

AUSTRALIAN *FLEXIBLE LEARNING* FRAMEWORK

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

2002 RTO Case Study Project 'Flexible learning in practice'



Using the Australian Flexible Learning Framework
to Increase Training Opportunities for
Disadvantaged Clients

November 2002

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RTO Case Study Foreword

The following case study is one of 18 case studies that document the use and application of Australian Flexible Learning (AFL) Framework products and services by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). The case studies are an initiative of the AFL Framework for the National Vocational Education and Training System 2000 – 2004 as a means of offering 'real-life' examples of how RTOs are implementing elearning strategies with the assistance of AFL Framework products and services. Each participating RTO has documented their experiences over a six month period (June 2002 to November 2002) and have been selected from each State and Territory representing the TAFE, Private Provider, Enterprise and VET in Schools sectors.

Each case study will provide you with an insight into how RTOs are implementing flexible learning and is critical reading if:

- You are interested in finding out about the possibilities of flexible learning
- You are currently implementing flexible learning within your organisation
- You are looking to extend your flexible learning delivery capabilities

Each case study covers areas such as;

- How to implement AFL Framework products and services
- Change management practices
- Customisation of flexible learning products and services
- Professional development
- Access and equity considerations
- Flexible learning strategic planning
- Blended learning techniques
- Marketing and much more.

Each case study highlights the various ways in which AFL Framework products and services can be applied to the learning environment to enhance client delivery and service.

For further information pertaining to AFL Framework products and services or to access other case studies visit discover.flexiblelearning.net.au or phone 07 3234 1852.

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1.0 Case Study Summary (Executive Summary)

This case study documents the application of Australian Flexible Learning (AFL) Framework products and services as these relate to two cohorts of disadvantaged clients in Australia.

Elearn.WA is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) based in Perth, Western Australia. Formed in 2001, its mission is to implement excellent flexible learning solutions in partnership with niche communities and industries. Elearn.WA achieves this objective through successful partnerships that build appropriate flexible learning solutions. The following organisations, key Elearn.WA partners in 2002, were integral to the development of the case study:

- Anglicare WA
- The Association for the Blind of WA
- The Royal Automobile Club (RAC) of WA
- The Royal Blind Society (RBS) of New South Wales.
- The Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB)

Five AFL Framework products and services were used as a basis to service these partnerships:

- Toolboxes
- LearnScope
- Access and Equity in Online learning
- Flexible Learning Leaders
- NET*Working 2002

The primary objective of the case study was to apply the above five AFL Framework products and services to three Elearn.WA flexible learning projects that focused on improving the accessibility of training for, and with, disadvantaged clients:

1. In partnership with the Association for the Blind of WA, the Royal Blind Society of NSW and the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, to implement TruVision online learning environments for the benefit of learners that are blind or vision impaired.
2. In partnership with Anglicare WA, to locate and apply online learning resources that would assist unemployed people to engage in training.
3. In partnership with the Association for the Blind of WA and the RAC, to implement an accessible online solution for call centre training in two industry contexts.

Each of the above projects involved a team approach that developed action plans for the implementation of ideas, and ongoing monitoring and support. All of the projects were fuelled by LearnScope professional development funding, and involved implementation of existing online products developed through the Toolbox initiative. All project participants were encouraged to engage with the NET*Working 2002 online community, and those concerned with web accessibility, considered resources developed under the AFL Framework's Access and Equity in Online learning project. Finally, each initiative was informed in some way by the collective knowledge of the Flexible Learning Leaders network.

Consideration of how the five AFL Framework products and services contributed to the combined flexible learning capabilities of Elearn.WA and its partners is a complex issue. Each product or service contributed to organisational capability in both explicit and implicit ways. For example, without the Toolbox products, there would have been no content to work with, and this almost certainly would have served as a huge disincentive for the establishment of the partnerships in the first place. The cost of developing online products from scratch is far greater than the cost of customising existing products. The Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) system is in a highly strategic position, having access to a library of world-class online content.

Equally, the LearnScope professional development initiative provided a valuable commodity – time – for all of the project participants to research, apply and reflect upon their practices.

