SUPPORTING BEST PRACTICE IN E-LEARNING ACROSS THE NHS

A Strategic Framework

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**Author**  
National Workforce Group

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A best practice strategic framework has been developed to promote the adoption and deployment of e-learning within the NHS. The National Workforce Group will promote the use of the framework and encourage the required collaboration to ensure that the NHS is fully able to benefit from e-learning developments.

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**Contact Details**  
Mr Tim Gilpin, Director of Workforce and HR  
Cumbria and Lancashire Strategic Health Authority  
Preston Business Centre,  
Watling Street Road, Preston  
PR2 8DY  
01772 645700

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a working document, offering a strategic framework for enabling best practice in e-Learning within the NHS. The approach has been developed in discussion with staff across NHS and other organisations. It will provide a framework for sharing best practice across the NHS at national, regional and local levels, with participation from the NHS Institute, the Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs), National Workforce Group (NWG) and Connecting for Health, Trusts and other partners and stakeholders in the health sector including Skills for Health. In addition, this guidance could also be offered to the voluntary and independent sector which will play an increasing role in delivering healthcare under Commissioning a Patient Led NHS. The next steps will be to promote the adoption of the strategic framework and to deliver the benefits from a common and concerted approach.

The strategy will support delivery of the NHS Improvement Plan and the Standards for Health through more effective training and development. Commissioning a Patient Led NHS emphasises the importance of adopting and using new modalities to support accelerated learning for the transformation of services. In addition, the organisational and strategic change required by Commissioning a Patient Led NHS can be directly supported by using e-learning approaches to underpin key change elements. For example, common learning related to practice-based commissioning could be supported with e-Learning. The cross government Efficiency Review also provides a context for the acceleration of e-Learning, to ensure coherence and value across the NHS and its partner bodies, and realise economies of scale in education and training. Yet it will be the commitment to and contribution of staff to the delivery of improved services which will be by far the largest single factor in ensuring success.

An urgent priority to promote and share best practice in e-learning across the NHS will be the development of a roadmap. This roadmap will chart and set out the common issues that must be addressed by the NHS if the use of e-Learning is to be effective and the full benefits offered by e-Learning are to be realised. The roadmap will identify initiatives and actions that will need to be taken at different levels to address the priority areas which are:

- The learning infrastructure, environment and systems: building capacity and readiness so that more NHS staff can access e-Learning.
- Developing high quality e-Learning materials and programmes: a coherent approach, through sharing of knowledge, resources and services across organisations and communities and dissemination of best practice technical and pedagogical standards.
- Seeking accreditation of programmes and resources to ensure quality, relevance and encourage use by organisations and learners.
- Promoting cost-effective procurement and licensing arrangements for products and services, including the development of a preferred panel of suppliers. This priority area potentially offers significant scope for delivering real value for money, provided that NHS organisations at all levels clearly define and agree common needs and actively collaborate in securing the commissioning leverage that the NHS could exert.
- Enhancing the capacity of the health workforce both in IT skills and in the e-Learning skills needed by tutors, trainers and learners.

And crucially

- Leadership: enabling leaders and managers to understand, plan and sustain the context for e-Learning in work and development for individuals and teams.

It is anticipated that the adoption of the strategic framework will generate several key benefits including:

• Promotion of the NHS as a learning organisation and as a key enabler for supporting cultural change, including multi-professional learning, considered essential for the modernisation of healthcare services.

• E-Learning will also have a significant benefit for patients and carers where the use of learning technologies will contribute to patient empowerment, enable self management of chronic and short-term conditions and promote communities of support for carers.

• Achieving a co-ordinated and coherent approach to developing and using e-Learning across health and social care.

• Sharing of expertise to inform the effective procurement, deployment and evaluation of e-learning. This will also include, with increased experience, more efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

• Sharing of learning resources within and across the NHS including Social Care and the Education sector.

• Rapid dissemination of learning essential for service development and delivery.

• More flexible and increased access to learning, particularly by staff groups currently finding difficulty in taking advantage of learning opportunities.

• Consistency and quality assured learning.

