)?
- c) What, if any, changes to job and organisational design are anticipated, and how will this affect skills needs?
- d) Do you, and other union members, feel that the coverage of the workforce's existing skill needs has been sufficiently comprehensive and candid?
- e) Is the organisation committed to addressing all the skills needs that are identified (including, say, Skills for Life)?

## Information, advice and guidance (IAG)

### Why it's important

It is now generally recognised that IAG is a key element in the provision of successful training or education, and that effective IAG increases people's chances of undertaking learning, and of achieving qualifications. IAG comprises three elements. These are:

- ▶ **information** – neutral information about options;
- ▶ **advice** – impartial one-to-one explanation of the information and how to use it;

- ▶ **guidance** – professional help concerning interests, goals, and potential, from a qualified guidance practitioner.

*'Our experience suggests that appropriate advice and guidance is crucial to the success of e-learning programmes, along with an effective induction and tutor support.'*

Michael, Development Manager,  
Magazine and Newspaper Printing Business.

Provision of IAG is primarily the responsibility of agencies like LSCs, learndirect, and the Jobcentre Plus, and in England, the LSC is responsible for the overall management of IAG services. However, in unionised workplaces, Union Learning Representatives often have an important role in the provision of information and advice.

### Further reading

*Information, Advice and Guidance for Adults – The National Policy Framework and Action Plan*  
Available from [www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/iag](http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/iag)

### What's at stake

A detailed treatment of IAG issues is beyond the scope of this guide. But there are two particular reasons why specific information and advice concerning e-learning should be available if e-learning is introduced at work.

Firstly, most people are not yet familiar enough with e-learning to know what it will involve. For example, they may need advice on the level of ICT skills needed to take part in a course by e-learning.

Secondly, in some organisations, e-learning provision is still the preserve of enthusiasts, who may see it as such a 'cure all' that they may gloss over the demands which it places on learners.

## What you can do about it

Prior to e-learning being implemented the employer's plans for IAG relating to e-learning should be scrutinised. This is particularly important when the e-learning is not being provided through a complete service such as learndirect with whom a wide range of IAG issues will be normally be covered as part of the service.

The sorts of questions you might want to ask when e-learning is being implemented include the following.

- a) Will clear information be available about each e-learning course, summarising things like the:
  - ▶ nature of the course?
  - ▶ time commitment it involves?
  - ▶ ICT skills required?
  - ▶ learner support which will be available (see also 2.2 Learner support)?
  - ▶ minimum technical specification for accessing the course from home (if the course can be accessed over the internet from home)?
  - ▶ way the course is assessed?
- b) What will be the a process for judging or assessing a learner's suitability for the course before they start it?
- c) Will impartial advice about non e-learning alternatives be available?

## Accessibility

### Why it's important

E-learning involves learners in:

- ▶ accessing course materials through a device such as a PC;
- ▶ using software to do things like submit work, download files, communicate with a tutor, browse the World Wide Web, or interact with a learning administration system.

The design both of the materials and of the software can dramatically affect the ease of use, or 'accessibility', of the e-learning, especially for people with disabilities such as poor eyesight.

### What's at stake

In the same way that a badly designed building will stop a person with impaired mobility from using it, badly designed e-learning materials and e-learning systems will prevent some people from participating.

For this reason technical and legal standards and guidelines have been brought in covering accessibility. The most important of these is the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which describe how to make web pages accessible to people with disabilities.

Technical guidelines such as WCAG sit within a legal framework covering disability discrimination, of which the most important parts are:

- ▶ the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) – which from 1st October 2004, made it unlawful for any employer (apart from the armed forces) **of any size** to discriminate against a disabled person because of their disability;
- ▶ the 2001 Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) – which removes the previous exemption of education from the DDA, making it unlawful to discriminate against disabled students in publicly funded education.

### Further reading

Disability Rights Commission website – [www.drc-gb.org/knowyourrights/index.asp](http://www.drc-gb.org/knowyourrights/index.asp)

Disability – what the law says – [www.disability.gov.uk/law.html](http://www.disability.gov.uk/law.html)

Accessibility and E-learning, from – [www.epic.co.uk/content/resources/white\\_papers/Accessibility.htm](http://www.epic.co.uk/content/resources/white_papers/Accessibility.htm)

Unfortunately, some suppliers of e-learning software and some developers of e-learning materials have been slow to realise that making e-learning accessible to people with disabilities is, effectively, a legal requirement; and the people who sell content and systems to businesses may lack awareness of these issues.

People with disabilities often use assistive technology to help them adapt standard technologies to meet their needs. E-learning systems and materials should be designed so that they work effectively with established assistive technologies.

### What you can do about it

Here are some issues to take up and questions to ask in the course of discussions about accessibility issues.

- a) Do web-based e-learning materials and systems conform to the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines?
- b) Have people with disabilities in the workplace been consulted about the design and layout of learning centres, and the accessibility of e-learning materials?
- c) Has appropriate assistive technology been installed on the PCs in the learning centre, and have staff been trained in its use?
- d) Are staff in learning centres aware of accessibility as an issue in e-learning?

