

Definition of key terms used in e-learning

Australian Flexible Learning Framework Quick Guides series

Based on the knowledge generated from the Australian Flexible Learning Framework projects and selected external literature, the Quick Guides series provides an introduction to key issues related to flexible and online delivery of Vocational Education and Training (VET).

Reference as:

Backroad Connections Pty Ltd 2003, *Definition of key terms used in e-learning* (Version 1.01), Australian Flexible Learning Framework Quick Guides series, Australian National Training Authority.

Version 1.01, 8 July 2004

This document can be accessed at:

<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/guides/keyterms.pdf>

For a list of other Quick Guides see:

<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/projects/sharingknowledge.htm#guides>

© 2003 Australian National Training Authority

This work has been produced by the Sharing Knowledge project with the assistance of funding provided by the Commonwealth Government through the Australian National Training Authority. Copyright for this document vests in ANTA. ANTA will allow free use of the material so long as ANTA's interest is acknowledged and the use is not for profit.

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of ANTA. ANTA does not give any warranty or accept any liability in relation to the content of this document.

An initiative within the Australian Flexible Learning Framework for the National Vocational Education and Training System 2000-2004

Managed by the Flexible Learning Advisory Group on behalf of the Commonwealth, all States and Territories in conjunction with ANTA

Scope of this guide

This Guide provides definitions and descriptions of some of the key terms relating to e-learning (which incorporates online and flexible learning) in vocational education and training. It also provides descriptions and annotated links to more comprehensive glossaries of terms, and sources which discuss key terms and concepts in more detail.

Where a term has a broader or more general meaning, we have provided definitions as they apply specifically within the domain of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework).

Why is it important?

Every field of endeavour tends to develop its own unique language. The fields of both vocational education and training (VET) and information and communication technologies (ICT) are particularly prone to jargon and acronyms. Hence some of the language used in the areas of flexible delivery and e-learning can be very off-putting to the teacher or learner attempting to come to grips with these new approaches to learning. Further confusion arises because, in such a rapidly developing field, the meaning of terms changes over time, and new terms are coined due to changes in emphasis, use, or meaning. This guide provides short definitions of some of the central terms, but more importantly will link you to more extensive lists and discussion of key concepts.

Definitions of key terms

- **Blended Learning:** Learning methods that combine e-learning with other forms of flexible learning and more traditional forms of learning. (Flexible Learning Advisory Group 2004)
- **Broadband:** High-speed transmission. (The specific speed used to define broadband is subjective; the word often implies any speed above what is commonly used at the current time.) (Flexible Learning Advisory Group 2004)
- **Community of Practice:** "A loosely-coupled group of practitioners who work and learn together around a certain broad topic over an extended period of time. CoPs operate on the basis of joint interest, spontaneous interaction, and mutual development." (Poell, R 2004)
- **Digital divide:** "The disparity in skill readiness and ability to access computers and the Internet together with the ability to effectively use this technology to enable full participation in vocational education and training". From Literature Review: Digital Divide (A&E 2002). This review also defines other terms related to this discussion such as functional literacy skills, IT literacy skills, and online information literacy.
- **e-learning:** "e-learning is a broader concept [than online learning], encompassing a wide set of applications and processes which use all available electronic media to deliver vocational education and training more flexibly. The term "e-learning" is now used in the Framework to capture the general intent to support a broad range of electronic media (Internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcast, audio/video tape, interactive TV and CD-ROM) to make vocational learning more flexible for clients." (ANTA 2003b, p. 5)
- **Electronic Authentication:** Authentication is the process of establishing whether someone or something is who or what its identifier states it is. The

key benefit of electronic authentication is that it enables electronic transactions to take place in an environment of trust and confidence. (ANTA 2003c)

- **Flexible learning:** “Flexible learning expands choice on what, when, where and how people learn. It supports different styles of learning, including e-learning. Flexibility means anticipating, and responding to, the ever-changing needs and expectations of VET clients - enterprises learners and communities.” (ANTA 2003a, see this reference for a more detailed explanation)
- **Globalisation:** in broad terms “ ‘globalisation’ is a short form for a cluster of related changes. (1) Economic changes that include the internationalisation of production, the harmonisation of tastes and standards and the greatly increased mobility of capital and of transnational corporations. (2) Ideological changes that emphasise investment and trade liberalisation, deregulation and private enterprise. (3) New information and communication technologies that shrink the globe and signal a shift from goods to services. (4) Finally, cultural changes that involve trends toward a universal world culture and the erosion of the nation-state” (Laxer quoted in Hobart 1999).
- **Internationalisation:** internationalisation and globalisation are often used interchangeably but Smith and Smith (1999, p. 1 Executive Summary) makes the distinction that “Globalisation [is] the integration of economies worldwide through trade, trade agreements, finance, information networks and the movement of people and knowledge between nations. Internationalisation represents those same activities occurring between two or more nation states but does not necessarily involve a whole-world view.”

