

# East Midlands Adult and Community Education Services: an adult, community and family regional e-learning community

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Supported by:



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## 1. The organisations

The regional e-learning community is made up of at least one and sometimes two members from all the local education authorities. They are:

- Derbyshire County Council
- Derby City Council
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Nottingham City Council
- Rutland County Council
- Leicestershire County Council
- Leicester City Council
- Northamptonshire County Council
- Lincoln County Council

The JISC Regional Support Centre East Midlands and East Midlands Broadband Consortium (embc) are also members.

## 2. Overview

The significant achievement of this project is not really about technology, but the development of a regional adult, community and family learning (ACFL) e-learning community. As part of an existing East Midlands broadband consortium project, a few enthusiasts explored web technologies, in particular learning platforms, as a means of transforming e-learning in their organisations. From this initial collaboration, East Midlands ACFL has grown into a pro-active e-learning community.

### 3. Details

#### Approach

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Our e-learning community is built on the expertise and relationships that have been developing around e-Learning over the last few years in the ACL sector in the East Midlands. We feel quite strongly that the success and sustainability of this community needs to be considered in two key areas:

##### *Human focus*

The strength and long term success of this project relies on those relationships that have grown from shared interests and needs. The technology allows for possibilities but the vision and creativity as to how this technology is used comes from those members of the community that are dedicated to adult and community learning.

##### *Pedagogical and technological focus*

Our intention at all times is to seek to meet the needs of our learners and we recognise that technology on its own cannot achieve this. However, we also recognise the importance of the combination of a vision for e-learning and the technical expertise creating just the right environment for change. Our community has given us the opportunity to discuss and research carefully a range of technical solutions, particularly around learning platforms.

#### Scale

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The start of our community evolved out of a project known as the Mobile Learning Unit (MLU) which began in spring 2003. It was managed by embc and funded by lottery money. In brief the project purchased a range of mobile technologies; ACL providers in the region were able to borrow these kits to use for learners in hard-to-reach locations. Technical support costs were also built into the project. From the outset ACL providers involved in the project sensed that their group had more to offer and focus on than the MLU kits alone and this was the beginnings of sharing resources and expertise. A year into the MLU project the LSC required all ACL providers to develop and implement an ILT/e-Learning strategy. This added a further focus for the group realising they had a different purpose to meet. The JISC RSC East Midlands also became engaged with the group at this time and along with embc are active members of the group.

#### Impact

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As e-learning becomes a much more everyday part of learning, the impact of this regional e-learning community is reaching deep into ACL organisations. Six months ago Derbyshire Adult Community Education service had perhaps ten tutors who knew what a learning platform was. Now there are 350 signed up to the project and, while not all are using e-learning as meaningfully as they could, it has injected a whole fresh approach to teaching and learning. Leicestershire County Council has introduced a learning platform to enable better and more efficient communication with their learners. And Derby City Council is developing resources through their learning platform which have alerted other authorities to the possibilities.

Two case studies highlight just how this project has broken new ground and allowed learning providers to widen participation and give learning opportunities to people like never before.

##### *Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Travellers Education Service (TES).*

The TES works with children whose families work on show grounds during the summer months and spend winter in Leicestershire. Previously the TES had liaised with each child's school and produced paper-based work packs to take away, posting work to and fro over the summer. With the six

laptops, the TES worked with five different families to set up separate areas on Assimilate (a learning platform) for each child and email assignments back and forth. The teachers gradually became involved and, most encouragingly from our point of view, the families also became involved.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that this project has stimulated and encouraged family learning in a culture where it never traditionally existed. One father was reported as asking where he could improve his literacy and numeracy to be able to help his son, and another family has been learning how to use the Internet in order to make their showground bookings online. The project has been nominated for a Becta award and is in the final six in its category.

#### *Nottingham CVS*

Nottingham Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) uses the laptops as a library for the beneficiaries of affiliated organisations. The main user of the MLU so far has been Inspire, a group working with adults with learning difficulties. The tutor has been able to deliver IT training to groups of 4-6 students in a suitable room. Previously they had to carry downstairs one heavy desktop computer with no Internet access and get the whole group gathered around it each week. Inspire staff have repeatedly said what a fantastic resource this is for them and how much the students enjoy using it. Another beneficiary has been a bed-ridden terminally ill cancer patient in hospice care; one of the groups has been taking out a laptop to her to teach her how to email to help her communicate with family and also to access online services.

### **Costs and benefits**

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Achievements include:

- New innovative technologies on a regional scale, such as a shared resources bank.
- Single Sign On (SSO) authentication allows access to a web-based personalised learning space for each tutor or adult learner.
- Shared expertise with recognition of LEA-wide differences.
- Shared resources and collaboration across the region and beyond e-learning.
- User access to the embc community gateway anywhere, anytime through a web-based interface.
- Using technology where appropriate, to meet the challenges of lifelong learning.
- Appropriate use of learning platforms.

Lottery funding enabled the MLU project to be successful. This has now come to an end but we have decided on new terms of reference for our community which fit with the group's now wider role. The cost of hosting meetings will be met by each ACL provider in turn, support will continue from the JISC RSC East Midlands and embc, and we hope to look for future funding as a group. In reality we understand that to develop future innovations we may struggle to fund projects such as the shared resource bank, but the benefits of belonging to a community like this can be realised through simple support and shared experiences.

## **4. Lessons, caveats, and implications**

As a regional e-learning community we feel the key to our success has been the focus on the human rather than the technical aspects of what we want to achieve. We look forward to hearing from you if you would like to discuss further what has made this community work or what you might want to consider for building your own community. You can log in to a discussion on our shared resource bank by sending your name, the name of your organisation and your email address to [sharon.hutchings@rsc-em.ac.uk](mailto:sharon.hutchings@rsc-em.ac.uk)

## 5. Contact details

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