### Further reading

TechDis aims to be the leading educational advisory service, working across the UK, in the fields of accessibility and inclusion. TechDis aims, through the use of technology, to enhance provision for disabled students and staff in higher, further (including adult and community learning provision) and specialist education. There are extensive, freely available resources on the TechDis website. TechDis is currently somewhat restricted in the extent to which it can respond to direct enquiries concerning publicly funded work-based learning, although this situation may change – [www.techdis.ac.uk](http://www.techdis.ac.uk)

## Environment for learning

### Why it's important

*'People learn better in a quiet undisturbed environment. Even desk-based staff come into our learning centre, because the conditions are right.'*

Malcolm, USDAW rep, retail industry fulfilment factory

E-learning is like other learning. To succeed, learners need an environment in which they can concentrate, in comfort, free from distractions, with convenient access to any relevant books, manuals, or paper-based course materials, and with any necessary support from a tutor or equivalent.

### What's at stake

E-learners, need, in addition:

- ▶ a computer with sufficient power and the right software installed on it for it to work with the intended course materials;
- ▶ a correctly lit and adjusted (and adjustable) workstation, i.e. desk, chair, computer, screen, keyboard, and pointing device, such as a mouse and mouse-mat, or 'tracker-ball';
- ▶ facilities to print out their work;

They may also need access to appropriate additional hardware or software, for example:

- ▶ headphones for any audio component which the materials may have;
- ▶ text-to-speech conversion software to enable a learner to have text read to them.

Finally, if participation in a particular course requires the learner to access the internet, or send and receive emails, or use a remote system like a web-conferencing system, then the learner's computer needs to be connected to a network which will allow these kinds of access.

Some people argue that these requirements can only be met in a purpose designed learning centre. Others think that for a desk-based worker with a networked computer, it may be reasonable for them to learn at their desk, provided that their e-learning does not involve the need for any face-to-face support from a tutor.

*'Staff in the Customer Services department do their ECDL course at their desks in their lunch-break. The 4 of them can learn as a group, and they switch their phones through to a different department so that they do not get disturbed.'*

Michael, Development Manager, Magazine and Newspaper Printing Business.

Similar considerations apply in the case of people learning from a home computer.

The computer needs to be correctly configured and have the right specification, and the learner needs to be able to access it in peace and quiet. The latter typically is not the case for many owners of home computers, so reliance on the use of home PCs for work-related e-learning is unwise.

### What you can do about it

Here are some issues to take up to ensure that the learning environment is suitable for e-learning.

- Push for the creation of a purpose-designed workplace e-learning centre, specified to support the technical requirements of the courses that are planned.
- Ensure that the learning centre is available to shift workers, and to other staff with non-standard attendance patterns.
- Get advice from your learndirect hub or from your local FE college about the design and operation of the learning centre.

- Encourage the employer to recognise that 'e-learning from the desk' may not be effective, and that therefore desk-based staff will need to access the learning centre.
- Suggest to the employer the purchase of some 'loan laptops' for use for e-learning at home by staff without quiet access to their own PC.

### Further reading

Design for learning – a design guide for people who run learning centres. Available on-line from [www.ufi.com/designforlearning/](http://www.ufi.com/designforlearning/)

## Implications for people with different working patterns

### Why it's important

*'I started on a night shift. You used to feel very alone sometimes. So I am determined to get the learning centre opened for more hours each week, so that shift workers can access it.'*

Malcolm, USDAW rep, retail industry fulfilment factory

Historically people who work 'non-standard' patterns in their workplace – part-time, shifts, homeworkers/teleworkers, or remote/mobile staff – have tended to be disadvantaged in terms of access to training, which is often geared to the needs of the majority of staff with more standard working patterns.

Because e-learning is less dependent on all learners being in the same place at the same time, it provides an opportunity to make access to learning more evenly accessible to all. However, to exploit this opportunity fully, the planning of e-learning delivery – particularly support to learners – must take account of different working patterns in a workplace.

### What's at stake

To ensure that access to training is available to all, it will help if you can put yourself in the shoes of each of the different working patterns that operate in your workplace. What issues of exclusion, if any, do these people feel affect them? How do they, and you, anticipate that e-learning will work in their circumstances?

We cannot anticipate all the factors that may be at stake, but the following questions highlight some possible examples:

- ▶ Will speed of progress through the course be a challenge for some workers? Is the e-learning genuinely self-paced or are people expected to finish within a specific period? Part-time workers, for example, may be part-time because they have other commitments that they cannot displace – if they are given less time away from work each week to do their learning, they may not be able to progress at the same rate.
- ▶ Are there any fixed-time activities, and, if so, will alternative times be scheduled for shift workers? For example, the e-learning may include 'synchronous chatroom' sessions, when learners are online at the same time and exchange messages in real time: will there be a chatroom session that shift workers can reasonably participate in?
- ▶ Does the training require learners to attend any sessions in person? For example, some 'blended learning' courses may mix e-learning with face-to-face sessions – will remote or homeworking staff be assisted in attending these sessions, or provided with equally effective alternatives to attendance?