Within VET the terms globalisation and internationalisation can be translated to mean:

- including world/global views and practice in both general and specific ways within content and teaching design
- exploring and adapting content and courses for appropriateness in a global context of a changing world
- putting greater emphasis on transferable and required skills to equip students for work in a modern day industry and enterprises
- recognising and responding to the challenges posed by competition from overseas training providers
- exploring opportunities for partnerships and collaborative development to extend market opportunities internationally
- identifying the critical success factors, barriers and issues associated with globalisation/internationalisation of training and the implications for VET providers.

For further discussion and references see the Quick Guide on Globalisation/Internationalisation of Online Content and Teaching (Backroad Connections 2002b).

- **Interoperability:** “To be interoperable, one should actively be engaged in the ongoing process of ensuring that the systems, procedures and culture of an organisation are managed in such a way as to maximise opportunities for exchange and re-use of information, whether internally or externally.” Paul Miller quoted in the Quick Guide on Interoperability (Backroad Connections 2002a).

As discussed in the Quick Guide on Interoperability, interoperability is not just a technical issue. Other aspects in the VET context include:

- semantics, or the meaning of information, including language suitable to target groups, common use of thesauruses and controlled vocabularies
 - inter-community interoperability in the context of the blurring of boundaries between schools, VET and higher education
 - international interoperability in the context of international technical and semantic standards, internationalisation of education and training, and cross-cultural issues.
- **Learning object:** A digital entity designed to support a particular learning experience that can be used either by itself or as part of a larger aggregation (such as an online unit or course). The national trend is to adopt international specifications and standards (IMS Content Packaging and IEEE Learning Object Metadata) that aid discovery through learning object repositories. (Flexible Learning Advisory Group 2004)
 - **Online learning:** As a technical term, online learning encompasses a range of technologies such as the world-wide-web, email, chat, newsgroups, and text, audio and video conferencing delivered over computer networks (local area networks, intranets or the public Internet) to deliver education and training, both remotely and in the classroom. Web-based systems range from simple publicly accessible webpages to complex online delivery platforms which manage student access to content, group interaction, online assessment and ancillary functions such as enrolments and student records.

The use of the term "online learning" to describe a **mode** of education is becoming less common with the recognition that "the push for 'pure' online learning has largely been replaced by a recognition of the benefits of hybrid or mixed modes, combining online features with face to face interaction in various ways." (KPMG 2002, p. 54)

Deleted: online

Some key distinctions

“Learning” versus “delivery”

These terms are often used almost interchangeably (as in *flexible delivery* or *flexible learning*). *Delivery* refers to the actual process of the interaction between a student and the teacher or a teaching resource. *Learning* is used to describe a broader context which also encompasses areas such as organisational policy, student support, and administrative systems. *Delivery* is often used when discussing the provision of education and training from the perspective of the training provider. *Learning* is more commonly used when discussing the experience of the learner or student.

Over the last few years there has also been a shift from talking about *delivery* to *learning* reflecting a move from an instrumental approach – training as something that teachers do to students – to a constructivist approach – learning is something that students do assisted by the education and training system.

Flexible, online and e-learning

In one sense there is a continuum between these terms, online is a subset of e-learning and e-learning is a subset of flexible learning. However there is also a distinction between technology and approach. Online and e-learning are about

specific technologies. Flexible learning is a philosophy and an approach, of which the use of technology is one, albeit very important, component.

Other glossaries

- **Australian Flexible Learning Framework: Common Jargon:** This page defines some of the commonly used terms in relation to flexible learning and the Framework. <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/aboutus/jargonbuster.htm>
- **ANTA website glossary:** The ANTA website contains an extensive glossary of terms related to vocational education and training at <http://www.anta.gov.au/glo.asp>
- The ANTA glossary is based on an NCVET glossary produced in 2000 which is still available for download (Knight & Nestor 2000).
- **Glossaries of Learning Technologies Terms:** A very useful collection of links to a range of glossaries produced by the Office of Learning Technologies in Canada. Some glossaries listed are about the Internet and multimedia in general, others are specific to educational technology. http://www.hrdc.gc.ca/en/hip/lld/olt/skills_development/glossaries.shtml

Deleted: <http://www.anta.gov.au/gloAtoE.asp>.

Deleted: <http://olt-bta.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/resources/glossaries/x.html>

Field Code Changed

Glossaries on accessibility and web publishing

- **Option keys: developing accessible websites:** A website developed by TAFE NSW to assist in developing online resources and websites which can be easily accessed by all users. Includes an extensive glossary of terms related to accessibility and online publishing. <http://www.oten.edu.au/optionkeys/>
- **Authoring Guidelines for Web Accessibility:** These EdNA guidelines are designed to assist online publishers to understand how to make their web pages accessible. The guidelines include a glossary of terms related to accessibility and online publishing. http://egov.vic.gov.au/pdfs/access_guidelines.pdf

Deleted: <http://www.edna.edu.au/publications/accessibility/index.html>

References on key concepts

The following resources provide introductions to specific key concepts within flexible and online learning.