Yet, while e-Learning will offer significant benefits, it is vital that these approaches are fully integrated into an overarching learning strategy given that e-Learning is just one of many modes that can enable learning.

Implementing The Strategic Framework

The strategy will be distributed to NHS organisations as a guide to best practice. Given the importance of ensuring local autonomy and relevance, the SHA’s will need to collate local views on –

• What are the expectations for the roles and responsibilities of key NHS organisations including SHAs, individual trusts in ensuring the development and sharing of best practice?

• Agreeing the co-ordination and communication arrangements to maintain a consistent and coherent national contribution.

The NWG will commission, publish, update and monitor the road map and support local delivery arrangements for e-Learning thorough SHA Workforce Directorates.
BACKGROUND TO DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

The need for a strategy to guide the work of NHS organisations and their partners in education and training was envisaged in the Lifelong Learning Framework ‘Working Together, Learning Together.’ In 2003, the Department of Health invited NHSU and Workforce Development Confederations (WDC’s) to develop an e-Learning strategy for NHS organisations. Nationally, the NWG (which represents the SHA Workforce Leads) asked the North West WDC’s to take a lead on behalf of all workforce development functions. This strategic guidance forms a key output from a joint project sponsored by the NWG and NHSU. A steering group, including Department of Health membership, has overseen progress and contributed at each stage.

A discussion paper entitled ‘E-Learning in Health’ was developed with a reference group organised by the North West WDCs. Wider online consultation was sought between March and May 2004. The majority of respondents welcomed the proposal to adopt a common strategy to develop and share best practice. The responses also highlighted both barriers and priorities and identified which organisations might contribute to best practice in the various action areas.

The draft strategy was considered at the ‘summit’ of NHSU and NWG in July 2004. The summit emphasised that implementation should:

- Be incremental: ‘building up, out and deep’ rather than a big bang approach. This would allow for response to changes for example in technology, and even more importantly, to be driven by pull from the service rather than push from the centre.
- Take account of organisational readiness, and use a variety of aids such as templates, toolkits, support communities and groups.
- Advocate co-ordination and common standards, to support the incremental and flexible approach.
- Be concerned to ‘fit’ with other strategies both at a national and local level.
- Include the perspectives of front line managers, those with existing experience of supporting e-Learning, and those representing new types of NHS structure such as Foundation Trusts.
- Adopt agreed indicators of maturity.

The Strategic Framework has incorporated these points. On a wider front, the recent work undertaken within the Strategic Learning and Research Advisory Group (www.stlarhr.org.uk), confirmed the importance of collaboration across government generally and Health and Education specifically. E-learning is a particular case in point.

CONTEXT OF THE STRATEGY

The NHS Improvement Plan

The e-Learning strategy will support the objectives and priorities of the NHS Improvement Plan for high quality and patient-centered care.

E-Learning can be embedded in practical ways to enable more staff to work differently and to deliver ‘skills escalation’ through enhanced knowledge and qualifications, and modernised learning in the workplace. The Improvement Plan refers explicitly to the role of e-Learning:

“Access to education and training materials will change with an increasing focus on electronic access. E-based learning programmes will develop. For example, under the Radiology Integrated Training initiative the 400 modules that make up the radiology curriculum will be available electronically . . . By 2008 such developments will be much more widespread…” (NHS Improvement Plan 2004).

This Framework takes the NHS forward, confirming that the growth in capacity and the skills required to deliver a patient-led NHS needs effective, timely training and learning approaches.

National Standards, Local Action’ and the Standards for Health

‘National Standards, Local Action’ emphasises greater local flexibility in delivery of fewer national standards and targets. This emphasis underscores the need for any e-Learning strategy to be based on best practice. The standards should facilitate and support PCTs and others in making effective use of e-Learning to improving capacity and responsiveness in their Local Delivery Plans.

The ‘Third Domain of Governance’ for Standards for Health includes ‘Core and Development Standards’ where the contribution of e-Learning is particularly relevant. This domain of standards emphasise the need for equitable access to learning, that staff can benefit from resources for personal and professional development, that new technologies are used effectively to ensure safe, high quality patient care.

