

## Chapter 14

# Building and Sustaining Collaboration in Cross Sector E-Learning Development

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter will focus on the process of building and sustaining collaborative reusable e-learning object development across three educational sectors, Higher Education (HE), the UK National Health Service (NHS) and Further Education (FE) Colleges, using the LOLA project as a case study. A qualitative evaluation of 'process' ran alongside the entirety of the LOLA project. This chapter reports the findings of this qualitative research, and analyses how collaboration was achieved between the diverse institutions who were project partners. The strengths of this approach included the commitment of the team members to collaboration, while practical challenges included the location of the team members, but also wider issues in the institutions involved, and in particular, the role of the Media Developer and the perception of it by other team members.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The LOLA project explored learning objects for life-long learning, and was a cross-sector collaboration across three educational sectors, Higher Education (HE), the UK National Health Service (NHS) and Further Education (FE) Colleges. These sectors were represented by the University of Nottingham School of Nursing, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, and Castle College Nottingham respectively. The overall aim of the project was to produce a set of Reusable Learning Objects (RLOs) covering a range of health care topics. The intention was that these RLOs would be usable across the three educational sectors involved in the project.

While there is general agreement that cross-sector collaboration is a desirable aim, it has not always been achieved. As the Department for Education and Skills (2003) said:

*There is too little cross-sector collaboration in supporting learners as they move through the education system – we need a greater focus on linking our public sector systems to provide unified support for learners throughout life (Department for Education and Skills, 2003).*

For students there are clear benefits. A student on an Access to HE course at an FE college accessing a repository of learning objects to support their studies moves to a university nursing course and has access to the same repository and a similar set of learning objects (albeit at a different academic level). The same individual would be able to access the repository as a qualified nurse continuing their education in the work place. A common repository of learning objects to support learning helps to create a seamless transition as students move across learning sectors (Universities Collaboration in E-Learning (UCeL), 2009).

Successful communities of practice have taken this collaborative approach, including the Universities Collaboration in e-learning (UCeL)

and the National Learning Network (NLN) in the FE sector. Though cross sector initiatives exist, they tend to be small scale. The universities of Bournemouth and Plymouth have partnered local colleges to produce resources for courses in Tourism and Arts. Cross-sector collaboration has also been achieved in language learning (Scottish Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, 2008). By widely disseminating the items in the repository and exchanging materials with other communities, time and funding constraints as well as project commitments were significantly reduced. This is because the production of new RLOs will often involve just reorganising assets into new ones or creating only those RLOs that are not yet available. It is worth noting that the development and maintenance of open repositories can be greatly beneficial for sectors like the FE where current conditions do not permit the development of them in-house (Fleming, Tammone & Wahl, 2002).

The LOLA project, the RLOs produced, their use and evaluation are discussed in more detail in chapters in this volume by our colleagues Richard Windle and Heather Wharrad. The LOLA project was funded by a grant from the Eduserv Foundation (2009). Instead of an external or top-down managerial introduction of a repository, the aim was to recruit members from various sectors who could be equally involved in the development and were willing to advertise and incorporate these materials into their daily teaching practice. This chapter will discuss the ‘how’ of building and sustaining collaboration, often a neglected topic in the e-learning literature.

A collaborative, cross-sector approach is thought to be essential for lifelong learning (Jameson & DeFreitas 2006), and they are well developed in nursing and health studies (Brady, 1997; Trim, 2001), though not specifically for the development of e-learning. Jameson et al. (2006, 964) report on two cross-sector collaborations (eLISA and CAMEL) to recommend a “controlled form of collaborative distributed-coordinated

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