

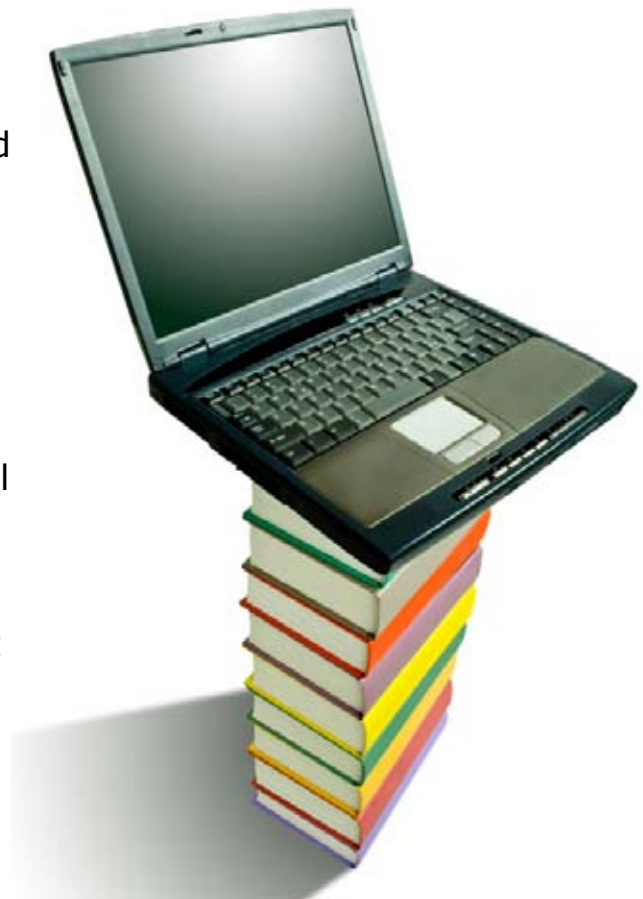
## eLearning Quality

Whenever I watch an old film like Ryan's Daughter, it always brings home to me just how much teaching and learning methods have evolved. In those days, education was about chanting and the concept of lifelong learning was unheard of. Any requirement to be involved in further training stopped as soon as you qualified in most professions you were entering. Nowadays, CPD is fast becoming mandatory for members of practically every trade or professional body and the Internet is an almost ubiquitous training and development tool for people - whether they are studying degrees, a foreign language during their lunch break, or, as is the case for many, keeping up to date with the latest developments in a particular profession.

Most people are accustomed to using e-learning systems, and comfortable with the idea of computers replacing a teacher for at least some of the time. However what is not so commonplace, at least, not yet, is the use of technology to automate the assessment of a candidate's performance. For professionals undertaking CPD programmes, or for students of vocational qualifications such as NVQs, it is increasingly recognised that e-portfolio technology has the potential to completely revolutionise the way an individual's competency is assessed.

Ken Boston the Head of the Qualification Curriculum Authority affirmed this when he commented "on-screen assessment will shortly touch the life of every learner in this country. Advances in technology have given us the opportunity to access and record aspects of human achievement that have been difficult to capture in the past. "

But as more and more organisations wake up to the idea of online competency testing, it is important that assessment systems are developed to take on



the role of the “servant” of the learning process rather than the “master”. I say this because it is becoming problematic for users of the earlier systems because they were not designed around the way people work and think, and forced upon the learner a contrived and often unintuitive learning journey. So, the challenge for developers of assessment or competence testing systems is to undertake the necessary observational research and consultancy at the outset to ensure the technology platforms they create are flexible enough to respond to the users’ requirements rather than dictating what those requirements should be. For example, in a recent project for the UFI, we used a storyboard approach to simulate five different versions of a new system designed to help people make decisions between different jobs, until the UFI were fully satisfied that the tool met their requirements. .

Measuring an individual’s competence to actually perform a particular job is obviously a really good thing and acts as a form of insurance. In the past, too many professionals were deemed competent simply because they could pass a one off written exam. Thankfully this is no longer the case, but creating a robust system of gathering information about what a person can do at work is vital, and very different from awarding a pass or fail mark. Such a system needs to be able to assure the quality of the judgements that are made whilst allowing the user to demonstrate with clear, tangible evidence, what they have learned from a training module and in particular, how they have reflected upon their learning and put this into practice. The industry refers to such systems as output based, (in contrast to the traditional input based systems). For example, a radiographer would provide CPD evidence by saying ‘I have attended the following course’, submitting an attendance certificate as proof, but the competency testing would continue with the candidate saying, ‘and I have reflected on my knowledge by putting the following things into practice’... or, ‘I have changed the way I work, I used to do X and now I do Y’...Their submission would be finished with an independent testimony from a certified witness, such as an audio or video recording from a supervisor or manager, or by a user who had experience of the candidate providing a particular service. Technology enables this evidence to be more easily captured directly from the candidate’s workplace, i.e. on a hospital ward, with screen shots showing evidence from a PC application, or even, as is the case with members of the Institute for Field Archaeology, by submitting photo or video evidence taken via a mobile phone. With recent advances in mobile technology it is even feasible for a candidate to take pictures of their work and go straight online to post the evidence in an e-portfolio.

In addition to measuring competency, assessment systems can help candidates cope with the ever increasing burden of red tape forced upon them by the

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various regulatory bodies as a result of different scandals and the requirement to demonstrate their competence in order to progress at work. So in the case of radiographers, all 23,000 practicing radiographers and members of SCOR are required to undertake compulsory CPD as assessed by the Society and College of Radiographers (COR). Then, up to 90% of members who work in the NHS are also required to produce evidence of their competence for the Health Professionals Council and to progress through the Knowledge and Skills Framework.. As a result SCOR have now made available to their members a technology system which allows them to use evidence of their competence captured once for multiple purposes. .

Today, e-learning and assessment allows us to train, develop and assess our current and future workforce continuously, to capture, share, and manage knowledge and skills of the professionals who work in our organisations, colleges, and universities, and to get the right information to the right people, when and how they need it. But the supporting technologies must always be designed to enhance and support the way people are used to learning and working, rather than the other way around.

## About the Author

**Chris Peat** OBE is the Director of Business Strategy at Axia Interactive Media (AIM).

AIM specialise in providing internet based solutions to support lifelong learning and development. Its customers include the Royal College of Nursing, Learn Direct, Council for Administration, Society College of Radiographers, Institute of Forestry and the Royal Society of Archaeologists.

Axia's Now.Net technology enables professional associations to implement an effective and efficient output based CPD system, regardless of size and resource constraints, with no requirement for technology development. Now.Net was short listed for the prestigious WOLCE Generic Solution of the Year Award 2006.