Mobile workers and homeworkers may also face health and safety issues with using computers for extended periods for e-learning in environments away from the office. These are covered in another section of this guide.

### What you can do about it

The approach you take to this area will depend on the spread of different working patterns in your workplace.

- What different types of working patterns operate in your workplace?
- Have staff representing each of these patterns been consulted about how e-learning will work for them?
- Will e-learning be entirely self-paced or will there be targets to complete within a certain period? (Note: there may be some circumstances where targets have a positive effect on completion of a course, so they should not necessarily be opposed, but targets should take account of all learners' circumstances.)
- Will there be any fixed time and/or face-to-face sessions, and will these be accessible to all (including more than one running of the sessions, if appropriate)?

## Time for learning

### Why it's important

As we said right at the beginning of this section on e-learning issues, e-learning could have a liberating or a constraining impact on the work/life balance of learners, depending on how it is managed.

E-learning potentially enables people to choose the time, place and pace for their learning. If the organisation trusts its workforce to exercise this choice responsibly, then the workforce can benefit from the increased control they have over their work/life balance. They can time-shift their learning to fit around, say, caring commitments.

On the other hand, there is a risk that some organisations could exploit the flexible nature of e-learning. Whereas union appointed representatives, such as shop stewards, safety representatives, and union learning representatives, have a legal right to time off with pay for role-related, trade union approved, training, paid time off for training is only an entitlement for workers if they are 18 or under and not

qualified to Level 2. So instead of giving the workforce time off for attending training sessions, an employer could maintain workloads and expect staff to make time for learning outside normal working hours, possibly from home. Clearly this approach risks increasing stress and pressure on the workforce, and is not acceptable.

### What's at stake

The issue of organisations providing their workforce with paid time to develop their skills is not unique to e-learning – it's just that e-learning introduces more options, good and bad, for how this is managed.

There is also a second issue to do with organisations encouraging and facilitating their workforce in taking up learning opportunities that may not relate directly to job performance (e.g. 'hobby' learning, or learning a foreign language where this is not required as part of the job). In this circumstance, the issue of time for learning is normally treated slightly differently.

In both cases, time available to staff for learning may be covered in an existing union learning agreement (even if this agreement did not anticipate e-learning when it was conceived). If you do not have a learning agreement at your workplace, then the introduction of e-learning may provide a justification for reaching one.

#### Further reading

*Model learning agreement between workplace union representatives and employer* Available free of charge at [www.learningservices.org.uk/national/learning-3739-f0.cfm](http://www.learningservices.org.uk/national/learning-3739-f0.cfm)

*Time Off for Study or Training* DfES website – [www.dfes.gov.uk/tfst](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/tfst)

Time off section of the Acas site [www.acas.org.uk/rights/timeoff.html](http://www.acas.org.uk/rights/timeoff.html)

The Birkenhead Rosenbrae Land Registry employs 270 people, mostly clerical staff working on computers. They are represented by the PCS union. Work-related training is provided via computer-based training blended with some face-to-face sessions. Union representatives worked to establish a learning centre to enable staff to take part in other learning opportunities, particularly in partnership with learndirect.

Starting with a simple 'cybercafé' facility, the Union Learning Representative sent out a learning needs questionnaire to members, and worked with the PCS to put together a business case for a more extended service, which they presented to management.

Under this proposal, which was agreed, the Learning Rep was able to get a learning centre up and running. The organisation provided the resources in terms of accommodation, PCs and internet connection. PCS has a relationship with learndirect, which allows the learning centre to act as a 'satellite' for the PCS learndirect 'hub' in London, and enrol staff on learndirect courses at the workplace. PCS e-learning tutors are also available to support learners online. The Learning Rep's time in supporting learners in the centre is covered by the facilities time agreement.

Under the terms of the learning agreement, the employer pays for any learning by the staff that leads to a recognised qualification (such as the European Computer Driving Licence). Individuals themselves pay for other non-work-related learning and do this in their own time – but they are free to use the learning centre facilities at no charge.

All work-related training is carried out within core working hours – in this case the learning materials are not available for home study since they are only available via the organisation's intranet.

At a distribution depot, an agreement with the recognised trade union allows workers 2 paid hours per week to do Basic Skills courses. IT and language courses are run on a 50/50 basis, with one paid hour per week for every 2 hours of study.

At a pharmaceutical products business, the lifelong learning agreement with Amicus states:

'For development of basic/essential skills employees will be allowed paid time off. For other learning activities arrangements for time off must be agreed with management. Where full time off is not acceptable or practical a 'shared time' agreement would ideally be reached where the employer and employee contribute time in equal measure.'

