The eLF Program

E-assessment case study

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Table of contents

Background...........................................................................................................................................1
Introduction ..............................................................................................................................................1
Drivers for change......................................................................................................................................2
The eLF program ........................................................................................................................................2
Learning goals ...........................................................................................................................................3
Opportunities...........................................................................................................................................3
eLFs in action..........................................................................................................................................3
Lessons learned.........................................................................................................................................4
Conclusion ...............................................................................................................................................5
For more information...............................................................................................................................6
Background

Assessment that is judged to be valid, reliable, fair and flexible is a pillar of the Australian vocational education and training (VET) system. The Australian Quality Training Framework 2007 (AQTF 2007)\(^1\) is the set of standards which assures nationally consistent, high quality training and assessment services in VET.

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework)\(^2\) commissioned research to examine and promote a greater understanding of e-assessment and the AQTF 2007 among VET auditors and practitioners. This research involved 48 targeted interviews with respected auditors, quality managers and practitioners, to build a picture of the key issues around how practitioners are using e-assessment and the auditing of current e-learning assessment practices in public and private registered training organisations (RTOs). The final research report – *E-assessment and the AQTF: Bridging the divide between practitioners and auditors* – is available at: [http://flexiblelearning.net.au/research](http://flexiblelearning.net.au/research)

To support these findings, three case studies of e-learning assessment practices in the VET system were developed.

Introduction

With over 1.2 million residents, Western Sydney is a rapidly developing area of New South Wales (NSW). TAFE NSW – Western Sydney Institute (WSI) provides access to VET pathways to university for Western Sydney residents. WSI delivers nationally accredited qualifications with a practical focus in identified skills shortage areas, such as children services, manufacturing, engineering, building, construction, nursing, management and accounting.

In 2009, WSI had over 84,000 enrolled learners and employed approximately 2,500 part time and full time teachers. According to research reports from the National Centre for Vocational and Educational Research (NCVER), more than three quarters of WSI graduates gain employment within six months after completing their qualification\(^3\).

WSI delivers national training packages in all industry areas and at all skill levels, from factory floor to senior management, and programs can be customised to suit business needs. WSI develops and designs training and assessment around national industry standards. In addition, WSI offers a wide range of commercial training programs and customised training delivered in TAFE colleges, in the workplace and via flexible online delivery. WSI’s Sydney West International Education Unit is a leading edge provider of educational services to approximately 1,000 international students from around 35 countries.

As a multi-campus organisation, WSI has developed special expertise around distance education, e-learning and blended forms of delivery. It has campuses in 10 locations and a facility for distance education located at Strathfield. Open Training and Education Network (OTEN) is the specialist distance education and open learning provider for TAFE NSW. OTEN delivers courses using a range of media

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\(^2\) The Framework is the national training system’s e-learning strategy: [http://flexiblelearning.net.au](http://flexiblelearning.net.au)

\(^3\) [http://www.ncver.edu.au](http://www.ncver.edu.au)
Drivers for change

TAFE NSW wanted to ensure its Institutes have the capability to meet the new and emerging demands of changing patterns of work and job roles, as well as diverse client needs. An important part of this new approach was to examine internal systems, processes and controls and question how well they support Institutes, or if they act as barriers.

The TAFE NSW: Doing Business in the 21st Century document, released in 2007, presented a new vision for TAFE NSW and emphasised five reform commitments to offer greater service, diversity and flexibility for learners, employers and customers, and to ensure TAFE services better meet the needs of industry and the community. These reforms were around strengthening locally customised services, building a new relationship with industry and enterprises, implementing personalised services, investing in TAFE NSW staff, and investing in new technologies for teaching and learning.

TAFE NSW: Doing Business in the 21st Century supported the need for TAFE to embrace changes in educational technologies as long as appropriate support and training for these systems was in place. As a result, WSI developed the eLF program to meet the objectives of TAFE NSW: Doing Business in the 21st Century. The eLF program focused on increasing staff professional skills development in terms of using new technologies and committing to a growth in investment in new technologies.

Increased use of the online environment for learning includes online assessment, and will require practitioners and learners to establish stronger relationships with each other using appropriate communication tools and skills. WSI predicts that these practitioner-learner relationships will become a driver for the increased use of more self, peer and collaborative assessment using online tools. Building teacher confidence around facilitation strategies and the use of emerging educational technologies for delivery and assessment will provide a basis for more blended forms of delivery, that can include more e-learning and e-assessment.

The eLF program

The eLearning Facilitation (eLF) program commenced in May 2008. The program had an initial target group of 10 teachers who represented a cross-section of the Colleges and OTEN. Tools used in the program include Wikispaces, Adobe Connect web conferencing, Moodle, Blogs and other web 2.0 technologies. Teachers were invited to join the program via email and application was through the internal Professional Development Database. The initial program involved one face-to-face workshop and ongoing online activities which teachers could engage in asynchronously.