Health care organisations will be supported in meeting the Standards for Health by providing best practice for managers and staff in capacity building and the effective use of e-Learning in training and development. Significantly, e-Learning will be an important mechanism in enabling rapid, effective dissemination and adoption of new practices.

The Gershon Efficiency Review

Areas identified for savings within the Gershon Efficiency Review include making better use of staff time through service redesign, workforce reform and implementation of the IT developments and rollout of Connecting for Health. The Efficiency Review provides a compelling context for the acceleration of e-Learning, to promote coherence and value across the NHS organisations, and realise economies of scale in delivery of training and development.

Connecting for Health

The delivery of the benefits arising from the Connecting for Health programme require rapid acquisition of new skills and approaches from staff at all levels in the service. The utilisation of e-Learning will be a vital tool in the spread and adoption of new practices. E-learning will have an important role in contributing to the delivery and consolidation of learning that will be needed to ensure successful implementation of new systems and applications.

Building Synergy With Other Strategies

The NHS is not alone in developing a strategic framework for this new area of learning technology and practice. It will be important to gain synergies with other e-Learning strategies to maximise efficiency and effectiveness. These will include the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) e-strategy, and the Social Care e-Learning strategy, as well as the government’s broader digital strategies and the emerging roles of the Departmental Chief Information

Officers. For the NHS the opportunity to work across public and private sectors emphasises the potential contribution to be delivered from a consistent approach to e-Learning.

The DfES e-strategy Harnessing Technology published in March 2005 sets out priorities for action across the education system and children’s services as well as actions for specific sectors including universities, colleges and workplace and work-based learning. The priorities emphasise transformation of education using interactive technologies, using technologies to reach out and attract new learners, reduction of waste through common procurement frameworks, cross-organisational sharing and working, using ICT technologies to create and provide integrated support services for all learners and citizens. Particular priorities concern the provision of an individual learning space and access to resources for all learners, developing the capability of the educational workforce and encouraging organisational capacity. Delivery of this strategy will be co-ordinated by Becta and Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), with governance through a DfES Programme Board.

Within the overall DfES e-strategy, the Higher Education Funding Council for England strategy (2005) seeks to embed e-Learning approaches as part of higher education provision by encouraging strategic, institution wide planning and implementation, encouraging learner centric approaches, supporting extended learning environments including supporting work-based learning. Specific cross-sector collaboration will be required to support implementation of the strategy. Key partners in delivery of the strategy include the Higher Education Academy with the subject Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

The Social Care e-Learning strategy is being taken forward by Social Care Institute for Excellence with Skills for Care, under the auspices of Department of Health.

The healthcare sector needs to utilise the changes from these strategies and to contribute to their refinement as they evolve in practice.

THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The Scope And Contribution Of E-Learning

E-Learning is not an end in itself, or a separate mode of learning. E-enabled learning is not just about discrete online courses or materials. Embedding e-Learning means using and blending a spectrum of learning technologies and pedagogues in the design, delivery, support and assessment of learning. E-Learning will be an enabler of effective learning. Its reach, flexibility and scale will accelerate learning across the NHS.

E-Learning is increasingly used in work-based learning and corporate training as well as in education at all stages. E-pedagogues and technologies can contribute to high quality, personalised and up to date learning in the home or community, as well as in the workplace or classroom. Tutors and learners can access resources and tools as well as use feedback and assessment to accelerate progress. E-Learning can reduce the time spent on administration, and help with the planning, recording and tracking of learning and development. It almost always includes some form of tutor support, blending face-to-face delivery with technology-based learning. E-Learning can support learning needs in all subjects and at all levels in all health and social care occupations and specialisms. It can respond to the needs of users and of diverse communities. If standard e-learning packages are adopted, accredited on a national basis, and linked to reporting processes within the Electronic Staff Record, it will reduce the amount of re-training required when staff move from one organisation to another.