### What you can do about it

The sorts of questions you might want to ask when e-learning is being implemented in your workplace include:

- How many 'learning hours' is each e-learning course expected to comprise?
- Will managers be briefed to ensure that staff have time to complete the courses effectively within their working hours?
- Where will staff have access to the e-learning course from? Their normal workplace? A dedicated learning centre? At home or 'on the road'?
- If work-related learning is done away from the workplace or outside normal hours, will this be credited as working time?
- Is there scope for staff to pursue non-work-related learning opportunities through e-learning?
- Is there, or should there be, a union learning agreement to cover terms and conditions of the above arrangements?

## Selection and development of e-learning materials

### Why it's important

It's in the interests of everyone concerned that the e-learning offered to staff guides as many people as possible to maximise their skills and potential. Poor quality e-learning materials will not achieve these benefits if:

- some people find the materials inaccessible for any reason (to do with their equipment, their environment or their own capabilities);
- significant proportions of people find the materials dull or un-motivating and fail to complete the learning as a result;
- people do not move forward in their learning because the design approach of the learning materials does not match their learning needs and styles.

### What's at stake

There are several ways in which an organisation can procure its e-learning materials.

- The materials can be designed from scratch to meet a specification that the organisation develops. This design is most often done by an external specialist e-learning provider, but may occasionally be done by in-house staff.
- The materials can be bought 'off the shelf' if providers have already developed e-learning that matches the organisation's needs. This usually happens in very common training areas, like basic use of word-processing or spreadsheet software.
- The organisation can partner with an e-learning provider – such as **learndirect** or the Scottish University for Industry – that has already bought or commissioned relevant materials, and also offers the support to go with it. Of course, this also depends on the provider having anticipated the organisation's learning needs correctly.

Choosing which approach to take will usually depend on how complex and unique the organisation's training needs are. The more unique they are, the more likely that it will be necessary to design new materials from scratch to meet the unique needs. Once the approach has been chosen, it will usually be a management decision to implement it and select the most cost-effective supplier. The factors for you to consider in any consultation on this will be the same ones that have already been addressed above.

- ▶ Will the e-learning materials and learner support fit together well (2.2)?
- ▶ Does the design of the materials reflect the results of sound training needs analysis (2.3)?
- ▶ Will the materials be accessible to the full range of potential learners (2.5)?

### What you can do about it

It helps to see the procurement of e-learning materials within the overall picture of e-learning in the organisation. If the training needs are effectively identified and used as the basis for specifying the materials, if standards for support and accessibility are adhered to, and if there is a shared commitment to producing real improvement in people's skills and knowledge, then the selection or development of e-learning materials should run effectively and successfully for everyone.

If you follow the recommendations in the rest of this guide, your role in the selection or development of e-learning materials should be a fairly simple one. The issues you want to be sure of are:

- a) What kind of approach (design from scratch, buy 'off the shelf' etc.) will be taken to procurement of the e-learning materials?
- b) Does the specification for the materials fully reflect the training needs analysis?
- c) Have the processes for supporting learners when they use the materials been thought through to ensure high-quality support is available at all times?
- d) Will the materials be accessible to all the people who might benefit from them?

## Health and safety implications

### Why it's important

If people do e-learning instead of classroom-based or traditional open learning, this will increase the amount of time they spend using a computer. Good health and safety practice for computer use is well established, and should be applied to e-learning in the same way as any other use.

### What's at stake

People may do e-learning in a range of locations:

- ▶ at their normal workplace/desk;
- ▶ in a dedicated learning centre;
- ▶ at home;
- ▶ on a laptop computer when 'mobile' in a range of locations (hotels, cafés, railway stations, etc.).

A full treatment of the health and safety issues that might arise in these locations is beyond the scope of this guide. These issues include considerations of positioning of computer screen and workstation affecting glare and posture, seating and appropriate breaks.

### Further reading

*Display Screen Equipment Regulations*  
[www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/si/si1992/Uksi\\_19922792\\_en\\_1.htm](http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/si/si1992/Uksi_19922792_en_1.htm)

*Working with VDUs (HSE guide for people who work with visual display units (VDUs), and their employers)* [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg36.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg36.pdf)

### What you can do about it

You should ensure that both employers and learners are aware of their rights and responsibilities in terms of health and safety, across all the various locations where e-learning may take place.

- a) Do computer workstations in the workplace and learning centres demonstrate best practice in terms of layout, equipment, environment etc?
- b) Are learners provided with information to help them minimise risks and optimise the environment when they learn in locations under their control?
- c) Will employers assist learners with any steps they need to take to minimise health and safety risks and optimise the environment in 'off-site' locations?

# 3 Working with others

This part of the guide covers three related areas. These are:

- ▶ **partnerships** – the relationships between some of the organisations which may play a part in e-learning in the workplace, for example between workplace trade unions and the TU Hub;
- ▶ **consultation and negotiation** – the processes by which e-learning issues get dealt with between union and employer;
- ▶ **agreements** – one way to summarise plans and decisions concerning e-learning.