Australian Flexible Learning Framework Quick Guides

Based on the knowledge generated from Framework projects and selected external literature, the Quick Guides series provides an introduction to key issues related to flexible and online delivery of vocational education and training. The Guides contain discussion and links to additional resources, and often include definitions of key terms. <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/guides/>

Selected issues: Online learning in Australia

NCVER has produced a collection of documents (NCVER 2002a) – based on the research reports funded under the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (AFLF) – which present essential and succinct information on selected online learning issues. <http://www.ncver.edu.au/online/issues.htm>

Vocational Education and Training Policy Advice 2001: Final Report

The purpose of this project was to examine characteristics of international vocational education and training policy and practice and to identify implications for the Australian VET sector. The principal methodology was an extensive literature review of flexible learning policy development, advice and practice in a global context. As part of the final report (ANTA 2001) there is discussion and comparison of key terms such as flexible delivery, online learning, e-learning, and distance education as they are defined by different authors.

Framework Evaluation project

The final report of the evaluation of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (KPMG 2002) discusses the relationship between flexible learning and e-learning in the context of defining the boundaries of Framework activities and measuring their impact. It observes that "Flexible learning, online learning, e-learning and the other terms in frequent use are understood in very diverse ways by providers and clients. Consequently what they do under these headings, and the judgements they make about the outcomes and outputs vary greatly. It may be that by 2004, greater common understanding of 'flexible learning', 'e-learning', online learning etc will have been achieved within the VET sector and that the Framework will have contributed to that consensus." (pp. 81-84)

References

ANTA 2001, *Vocational Education and Training Policy Advice 2001: Final Report*.

<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/policies/year2001/fincomp.pdf>

ANTA 2003a, *What is Flexible Learning?*

<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/aboutus/whatisfl.htm>

ANTA 2003b, *Implementation Plan 2003: Australian Flexible Learning Framework for the National Vocational Education and Training System 2000-2004*.

<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/aboutus/implementationplan2003.pdf>

<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/aboutus/keydocuments.htm>

Field Code Changed

ANTA 2003c, *Legal Issues in Electronic Authentication*,

<http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/experts/reports/electronicauthenticationfinal052003.pdf>

A&E - Access and Equity in Online Learning project 2002, *Literature Review: Digital Divide (R019RL)*.

<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/accessequity/downloads/R019RL.pdf>

Deleted: <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/accessequity/content/research.asp>

Backroad Connections Pty Ltd 2002a, *What is Interoperability and Why is it Important?* (Version 1.01), Australian Flexible Learning Framework Quick Guides series, Australian National Training Authority.

<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/guides/interoperability.pdf>

Deleted: <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/guides/interoperability.html>

Backroad Connections Pty Ltd 2002b, *Globalisation/Internationalisation of Online Content and Teaching* (Version 1.00), Australian Flexible Learning Framework Quick Guides series, Australian National Training Authority.

<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/guides/international.pdf>

Deleted: <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/guides/international.html>

Flexible Learning Advisory Group 2004, *Australian Flexible Learning Framework for the National Vocational Education & Training System 2005-2007*, Australian Flexible Learning Framework.

Hobart, B 1999, *Globalisation and its impact on VET: Review of Research*, NCVER.

ISBN 0 87397 515 4.

<http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr8020e.htm>

Deleted: <http://www.ncver.edu.au/cgi-bin/gda.pl?id=1411/research/proj/nr8020e.htm>

IEEE-LTSC - Learning Technology Standards Committee 2001, *IEEE P1484.12 Learning Object Metadata Working Group: Scope & Purpose*.

<http://ltsc.ieee.org/wg12/par1484-12-1.html>

Deleted: http://ltsc.ieee.org/wg12/s_p.html

Knight, A & Nestor, M 2000, *A glossary of Australian vocational education and training terms*, NCVER, Adelaide.

<http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/core/cp9812e.pdf>

Deleted: <http://www.ncver.edu.au/cgi-bin/gda.pl?id=1743/research/core/cp9812e.htm>

- KPMG Consulting Australia & Lifelong Learning Associates 2002, *Evaluation of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework 2000-2001*, ANTA.
<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/aboutus/keydocuments.htm#evaluation>
- NCVER 2002a, *Online learning in Australia: Selected issues*, NCVER, Adelaide.
<http://www.ncver.edu.au/online/issues.htm>
- NCVER 2002b, *What is online learning?*, Online learning in Australia: Selected issues series, NCVER, Adelaide.
<http://www.ncver.edu.au/online/issues/defn.htm>
- Poell, R 2004, *Working and Learning in Vocational Education and Training in the Knowledge Era*, Final report of the Professional Development for the Future Project, Attachment D: New approaches to professional development
<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/projects/resources/PDFutureD.pdf>
- Smith, PJ & Smith, SN 1999, *The Internationalisation of Vocational Education and Training. Review of Research*, NCVER, Adelaide. ISBN 0 87397 533 2.

For more information contact:

Framework Communications Team:

Phone: (07) 3247 5511

Fax: (07) 3237 0419

Email: enquiries@flexiblelearning.net.au

Web: flexiblelearning.net.au

Locked mail bag 527 GPO

Brisbane QLD 4001