Benefits Of E-Learning

E-Learning offers practical benefits for individuals and a whole range health organisations:

- **Individuals** – personalising learning for progress in jobs and careers.
- **Employers** – engaging staff and promoting new ways of working.
- **Managers** – helping to achieve business and performance targets.
- **Health professionals** – collaboration and communication to share knowledge.
- **Educators** – to enable them to support learning in the workplace.
- **Providers** – widened participation in learning, at work, in the community, at home.
- **Organisations** – promoting knowledge management and workforce development.
- **Communities** – to enable sharing and innovation in work, learning and practice.
- **All staff** – inter-linking the use of technologies for learning and for work.

E-Learning will also have a significant benefit for patients and carers where the use of learning technologies will contribute to patient empowerment, enable self management of chronic and short-term conditions and promote communities of support for carers.

Purpose Of The Strategy

Given the diversity of need, and the volume and complexity of learning and training within the NHS it is clear that new ways of delivery are required. A key aim of the strategic framework is to achieve full value and efficiency from the embedding of appropriate technologies for service delivery as well as for learning. Many organisations recognise the challenges and complexity involved and would welcome a lead on common approaches. There is significant international and national activity to develop standards which can ensure the effectiveness of e-learning. For example, the IMS which is a non-profit organisation, which has a membership that includes amongst others government agencies, educational institutions, publishers, hardware and software vendors, and other consortia promotes the adoption of open technical specifications for interoperable learning technology. Several of these specifications have become worldwide de facto standards for delivering learning products and services. It is important that the NHS fully benefits from these existing standards. However, where standards are identified or developed, these will be promoted as best practice and guidance rather than mandatory.

The development of e-Learning resources, programmes and services can be substantial in terms of effort, complexity, support, delivery and cost. Whilst there are now signs of significant e-Learning activity being pursued by a range of NHS organisations which indicate the potential of e-Learning, practical experience in delivering e-Learning within organisations and across the NHS is still relatively immature. Early evidence suggests that deploying and using e-Learning in both the NHS and Social Care will be challenging. The e-Learning capability of the NHS could be a critical success factor in the Connecting for Health implementation and the delivery of benefits. The implementation of this framework may also lead to reduced waste of resources, as often organisations purchase duplicate products or those which are not compatible with new technologies.
How The Strategic Framework Will Work?

The strategy will promote sharing and communicating best practice across NHS organisations.

Best practice will enable and facilitate common, co-ordinated and collaborative approaches to support health care organisations in obtaining more productive use of resources and more efficient and effective learning. For example, technical interoperability standards and specifications will enable learning materials to be re-used and shared, so that total costs of ownership are reduced; such benefits have already been demonstrated. Collaborative approaches to tutor support across organisations could reduce costs of specialist support. E-Learning can enable better use of productive time for service delivery by NHS staff, rather than time away from the workplace on expensive training programmes. Boards and Senior Management teams can check local approaches and investment plans against the framework.

The Role Of Partners

The role of partners within the NHS, including the NHS Institute, Connecting for Health and the SHA’s National Workforce Group, will be to ensure the delivery of:

- **National standards**: promoting and sharing developments in standards for best practice in e-Learning (technical, learning design, learning support, quality of facilities and technologies, procurement etc.) to inform and support suppliers and NHS organisations

- **Local and regional co-ordination**: working with the SHAs and Trusts to ensure a co-ordinated approach, prevent inconsistent demands or duplication, and liaising with Connecting for Health clusters, SHAs and regional partnerships

- **Local action**: sharing best practice and case studies to support local organisations

This core collaboration will be enhanced by the contributions from the Royal Colleges, Skills for Health, the Sector Skills Council and academic and commercial partners.

Benefits Of The Strategic Framework

A shared strategic framework will promote coherence in areas such as technical standards, whilst encouraging local innovation and collaboration. It will provide a practical framework for both central and local actions. The most significant benefits will be to:

- Take a co-ordinated and coherent approach to developing and using e-Learning across health and social care.

- Make learning more readily available, by extending reach and access.

- Enable sharing of learning resources and services, for quality and efficiency.

The e-Learning strategy will enable a co-ordinated and coherent response to the drivers that are transforming the NHS and altering the role of learning itself.

