



UK – e-learning National Workshop

Norton Radstock College
Wednesday 16 June 2010

1. Workshop Objectives and Topics

The UK national Workshop was planned to be interactive and interesting workshop, with participants from small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and also specialist e-learning practitioners who had an interest in e-learning for small businesses in rural areas.

The people who attended were all from the south-west part of England, although the event was publicised in a wider context. Of the 22 SMEs who booked to attend, 19 attended, showing an interest in the subject and an interest in discovering what exactly is involved in e-learning.

The agenda covered the following topics:

- Introduction to eruralnet project
- What is e-learning – definitions and discussion
- Demonstrations of various types of e-learning
- Experience of e-learning in practice
- **Debate:** This house believes that the e-learning of today is essential for the important skills of tomorrow
(The proposer and the person against were both e-learning specialists)

The objective of the event was to publicise the eruralnet project and also to get views and opinions of e-learning amongst rural SMEs. It was also considered to be a good introduction to e-learning to enable the participants to consider using e-learning for their future learning needs.

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 proceeds 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 motion was rejected, with 90 for the motion and 144 against.

Following the previous meeting with some Training Providers (see separate report), it was decided to use this debate as a forum for discussion at this event.

3. The Great Debate!!

What started as a debate about e-learning being essential for the skills of tomorrow (a debate topic from the Oxford Union in 2009, see above) quickly became a discussion about the pros and cons of e-learning in general. This is the same result as the original debate, generally for the same reasons.

Nineteen small rural businesses took part in the debate/discussion, with four e-learning specialists also present. It was an interesting discussion; participants were very willing to give their views. Many of those present had experience of e-learning; most were vociferous in their views that they had not enjoyed the experience.



Small businesses listening to the discussion

Many expressed views that could apply equally to classroom learning as well as e-learning at a distance.

In particular they felt that learners would return to a company or training provider whose course they had previously enjoyed themselves, also recommending the provider to others. Minds can be changed – positive or negative. Many people who have an enjoyable experience will have the faith to try again and this would establish the credibility of e-learning.

Costs can be an issue for small businesses or the self-employed even though this is a legitimate business expense. Again, if the experience is enjoyable and worthwhile, it is more likely to be repeated. Many participants had actually

experienced courses that were tedious and boring and therefore did not want to repeat that experience.

Barriers to e-learning participation were gained from both experience and also by reputation only:



Representatives from rural SMEs participating in the debate

- Support is seen as a very big issue with e-learning. Many people feel they want a tutor to answer their questions and give explanations 'immediately'
- Online forums and discussion groups – these were viewed as a second-rate learning experience
- Online tutor support is not always available when you need it. One issue cited was that some e-learning is available from other countries, where there is a time lapse. It was also noted that courses available from other countries offered a wider range of subjects, including really specialist subjects which a person or business could never hope to find in their local area
- One example given for experience of e-learning was the free CDs given with magazines – the example was Digital Photography and free CDs given in the magazine, tutorials in the use of Photoshop. Several people agreed that they had tried one CD, either it wouldn't work or they found it boring (often with many advertisements) and this had coloured their view of e-learning

There is one really big issue with e-learning by someone who works from home or their home is their business – any type of learning done at home requires a huge amount of self-discipline, both from the learner and also from their families not interrupting!

Classes allow interaction, allow people to meet others, allow business networking. This is seen as something particularly useful for small businesses that often have no time outside their own business; the views of others are really useful.

Almost everyone present agreed that to someone who worked at home or in premises where the work was not separated from the business, wanting any form of learning to be 'somewhere else'; it was felt to be essential that they would timetable their learning activity and plan to be away from work for the travel and learning time. They did not feel that learning at home saved time, even when travel time was taken into account. Almost all felt that it would be too easy to schedule the learning and then get involved in work or home and they would just reschedule, and keep rescheduling – in other words, not doing the learning.



Two e-learning specialists discuss the eruralnet project



Rural businesses discussing e-learning

Annex 1 – Agenda

Eruralnet Workshop
@thehollies, Wednesday 16 June



AGENDA

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|------|--|
| 0930 | Registration and coffee |
| 1000 | Welcome and introduction to eruralnet project
E-learning – what is it?
Marny Thompson, Norton Radstock College |
| 1030 | Demonstrations and practice
Kate Doodson, IT Consultant |
| 1100 | Coffee |
| 1130 | Google e-marketing - Experience of e-learning
Kate Doodson |
| 1300 | Lunch |

Debate: This house believes that the e-learning of today is essential for the important skills of tomorrow