## Partnerships

The term partnership has come to be used to describe a situation in which organisations collaborate to their mutual benefit, sometimes without the collaboration being governed by a contract or enforceable agreement, and sometimes without partners paying each other for their services. The term partnership is also used to describe a commitment between an employer and its recognised trade unions to a non-adversarial approach to industrial relations, with workplace learning being a typical subject for such internal partnerships.

Here are some examples of ways in which external partnerships are relevant to workplace e-learning.

Remploy, a major employer of people with disabilities, works in partnership with SEMTA Engineering Sector learndirect Hub to provide tutor support for the learndirect Access Points which are incorporated into the learning centre at each Remploy factory.

The University of Paisley's Business School, School of Education, and the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), Learning and Teaching Scotland and three local education authorities, worked in partnership to develop a wholly online masters programme, through which several hundred Scottish schoolteachers are now studying to achieve Chartered Teacher status.

Hertford Regional College works in partnership with the food distribution depot of a major retail company, to provide tutor support in basic skills for staff undertaking learndirect courses at the on-site learning centre. *'If I need a course they can get it agreed within a day and something up and running in a couple of days. We could not ask for a better supplier.'* Malcolm, USDAW rep, retail industry fulfilment factory

From these examples you can see that it is normal for successful e-learning provision, even for large organisations, to depend on the work of external partners. In some cases the external partner can act as a conduit for Government funding to support the e-learning (as in the retail example); in other cases the partnership can increase the credibility and reach of the e-learning provision (as in the Educational Institute of Scotland example). In others the partnership can give the employer access to the skills of staff that it does not itself employ (as in the Remploy examples); and it can greatly broaden the range of learning opportunities which can be made available through work.

Often the employer is responsible for formalising the partnership relationship, although the University of Paisley/EIS example shows that this is not always the case.

Recognised unions ought to be consulted about and involved in partnership decisions taken by the employer, in which case issues for discussion could include the following.

- a) Which partner is responsible for what?
- b) What scope is there for the employer to take full advantage of public sector initiatives like **learndirect** or the Scottish University for Industry?
- c) What service levels is the partner responsible for providing?
- d) Who controls the staff of partner organisations when they are at the workplace?
- e) What is the process for getting problems, such as unsatisfactory performance by a tutor supplied by a college, resolved?

- f) How and at what frequency will the workings of the partnership be reviewed?
- g) How will the partner organisation respond if the demand for its services is greater than expected?

All over the UK, e-learning centres have been established with the close involvement of Union Learning Representatives, and often with start-up funding from the Union Learning Fund (ULF). By mid 2004 nearly 200 ULF funded learning centres had been established, of which 70 are part of the TUC's Trade Union Hub, offering e-learning courses provided by Ufi/learndirect. In 2003/2004 over 6000 workers accessed e-learning courses through the centres, which are in big and small organisations, in the private and the public sectors. Examples include centres at:

- ▶ a fire station in Morpeth, Northumbria, set up with the support of Fire Brigades Union;
- ▶ Unilever's Ice Cream and Frozen Foods factory in Grimsby, Humberside, set up at the instigation of the GMB;
- ▶ Arriva's bus depot in Leicester, set up as a TGWU initiative.

(For more information about the work of the Trade Union Hub contact Alex Rowley, Hub Manager, via [www.learningservices.org.uk/tuhub](http://www.learningservices.org.uk/tuhub))

## Consultation and negotiation

The 2002 Employment Act gives Union Learning Representatives rights to:

- ▶ engage with employers on a wide range of workplace learning issues;
- ▶ time off with pay to exercise these rights.

### Extract from Part 4 of the Employment Act 2002

#### 168A Time off for union learning representatives

- (1) An employer shall permit an employee of his who is-
  - (a) a member of an independent trade union recognised by the employer, and
  - (b) a learning representative of the trade union, to take time off during his working hours for any of the following purposes.
- (2) The purposes are-
  - a) carrying on any of the following activities in relation to qualifying members of the trade union-
    - (i) analysing learning or training needs,
    - (ii) providing information and advice about learning or training matters,
    - (iii) arranging learning or training, and
    - (iv) promoting the value of learning or training,
  - (b) consulting the employer about carrying on any such activities in relation to such members of the trade union,
  - (c) preparing for any of the things mentioned in paragraphs (a) and (b).

(source: [www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/20020022.htm](http://www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/20020022.htm))

The emphasis in the 2002 Act is on **consultation**, which is a two-way process of discussion in which the employer and the union take proper account of each other's views, and through which union members get real influence over the employer's decisions. This contrasts with **negotiation** in which an employer (or employer's organisation) and its recognised unions engage in a bargaining process, the product of which is a collective agreement between the employer and the unions.

In practice, the boundary between consultation and negotiation tends to be more blurred than the definitions above suggest. For example:

- ▶ collective agreements sometimes arising from a process that is called consultation;
- ▶ a lot of what goes on during negotiations is often, in reality, closer to consultation.