- Modernisation and personalisation demanding different ways of working.

- The impact of technologies and e-health.

- Improved recruitment and retention.
• Increased emphasis on team-working and multi-professional collaboration.
• Learning as a habit of mind for continuous development.
• Learning as a consistent professional activity throughout the workforce.
• Demand for service improvement.

These benefits may be defined in terms of

• Efficiency – reducing time and cost for programme development and delivery.
• Effectiveness – enhancing individual, team and service capacity.
• Quality – enhancing actual and perceived product and service value, particularly in delivering a more patient-centred service.

A Co-ordinated Approach To Sharing Best Practice

E-enabled learning will be central to learning and work for the 21st century. High performing organisations have already taken this to heart. Nevertheless, work-based e-Learning is at an early stage of development and is not without its difficulties. Best practice advice and guidance is needed to overcome barriers; build capacity in infrastructure and skills; innovate in pedagogies and resources; and embed e-Learning across the NHS.

The main barriers to e-Learning identified within the NHS are:

• The inadequacy of existing ICT infrastructure and lack of access.
• The perceived difficulty in getting local organisations, or indeed departments within organisations, to adopt a common strategy.
• Lack of ICT skills among health and social care workers.

However, most respondents to the consultation thought that their own organisation was ready for e-Learning, and 41% felt that the proposed strategic framework connected well or was mutually beneficial to their local strategy.

ICT readiness is not enough in itself. There is more to do both in building e-Learning capacity and in joining up development and activities to secure service-wide embedding and quality for a mature system. The pockets of excellence in e-Learning in the NHS are still often isolated and co-ordinated advice is not available. Lack of collaboration can mean duplication in materials or platforms or the inability for platforms and resources to interoperate. We do not yet fully exploit the crucial benefit of being able to work with others in our community – whether the community is a professional specialism, a local health economy, a dispersed and remote community of carers, or learners with similar special learning needs.

A strategy which promotes sharing best practice will help organisations to avoid fragmentation and waste; ensure that their staff, educators and managers can fully benefit from learning; and obtain best value from existing resources and new investment. The lessons learned and the value gained from the National Core Content Project illustrate the potential of strong commissioning for enabling access to a wide range of quality resources.

There is also a need to ensure that the skills are in place to support Connecting for Health, the National Programme for Information Technology. This huge programme of investment needs to dovetail with and enable increased organisational and individual learning across all health and work-related disciplines through the use of learning and applied technologies. The
approach will also support Agenda for Change and the Knowledge and Skills Framework, for example, through e-portfolios to enable staff to assemble and present evidence of their learning.

A coherent approach will also enable the NHS to interface with other national e-Learning strategies, such as the Department for Education and Skills. Learning in health and social care is closely interwoven with the schools, college, adult and community and higher education sectors. It makes sense to take common approaches to e-Learning, to educational workforce skills, and to harmonisation of e-systems and data to support learning.

There is opportunity for collaboration across government departments, and also Regional Development Agencies, in developing learning communities and partnerships, and in integrating with EU and international developments.

Priority Areas

It will be essential to agree on priority areas for best practice development, in the light of the e-Learning readiness of the NHS and to reflect national and local drivers for learning and skills development. The consultation provided a starting point for this process.

The three most important areas for overall success were described as:

• Developing plans for ensuring access to learning infrastructure, facilities and equipment for all staff.

• Enabling e-access to health-related research, knowledge and information sources and repositories.

• Ensuring that educators have the skills to design, deliver and support e-Learning.

The three areas needing most urgent action were:

• Ensuring that educators have the skills to design, deliver and support e-Learning

• Ensuring that learners have the skills to undertake e-Learning, as well as ICT skills

• Establishing an Interoperability and Technical Standards Forum for e-Learning in health care with participation from other relevant national and international organisations such as DfES, (JISC), IMS (www.imsglobal.org) and others.

The three most important means of creating time and space to learn in the workplace were identified as:

• Protected learning time

• Dedicated learner centres or access points

• Management support and commitment to staff learning.