The program was designed to allow teachers to experience a range of activities which included facilitation strategies and the use of emerging educational technologies. Completing these activities provided teachers with the skills to further develop and facilitate their own learning activities, units and courses using appropriate technologies and an e-learning facilitated approach. It was expected that teachers would apply what they had learnt in their teaching practice and collect evidence in the form of a work-based project portfolio. In turn, the program
participation and the portfolio would provide evidence for recognition or assessment for the unit **Facilitate e-learning** (TAADEL501B).

The initial program had an 80% completion rate. There were three facilitators assigned for the face-to-face workshop and two facilitators assigned to the online sessions.

**Learning goals**

Central to the effective assessment of learners' work is the need to build strong and supportive relationships with individual learners. The choice and design of e-learning and associated e-assessment methods are influenced by several factors. These include learner characteristics, learner involvement in the assessment process, teacher-learner on-line communication and the time commitments of learners and teachers. This professional development program aligns with the unit of competency TAADEL501B. Completion of the unit enables teachers to conduct more successful individual and group instruction.

The elements of competency include assessing the suitability of e-learning as a delivery mode; planning for delivery using e-learning strategies; developing e-learning facilitation relationships between the facilitator and learners; and using appropriate communication tools and skills.

**Opportunities**

eLF graduates were given the opportunity to attend e-learning online conferences and encouraged to participate in e-learning activities in addition to the program. There was a weekly session held every Friday morning, primarily to introduce new technologies to all teachers and staff at WSI. eLF participants were encouraged to attend these programs or listen to the recordings afterwards, and eLF graduates were encouraged to co-facilitate the sessions. These sessions were also supported by a wikispace which contains guides and links to relevant technologies.4

The eLF program was also conducted with trainers from the NSW Federation of Housing Associations, as part of a Framework Industry Integration of E-learning project.5 The participants in this program used a Moodle6 site as their main delivery platform, engaging in forums and online discussions. The WSI facilitators mentored the community housing trainers in e-learning facilitation.

**eLFs in action**

A component of the initial face-to-face workshop was a visualisation exercise where small groups were asked to work together to build a visual picture of what they think an e-learning facilitator looks like.

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4 [http://techtme.westernsydneyinstitute.wikispaces.net/](http://techtme.westernsydneyinstitute.wikispaces.net/)

5 [Industry Integration of E-learning](http://industry.flexiblelearning.net.au)

6 [http://www.moodle.org](http://www.moodle.org)
The results of the exercise are shown below in Figure 1.

![E-learning drawings](image)

**Figure 1: E-learning drawings**

There is an audio recorded at the face-to-face workshop at the beginning of the session with explanation of the program and strategy used at WSI to help teachers develop skills in e-learning facilitation. The audio is on the first page of the wiki [http://elf.westernsydneyinstitute.wikispaces.net](http://elf.westernsydneyinstitute.wikispaces.net) (scroll to the bottom of the page to play the audio file).

Other resources used include:

- eLF wiki: [http://elf.westernsydneyinstitute.wikispaces.net/](http://elf.westernsydneyinstitute.wikispaces.net/)

**Lessons learned**

The eLF program was successfully repeated for additional participants. There are now five facilitators in this program and the workshops are run with two facilitators per group.

Responding to feedback from the first two groups, it was decided for Semester 1, 2009 to change the delivery timeframe from six to 14 weeks. Online meetings were then held fortnightly and an announcement was posted weekly on the wikispace outlining the homework required for that week. The online sessions were recorded and information was posted on the wiki. This allowed teachers to catch up on missed sessions.

Another improvement to the program was to ensure that all participants have participated in two Adobe Connect sessions prior to commencing the program. These sessions were designed to familiarise participants with this technology so they can engage in the learning.

Two separate wikispaces are now used to support this program. The public face of the program is the eLF wiki ([http://elf.westernsydneyinstitute.wikispaces.net/](http://elf.westernsydneyinstitute.wikispaces.net/)) – a protected wiki which is open to all to view. All assessments and readings were posted on this wiki. A weekly announcement was also posted, and participants are encouraged to work ahead if they wish to do so.

The eLF4us wikispace was private and open only to members of the eLF program. This was where homework was posted and members engaged in asynchronous activities and reflective journals. An improvement to be implemented in 2010 will be
to present the content and some of the activities through a Moodle course and continue collaboration and sharing through the eLF4us wikispace.

As of December 2009, there are 47 eLF graduates who are spread across all campuses within WSI and OTEN with around 20 more expected to complete the course at the end of January, 2010. In total, there are 88 members of the eLF community.

**Conclusion**

In summary, WSI will continue to increase the use of the online environment to expand possibilities around teaching, learning and assessment. Fundamental to growing the use of the on-line environment is the need for strong relationships between learners and their teachers. Programs such as the eLF program are successfully promoting better levels of e-learner collaboration and interaction that can enhance learning experiences.
For more information

**Benchmarking and Research**
Annie Fergusson  
Phone: (08) 8348 4071  
Email: Annie.Fergusson@sa.gov.au  
Website: flexiblelearning.net.au/research

**Australian Flexible Learning Framework**  
Phone: (07) 3307 4700  
Email: enquiries@flexiblelearning.net.au  
Website: flexiblelearning.net.au