In large multi-site organisations, local decision-making on e-learning is usually constrained or influenced by national or 'head office' decisions, with issues like choice of content supplier or choice of ICT system largely beyond local influence, and with local managers and union representatives sometimes understandably reluctant to have attention drawn to local agreements or practices that are better than or different to those decided nationally.

Yet inevitably, a lot of the dialogue about the detail of e-learning takes places locally, for two reasons.

Firstly, there is much local variation in the scope for external partnerships. For example:

- ▶ further education colleges vary in their capacity to provide tutor support for e-learning;
- ▶ local Learning and Skills Councils (and organisations such as Regional Development Agencies) differ in their approaches to e-learning, and in the amount of funding they can put into it.

Secondly, the rights contained in the Employment Act 2002 are new, so there are wide local variations in the extent to which Union Learning Representatives are organised, or in which the recognised trade unions have made workplace learning.

Consultation or negotiation about e-learning may take place at many levels. In all cases, e-learning may be a new subject that many of the participants in the discussion, both union and management, will be less familiar with than is the case with more typical learning issues (e.g. entitlements for learners to paid to time off, staffing arrangements for the learning centre, or incentives for people who gain qualifications). Here are some points to watch:

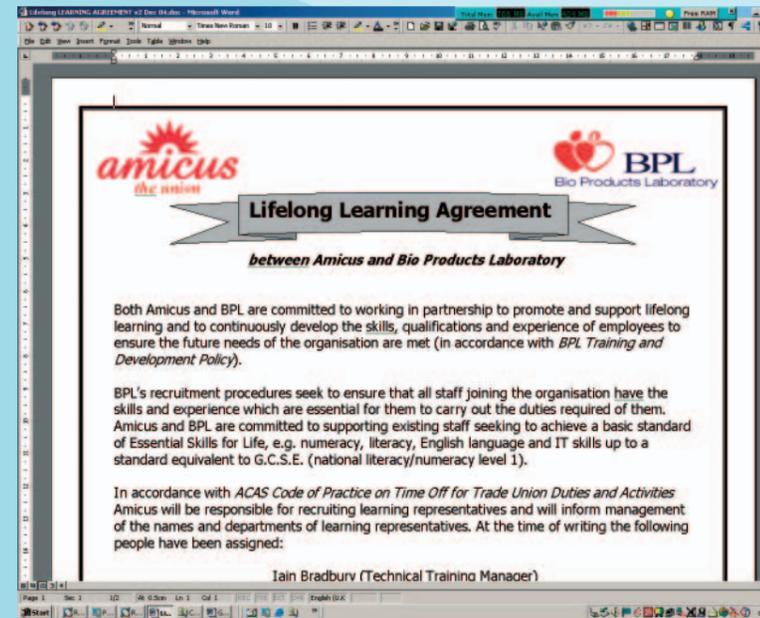
- a) sales people may make unrealistic claims for the effectiveness of their e-learning materials or the systems to support them;

- b) managers for whom fluent use of IT is a day-to-day requirement of their job may downplay the difficulties which face learners who have not got IT skills and whose jobs do not give them the opportunity to develop them, but who are expected to learn using IT;
- c) HR people may be keen on e-learning because of the scope it gives them to keep track on who has done what course, rather than because the e-learning proposed is known to be effective;
- d) training and development staff may resist the introduction of e-learning because they see it as a threat to the (face-to-face) training department, or they may favour it because they see it as a way to reduce the amount which the organisation spends on tutor support;
- e) the managers responsible for dealing with e-learning suppliers may simply not have the skills and experience to know what the organisation needs, nor to make good judgements about what is on offer.

## Agreements

Examples of the sorts of e-learning related agreements that may be negotiated include those between:

- ▶ **employers and unions** – for example covering an entitlement to paid time off for workers undertaking work-related training by e-learning, or about the setting up and staffing of a workplace learning centre;
- ▶ **employers and suppliers** – for example covering the development or customisation for the employer of an e-learning course, or the terms of a license for staff to access a range of e-learning courses from the supplier's website, or the supply of a software system to track which staff have done which course;
- ▶ **partners** – for example covering an initiative like the EIS/University of Paisley Chartered Teacher programme, or SEMTA's support for *learndirect* Access Points in Remploy.



Extract from a lifelong learning agreement at a pharmaceutical products factory. See Appendix; p.26 for the Learning agreement in full.

Agreements in the first category are going to be open to the union, by default, since the union is party to them! But to gain effective influence over the way in which an employer makes use of e-learning, the union should be consulted about agreements in the second and third categories, even if for reasons of commercial confidentiality the employer is reluctant to disclose certain aspects of them.

The sorts of questions you might want to ask concerning partnership (P) and supplier (S) agreements include:

- a) Are the roles and responsibilities of different partners clearly stated? (P)
- b) What standards for learner support have been agreed between the employer and its supplier of e-learning? What account is being taken of BS8426 *A code of practice for e-support in e-learning systems*? (S/P) [See also *Learner support*.]
- c) Have proper arrangements been made to give learners information, advice and guidance about the e-learning on offer, and about the non-e-learning alternatives? (S) [See also *Information, advice, and guidance*.]