From this feedback priorities are:

• Developing the learning infrastructure, environment and systems: building capacity and readiness across all organisations with ICT and learning infrastructure that can be accessed by all NHS staff. This can include greater adoption of the government’s Home Computer Initiative scheme by NHS organisations
• Increasing and accelerating learning: enabling a coherent approach to learning across the NHS through access to high quality materials and programmes, including sharing of knowledge, resources and services across organisations and communities

• Supporting the learning workforce: building the capacity of the health workforce both in IT skills and in the e-Learning skills for both educators and learners

• Embedding a learning culture: in which leaders and managers understand, plan and sustain the context for e-Learning in work and development for individuals and teams.

The priorities are set out in an overall strategic framework shown in Table 1 while Table 2 identifies the new services and processes that might support the strategy.
### TABLE I: NHS E-Learning Strategic Framework

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<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Timescale</th>
<th>Drivers and Requirements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NHS Vision</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td><strong>NHS Improvement Plan, Creating a Patient Led NHS Agenda for Change and Standards for Health</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>E-Learning vision</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Transform the service through learning that is:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• an essential, seamless, natural and unconscious part of everyday work for individuals and teams;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• delivered and supported effectively and efficiently, in ways that embed best practice in use of digital technologies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic Framework</td>
<td>2005-2008</td>
<td>Develop, share and disseminate best practice in:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Developing the e-Learning infrastructure, environment and systems: building capacity and readiness across all organisations with ICT and learning infrastructure that can be accessed by all NHS staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Increasing and accelerating e-Learning through a coherent approach to give access to high quality materials and programmes, including sharing of knowledge, resources and services across organisations and communities.</td>
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<td>• Supporting the e-learning workforce: building the capacity of the health workforce both in IT skills and in the e-Learning skills for both educators and learners.</td>
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<td>• Embedding a learning culture: in which leaders and managers understand, plan and sustain the context for e-Learning in work and development for individuals and teams.</td>
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<td>• Ensuring a quality learning experience: promoting the best standards and processes to develop, deliver and accredit e-Learning products and services which are learner-centred, service relevant and reflect the potential of work-based learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key delivery plans to be considered for e-Learning applications</td>
<td>2005-2008</td>
<td>Standards for Health</td>
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<td>Plans of central bodies</td>
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<td>SHA’s Trusts and other organisations’ local development plans</td>
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<td>Best practice standards and guidance</td>
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<td>NWG co-ordinate</td>
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<td>Partner and stakeholder programmes and initiatives</td>
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<td>Analysis, research and evaluation to map needs, monitor progress, and enable innovation and inform best practice</td>
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Table 2: What New Services Or Processes Might Support The Strategy?

Some potential best practice services or processes that may be explored to address priority areas include;

- A national quality framework or forum.
- Standards for technical interoperability, learning design, learning support, and learning centres.
- National learning repositories.
- A ‘maturity model’ of good practice that allows local organisations to locate and benchmark their stage of development on an evolutionary ladder towards full embedding.
- Capacity-building for e-Learning embedded in leadership development.
- Peer review of e-Learning resources.
- Shared commissioning criteria or pedagogical standards for learning materials.
- Open learning architectures and co-ordinated approaches to learning platforms.
- Cross-searching and access to e-libraries and other resources.
- Development of an open systems framework to promote modularity and flexibility in implementation of services.
- Formation of a ‘community of practice’ for the NHS leaders in this field.
- Systems to enable exchange of learning data.
- Implementation of the new National Service Framework for Library Services which will offer standardisation of library learner support services.

Such services would be the ‘glue’ to enable coherence, progression and flexibility of access to learning for staff in and across NHS organisations. However, the intention of the strategic framework is to maximise local innovation and responsibility, to ensure that local learning needs are met, whilst sharing best practice across local boundaries.

THE WAY FORWARD

The Framework will be widely distributed within the NHS and shared with higher and further education, the supplier organisations in education and information technology and patient and carer organisations to stimulate interest and encourage local action.

