



UK – Training Providers Workshop

Norton Radstock College
Wednesday 9 June 2010

1. Workshop Objectives and Topics

An opportunity arose to invite a group of training providers already scheduled to attend Norton Radstock College to add a small workshop/working lunch to enable the UK partner to seek their views on e-learning, particularly in relation to rural SMEs.

The Training Providers who attended were from the south-west of England, mainly local to the college, although one travelled from Devon, some 200 kilometers. All were involved in e-learning; e-learning practitioners, ICT specialists, curriculum quality and e-librarian.

The agenda covered the following topics:

- Introduction to eruralnet project
- What is e-learning – definitions and discussion
- Discussion regarding planned debate for the SMEs (This house believes that the e-learning of today is essential for the important skills of tomorrow)

The objective of the working lunch/workshop event was to publicise the eruralnet project and also to get views and opinions of e-learning amongst rural SMEs; it was considered important to understand how to engage the rural small businesses in the planned formal debate (the UK Eruralnet Workshop) and how to get their realistic views on the topic.

2. Themes and structure

In 2009, the Oxford Union (one of the oldest debating societies in the world) held a debate, which was attended by 300 people with many people following the proceedings on the Internet and many discussion forums before, during and after the event.

The motion was 'This house believes that the e-learning of today is essential for the important skills of tomorrow'.

During the original debate, much discussion centered on the way the motion was worded and general discussions regarding the pros and cons of e-learning rather than actually addressing the motion.

The UK partner had decided to use this debate as a forum for discussion at the UK National Event.

Discussions were informal.

The Workshop

What started as a discussion about e-learning being essential for the skills of tomorrow quickly became a discussion about the pros and cons of e-learning in general.

It was generally agreed that using the debate and the topic would be good for the planned SME workshop; some suggestions were made regarding how best to engage the SMEs when holding the debate and one e-learning specialist volunteered to participate in the workshop the following week.



Training providers discuss the eruralnet website and questionnaires

Some of the views on e-learning from the original debate were used for discussion during the workshop:

- The next generation will not want simple click and learn courses
- The debate is not about whether e-learning is useful or efficient, but whether the e-learning of today will meet the skills of tomorrow – which will include interpersonal and soft skills
- Today's e-learning is only marginally useful
- How can we transform the way we learn, educating and learning from the whole world in an inspiring way
- An online training provider is just like an e-learning vending machine
- We need to re-define e-learning or the 'e' will just mean enough
- E-learning is providing only shallow learning – such as legislation and compliance topics (not the profound learning you get through interaction with other people, practice and experiences)

- E-learning includes interaction with others, through forums, blogs, wikis; it is central to e-learning
- D-learning (digital) is a better description
- Computers not books (but nothing else different)
- The learner should be in control: on-demand, anytime, anywhere learning – mobile phones are all pervasive, all over the world – the mobile phone can be used for learning
- Is traditional classroom training better than e-learning?
- There are great e-learning resources, there are poor e-learning resources just as there are good tutors who inspire their students and bad tutors who fail to inspire their learners no matter what approaches they adopt



Participants discussing e-learning at the workshop/working lunch

- The 'traditional' idea is that face-to-face teaching is the only valid mode of teaching

Conclusions

The general discussion was rather inconclusive with an element of negativity, as all recognise the need to engage SMEs and also how difficult it is to engage SMEs in any form of learning, on-the-job training for themselves or their staff.

It was accepted that informal learning had to be considered, that many SMEs did not view colleges or universities as venues for their professional development training and that the training providers had to change to deliver what was expected from small businesses. It was also recognised that this was a costly business and may, in fact, be too expensive; expectations from small businesses were that their training should be tailored to their individual needs; perhaps 'mentoring' or 'coaching' was more appropriate.

The general consensus was that all would be interested in the outcomes of the planned SME workshop; it was agreed that all participants would be given a copy of the report.

The planned Advisory Forum was also discussed; the training providers did not feel able to contribute to this forum, although some were interested in the potential outcomes and will be following any information on the project website.