- d) Has the content supplier committed to making its e-learning materials conform to the W3C Web Content Accessibility Initiative? Have people taken the time and trouble to assess the quality and effectiveness of the e-learning materials? (S) [See also *Accessibility*.]
- e) Does the agreement specify the design of the learning centre, and how the environment will be maintained in fit state for learning? (S) [See *Environment for learning*.]
- f) Have proper arrangements been made to cater for the needs of workers with non-standard working patterns, or whose first language is not English? (P/S) [See also *Implications for people with different working patterns*.]
- g) Have people taken the time and trouble to assess the quality and effectiveness of the e-learning materials, perhaps by arranging to visit one or more reference sites? (S) [See also *Selection and development of e-learning materials*.]

# 4 Support and information

## Support

Many areas have local Lifelong Learning Partnerships where providers of learning and advice come together to promote learning opportunities within their location. See, for example, Edinburgh Learning – [www.edinburghlearning.com](http://www.edinburghlearning.com) – or Sefton Learning – [www.seftonlearning.org.uk](http://www.seftonlearning.org.uk). You can enquire of your local education authority or search the web to locate a nearby lifelong learning partnership. Then contact them to see what advice or support they may be able to provide to help you with whatever e-learning issues you are facing.

TUC Learning Services – [www.learningservices.org.uk](http://www.learningservices.org.uk) – has regional offices throughout England and Wales.

Union Learning Fund (ULF) – the main website is [www.unionlearningfund.org.uk/about.htm](http://www.unionlearningfund.org.uk/about.htm) from where you can find out about the fund and the bidding process.

## Information

### E-learning

Jane Knight's e-learning centre – [www.e-learningcentre.co.uk](http://www.e-learningcentre.co.uk) – an up-to-date and comprehensive website covering all aspects of e-learning.

Training Zone – [www.trainingzone.co.uk](http://www.trainingzone.co.uk) – an online network for training professionals with plenty of material about e-learning.

*Design for learning – a Ufi/learndirect design guide for people who run learning centres* – [www.ufi.com/designforlearning](http://www.ufi.com/designforlearning).

### Ufi/learndirect

**learndirect** – the main website is [www.learndirect.co.uk](http://www.learndirect.co.uk) from where you can get national learning advice and information about work-based learning.

Ufi – **learndirect** is run by a company called Ufi Ltd. To contact them, visit [www.ufi.com](http://www.ufi.com). Ufi also provides its partners with additional, secure information about running learndirect learning. If your union is a learndirect partner, you may be able to get access to this.

**learndirect** Scotland is the Scottish sister organisation of Ufi. Its partners' website is [www.lds4partners.com](http://www.lds4partners.com)

*Logging onto Learning – the union contribution to learndirect centres in the Trade Union Hub.* Available from [www.learningservices.org.uk/tuhub](http://www.learningservices.org.uk/tuhub)

### Information, advice and guidance

*Information, Advice and Guidance for Adults – The National Policy Framework and Action Plan.* Available from [www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/iag/](http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/iag/)

### Learner support

BS 8426, *A code of practice for e-support in e-learning systems.* Available via <http://bsonline.techindex.co.uk> (current price £94 for non-members of BSI, £47 for members)

### Accessibility

Disability Rights Commission website – [www.drc-gb.org/knowyourrights/index.asp](http://www.drc-gb.org/knowyourrights/index.asp)

Disability – what the law says – [www.disability.gov.uk/law.html](http://www.disability.gov.uk/law.html)

*Accessibility and E-learning.* Available from [www.epic.co.uk/content/resources/white\\_papers/Accessibility.htm](http://www.epic.co.uk/content/resources/white_papers/Accessibility.htm) (Note: Epic is one of the major UK providers of bespoke e-learning.)

TechDis aims, through the use of technology, to enhance provision for disabled students and staff in higher, further (including adult and community learning provision) and specialist education. There are extensive, freely available resources on the TechDis website. TechDis is currently somewhat restricted in the extent to which it can respond to direct enquiries concerning publicly funded work-based learning, although this situation may change – [www.techdis.ac.uk](http://www.techdis.ac.uk)

### Health and safety

*Display Screen Equipment Regulations.* Available from [www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/si/si1992/Uksi\\_19922792\\_en\\_1.htm](http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/si/si1992/Uksi_19922792_en_1.htm)

*Working with VDUs (HSE guide for people who work with visual display units (VDUs), and their employers).* Available from [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg36.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg36.pdf)

### Agreements

*Model learning agreement between workplace union representatives and employer.* Available free of charge at [www.learningservices.org.uk/national/learning-3739-f0.cfm](http://www.learningservices.org.uk/national/learning-3739-f0.cfm)

*Time Off for Study or Training,* available from [www.dfes.gov.uk/tfst](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/tfst)

Time off section of the Acas website [www.acas.org.uk/rights/timeoff.html](http://www.acas.org.uk/rights/timeoff.html)

# 5 Appendix

## Lifelong Learning Agreement between Amicus and Bio Products Laboratory

Both Amicus and BPL are committed to working in partnership to promote and support lifelong learning and to continuously develop the skills, qualifications and experience of employees to ensure the future needs of the organisation are met (in accordance with BPL Training and Development Policy).