The NWG will initially undertake co-ordination and leadership on behalf of the NHS through the formation of an ‘Interim Management Board’. As the NHS evolves, new models of collaboration and monitoring through the ‘Foundation’ movement and the evolution of the intermediate tier of DH strategic leadership and performance management, maybe required.

The Interim Management Board will develop, publish, update and monitor the road map and
support local delivery arrangements for e-Learning thorough SHA Workforce Directorates.

The roles of partners and stakeholders

It will be a matter for individual authorities and organisations to determine their level of participation and what actions they take and when. Potential users of best practice will include all those organisations, partnerships and communities who will contribute to and be users of e-Learning in the NHS, including professional associations and bodies, educational providers, Skills for Health, as well as DH and NHS bodies engaged in ICT, HR and knowledge management functions. Regional and local partners and stakeholders could include Health Education Partnerships, SHAs and Trusts, Learning and Skills Councils, Regional Development Agencies, and the People’s Network of Public Libraries. Appendix 1 identifies the potential role of key stakeholders.

Key Partners

National, regional and local partners are likely to include:

- The NWG, representing the SHAs collectively which can bring together common issues and give the leadership required for the promotion of this strategic framework across the service.
- SHAs which can analyse demand, plan, commission learning, support supply of equipment and contribute to evaluation and research for their local constituencies.
- NHS Trusts whose leaders and managers plan for the facilities, equipment and support for staff training and development, to support Standards for Health.
- Skills for Health: as the Sector Skills Council for the health sector with a remit including identification of learning needs and occupational standards.
- NHS Institute: could also consider a role if this is consistent with its remit for innovation and learning.

Analysing The Current Position

A baseline for best practice development will be derived from mapping the current position in relation to e-Learning. Initial areas to be mapped are:

- Infrastructure, to understand the NHS-wide position in terms of connectivity, networks, equipment and facilities, pending completion of the Connecting for Health rollout.
- Which staff groups and individuals have access to e-Learning facilities and equipment, whether in the work setting or through dedicated learning centres.
- How far content is co-ordinated or mapped, either across organisations or for all specialisms, and how easy it is to find or access resources.
- Whether the potential for sharing and re-use of resources is limited by the lack of central standards that can support interoperability, although the e-GIF now includes e-Learning as well as health standards and specifications. It is important that this work is continued.
- What engagement exists between local delivery organisations and national expert
groups such as the professional bodies to ensure that learning and assessment methods are relevant to specialisms.

- The level and scale of competence and confidence to support e-Learning.

The analysis should also look at wider readiness to benefit from embedded work-based learning. NHS staff should have a reasonable expectation of being able to learn in their work environment. Additionally, organisational readiness means having processes for the planning, funding and management of sustainable e-Learning – and therefore implications for leadership and management development.

The analysis should also identify any additional barriers. These might include for example, the high level of development costs; access for disadvantaged learners, those with low skills, or those with disabilities; and lack of understanding or awareness of e-Learning including the perception of online-Learning as being unsupported.

Developing a Roadmap

A ‘roadmap’ for the NHS will be developed and published in early 2006. It will focus on six core dimensions, and the potential benefits to be realised. The dimensions will include,

- Standards and infrastructure
- Sharing learning resources
- Local coordination - models of best practice
- Procurement
- Promoting organisational maturity

The roadmap will be published by the NWG, with stewardship vested in the Interim Management Board. This roadmap will be refined following consultation with key stakeholders.

The roadmap will make explicit what action needs to be national or central, and what is best left to local management, delivery and innovation. Some aspects are necessarily national, requiring coherence right across the NHS and indeed reaching into other sectors. For example, a national approach to technical standards (linked to other national and international efforts) is essential for interoperability and for sharing and re-use of resources across platforms.