Proposer: Suzanne Carder, e-learning specialist
Against: St John Evans, IT and Business Tutor

VOTE

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| 1430 | Summary and finish |
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Annex 2 – pros and cons as discussed

DEBATE and DISCUSSION

For	Against
Good having tutor support, the tutor had patience as people don't know or aren't familiar with computers. A tutor is able to answer questions when they arise so you can continue smoothly.	
A tutor is able to explain any terminology	
Classes let you interact with each other, meet others, let you network, and are sociable, so much more enjoyable	Buying magazines with CDs/DVDs to help, aren't always used as they don't let you get to the section that you want to with out going through things that you might not want to learn. They then become uninteresting. This could also be the case in a class room where you have to wait for others if you are at a higher level, but people don't mind helping others, or going over things in a classroom as it's sociable and you can see the progression.
Some people aren't disciplined enough to learn at home on their own, especially if they work from home as there is no change in atmosphere.	If personally interested in something, would buy books to self-learn. Often CDs available for online learning just don't get looked at
Useful to go out to a class. When learning at home would get to a certain point and not know what to do next	Online forums seen as a second rate learning experience
Time management when self-employed can be a problem. Time needs to be ring-fenced. Booking a time off their own working site (ie at home) is better and the are more likely to attend as it is planned well in advance	Engage the mobile phone – although this could be seen as something for the young
Authenticity may be questioned;	Once through the door – can change

people are wary of what they read on the internet. Also, there is just too much information on many sites that are intended to help small businesses learn	minds. Some will have faith to try again; would establish the credibility to elearn
	Webinars and podcasts seen as something that could encourage further interaction
Books are more preferable to e-learning as you are able to flip through and find specifically what you are after and can look up at any time quick and easy, rather than searching on the web.	Having access across the world would help with e-learning as you would also be able to promote your business e.g. creating a video about your tourist accommodation to promote by travel agents in the USA?
You are more focussed in a classroom as at home you might be interrupted, or pestered, and so loose interest and focus, especially if waiting to continue onto the correct level. In a class you are kept on track.	
Sometimes e-learning is too general and so becomes boring as not specific enough. Being more specific keeps learners more occupied and interested	
	If an e-course was having a questions and answers session it would be preferable in a small online group so that there is time to answer questions easily rather than hundreds of people trying to ask things, so it would become more time consuming.
Once you get a feeling for a tutor and you feel that they know what they are talking about, so you like their style of teaching, and then you trust the tutor and would use them again. Tutors are also able to point things out like handy hints and tips that they have found from their experience, you don't always get this from an e-learning course. A tutor would point out the small print; you would have	Our learners today would be interested in trying a 'webinar' they met and knew the tutor and so favoured her. So once people know the tutor and like them they are more willing to try other techniques of learning.

to find it yourself on an e-course.	
Learners would return to a company whose course they enjoyed and would attend follow up courses.	Learners would return to a company whose course they enjoyed and would attend follow up courses.
Costs could be an issue. People don't want to pay a lot for a day course, regardless if all day and in a classroom. Most would pay for the course as a business expense, so low costs would be covered (wouldn't spend hundreds of pounds)	Costs could be an issue. People don't want to pay a lot for a day course, regardless if all day and in a classroom. Most would pay for the course as a business expense, so low costs would be covered (wouldn't spend hundreds of pounds)
There is too much information on websites and would take too long to search and filter to get to what you after. But the sites with information are a form of e-learning.	Courses could be broken down onto CD so that people could pick and choose the sections that were relevant to them, and be in manageable chunks. Podcasts would be a possibility to be able to listen to anywhere.
There isn't always time to sit down and learn online, or time is not allocated. When coming on a course time is booked out, you're out of the work area so there are no interruptions and you've committed to coming. E-learning means you can keep putting it off if other things crop up	Having remote help from tutor might be beneficial so that the tutor can be 'in' the computer to help when you get stuck
If you are stuck at a certain level, a tutor is able to help quickly, and you are shown how to over come the problem.	Some views are that e-learning is for the next generation as they learn and use computers more. Although it was pointed out that students do enjoy the interaction and social side of the course.
When you encounter a problem, or you don't understand something, being in a classroom assures you that you're not 'stupid' as others are in the same boat asking questions. Online you don't have this assurance from others.	When a tutor is online there is not always a quick response, you have to wait for the tutor to reply
In a classroom you have instant	Although e-learning lets you join

answers to be able to move on.	courses abroad, as there is a time difference in other countries this can be a hindrance. You have to allow the tutor time to work out your problem and get back to you with a solution. But it allows you to search further afield for advice.
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