BPL's recruitment procedures seek to ensure that all staff joining the organisation have the skills and experience which are essential for them to carry out the duties required of them.

Amicus and BPL are committed to supporting existing staff seeking to achieve a basic standard of Essential Skills for Life, e.g. numeracy, literacy, English language and IT skills up to a standard equivalent to G.C.S.E. (national literacy/numeracy level 1).

In accordance with **ACAS Code of Practice on Time Off for Trade Union Duties and Activities** Amicus will be responsible for recruiting learning representatives and will inform management of the names and departments of learning representatives. At the time of writing the following people have been assigned:

Iain Bradbury (Technical Training Manager)

Sue Farr (Production Training Manager)

Lifelong Learning Representatives will liaise with line managers and members of the personnel team in carrying out their duties.

The functions of the learning representatives include:

1. Analysing learning or training needs
2. Providing information and advice about learning or training matters
3. Arranging learning or training
4. Promoting the value of learning or training
5. Consulting the employer about carrying out these activities

Lifelong Learning is complementary to established BPL training programmes.

Where requested any interviews carried out between a learning representative and a BPL employee will remain confidential.

All time off for learning activities must be authorised by the line manager and must not be to the detriment of normal working practices.

Union learning representatives will be granted reasonable paid time off to enable them to carry out their duties effectively including receiving training. Employees will be entitled to reasonable time off to access their learning representative.

For development of basic/essential skills employees will be allowed paid time off. For other learning activities arrangements for time off must be agreed with management. Where full paid time off is not acceptable or practical a 'shared time' agreement would ideally be reached where the employer and employee contribute time in equal measures, (e.g. for an employee participating in a 1 hour learning activity, BPL allows 30 minutes paid time and the employee gives 30 minutes of their own time). Employees will not get paid overtime for participating in learning activities out of normal working hours.

Facilities will be made available for use by learning representatives and employees. These will include at least one computer with internet access, a notice board and the facility to hold confidential meetings if necessary. Access may be required out-of-hours for learning activities.

Lifelong Learning needs/initiatives will be discussed at the BPL Corporate Training Group (CTG) meetings. The CTG will:

1. Direct learning resource requests to the BPL Executive or Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) as appropriate
2. Agree an annual learning plan
3. Discuss potential improvements to established training programmes and policies

Due to limitations on resources learning needs may need to be prioritised. Any learning needs will be directed through a union learning representative. During interview the learning representative will evaluate the learning request by completing a learning assessment form. The employee's line manager must also approve the request before it is progressed further.

Amicus and BPL will work together to constantly evolve Lifelong Learning for the benefit of employees and the organisation alike.

Amicus aims to work in partnership with BPL to achieve these aims.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
BPL Executive

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Amicus chair at BPL

# 6 Glossary

## Acas

Advisory, Conciliation, and Arbitration Service. Acas is a Government Agency which aims to improve organisations and working life through better employment relations.

## Assistive technology

Enhancements to technology, or methods of using technology, that make it possible for people with disabilities to use technology (or to use it easily) that they were formerly unable to use (or to use with only some difficulty)

## CD-ROM

Compact Disc – Read Only Memory. An optical disc that is used to store text, graphics, and audio data, and which a computer can read if it fitted with a CD drive.

## CIPD

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. The leading UK professional body for those involved in personnel management and related roles.

## DVD

Digital Versatile Disk. A type of CD-ROM which can hold a greater amount of data, accessed more quickly, than a CD-ROM.

## ECDL

European Computer Driving Licence. A prominent computer skills certification programme for users of PCs.

## Interactive TV

Interactive TV is an umbrella term for the content and services which are available for digital viewers to navigate through on their TV screen.

## LSC

Learning and Skills Council (government agency responsible for funding and planning education and training for over 16-year-olds in England)

## NHS

National Health Service

## PC

Personal Computer, that is a computer designed for use by one person at a time, equipped with its own keyboard, pointing device, and screen. Sometimes the term PC is used more narrowly to denote a personal computer running the Windows operating system.

## Sector Skills Council

Sector Skills Councils are employer-led, UK wide organisations, licensed by the Government, which actively involve trade unions, and other stakeholders in the tackling the skills and productivity needs of their sector throughout the UK.

## SEMTA

SEMTA is the Sector Skills Council for the science, engineering and manufacturing technologies sector.

## ULF

Union Learning Fund. A Government initiative providing funding to help trade unions to encourage greater take-up of learning at work, and to boost unions' capacity as learning organisations.