SHA workforce directorates will co-ordinate e-Learning strategies for their health economies. The responsibility for ensuring access of individual staff to e-Learning through planning, funding and management will rest firmly with Trusts and employers. Not all SHAs or Trusts are at the same stage of development in e-Learning. Each individual organisation can use the best practice framework as guidance to assess their own progress and maturity. To gain the maximum value across the sector, leading practice will be disseminated and shared. It will be important not to inhibit innovation at local or regional level, whilst at the same time building on pockets of excellence and local case studies to disseminate at national scale. In any case, the strategy needs to be responsive to local demand and experience. Appendix 1 identifies some of the suggested actions that organisations at different levels might take to encourage adoption of e-Learning.
The road map will be linked to a ‘maturity model’ to support the wider context of organisational development, essential if the NHS is to develop as a learning organisation. Maturity models for e-Learning are best practice toolkits to assist progress. They typically analyse progress according to five stages of maturity progressing from initial to fully embedded approaches: localised, managed or co-ordinated, transformative, embedded, and innovative. They can be applied both at the sector and the organisational level, and can help leaders and managers to benchmark their progress. Toolkits have already been developed by some NHS organisations to assess and promote organisational readiness (www.clha.nhs.uk).

**Funding And Resources**

Funding for services and activities need to be planned by individual partners and participating organisations from within their existing resources. The NHS, as reflected in ‘Creating a Patient-led NHS’, must be prepared to challenge the inflexibility of fixed budgets and the locking of resources into outmoded models of provision be it service or learning provision. Opportunities for shared funding development across different organisations, health communities and indeed different public sectors are significant. The NWG will support some limited infrastructure to oversee co-ordination of commissioning, investment, and the dissemination of good practice.

**CONCLUSION**

If the NHS is to be able to develop as a modernised learning organisation, demonstrate a commitment to the development of its workforce consistent with the imperatives and delivery expectations required for the 21st century it must take full advantage of new learning technologies. The implementation of the Knowledge and Skills Framework is a particular example of a shift in approach that will demand increased access to learning opportunities. For professional staff the challenge of re-registration needs to be matched with responsive and appropriate learning and skills training. While e-Learning will not be an appropriate method in meeting many learning needs it is also clear that the increased use and application of e-Learning approaches are now inevitable given the urgent need for consistent, flexible, equitable and timely access to learning by the NHS workforce.

E-Learning must not be seen as a lesser option; it should be deployed and valued specifically for the benefits that can be realised and which might not be achieved with other approaches. There is now experience in some NHS organisations of the development and deployment of E-Learning, offering practical lessons to be shared and realising the benefits for the wider NHS. The workforce must be prepared to learn differently if the wider modernisation of the NHS is to be fully achieved and sustained. The use of new learning technologies can be a powerful enabler in realising the modernisation challenge.

Leadership and a commitment to sharing and adopting best practice in the use of e-Learning is now urgent. This strategic framework offers a common yet flexible approach to its achievement. Endorsement and adoption by NHS organisations is a vital starting point.

Appendix 1. Suggested actions that need to be taken by key stakeholders to promote the adoption and deployment of e-Learning?

National Workforce Group

- Lead the adoption of the E-Learning best practice strategic framework.
- Develop, publish, monitor and update the e-Learning road map.
- Represent the NHS and influence national cross-sector e-Learning developments.

Strategic Health Authorities

- Encourage the adoption of the E-Learning best practice strategic framework by local organisations and align as an enabler in securing the delivery of local service and organisational development plans.
- Use strategic leverage in the commissioning of programmes/services from local education providers to ensure that e-Learning approaches are considered as a potential delivery option.
- Provide resources to support local adoption, deployment and developments.
- Lead a benefits realisation review to promote cross-organisational working, enable shared commissions, deliver wider access and participation and promote knowledge and skills acquisition.
- Share examples of best practice.

Individual Organisations

- Should consider how best to progress local developments using the available assessment and planning tools and best practice standards.
- Ensure that the education and training workforce appreciate the potential of new learning technologies and how they can be incorporated to support local training delivery and achievement of the competencies within the Knowledge and Skills Framework.
- Provide a suitable-Learning environment.
- Develop policy and procedures to support learning.
- Monitor and ensure that staff have access to opportunities to develop the key skills to use e-Learning.
- Consider how e-Learning approaches can be used with benefit for patients and local service users.

Learners

- Will need to be open to new ways of learning.
- Take responsibility for own personal development.
- Participate in developing and evaluating the quality and effectiveness of programmes.