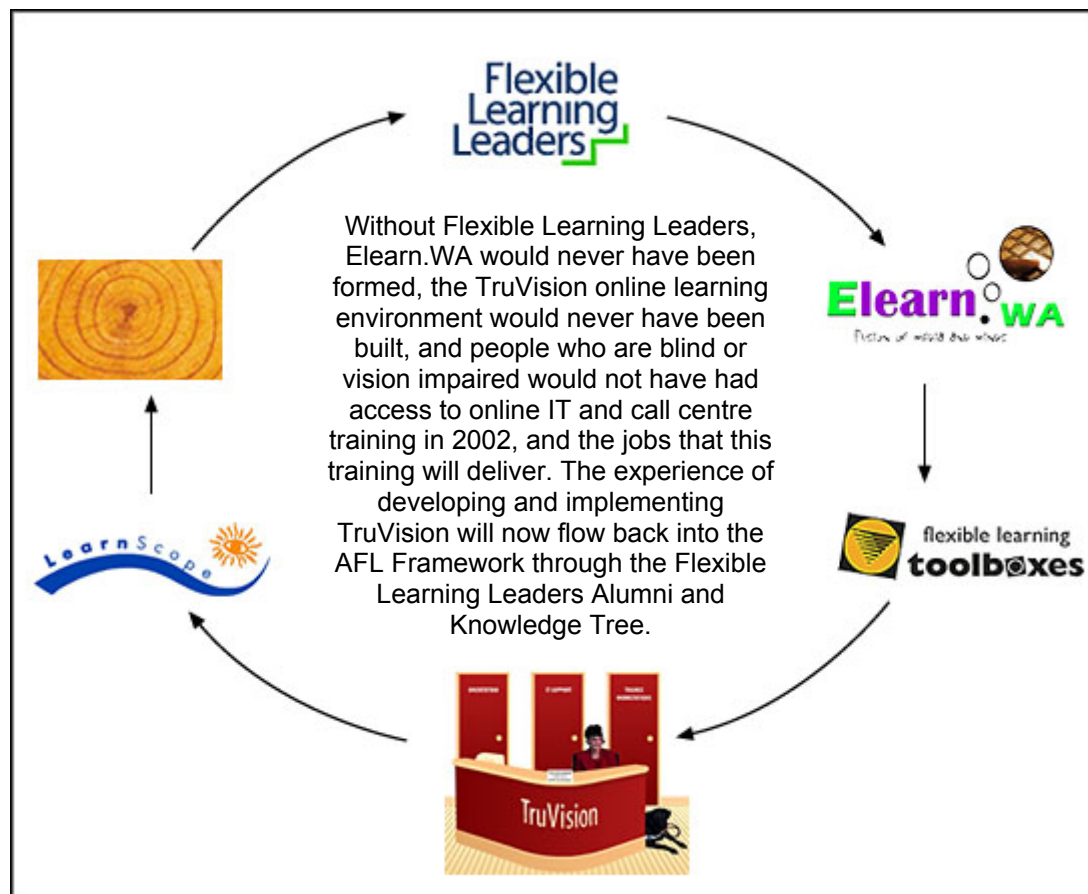
Continuing the theme of professional development, the NET*Working 2002 online conference gave participants a valuable opportunity to engage in a dialogue with their peers. The NET*Working 2002 site now serves as an excellent online resource.

The Access and Equity in Online Learning Reports, particularly those which are concerned with the range of assistive technologies for people blind or vision impaired, were a tool that

confirmed organisational accessibility strategies, particularly as these relate to universal design.

Finally, the Flexible Learning Leaders project was fundamental to the ideas that underpin Elearn.WA's approach to flexible learning. The centrality of the Flexible Learning Leaders initiative to Elearn.WA is expressed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: How the AFL Framework was Central to the Development and Implementation of TruVision



AFL Framework products and services that were used and documented as part of this case study are so intertwined with Elearn.WA as an organisation, and the partnerships that have resulted, that it is almost impossible to separate them.

This case study report is a component of the overall case study project. As a companion to the report, a web site was built that contains the project proposal, a summary, and full interviews with project partners and media releases. This web site is located at http://www.elearn.wa.edu.au/case_study

2.0 Flexible learning background (Introduction)

Elearn.WA is registered to deliver training in Information Technology and Retail, and conducts a range of product and professional development activities in other industry areas. As an organisation, Elearn.WA's core functions are:

- Provision of online learning programs in niche areas (eg IT training for people blind or vision impaired; retail training in the schools sector).
- Design and development of online products and services (eg TruVision @ <http://www.elearn.wa.edu.au/truvison>, a simulated online learning environment, built as an Equity Toolbox under universal design principles, to support learning in the Certificate I in Information Technology ; Hamilton Air @ <http://www.elearn.wa.edu.au/hamilton> - an online learning environment,

- again built under universal design principles, to support learning in the Certificate III Business).
- c) Research and evaluation of online learning initiatives.

Elearn.WA has a level of agility that larger organisations probably find difficult to match, having a depth of knowledge and expertise to anticipate, and quickly respond to change in VET. This agility has spawned a range of projects and a growing list of partnerships with enterprises, other RTOs, and in the schools and higher education sectors.

As an RTO, Elearn.WA's competitive advantage lies in its knowledge and its networks. Through a good conceptual understanding of a range of AFL Framework initiatives (eg Toolboxes, LearnScope), Elearn.WA is in a position to introduce other organisations to the benefits of flexible learning. It has no particular preference on what and how flexible learning can be introduced. Rather it works with other organisations to build a flexible learning culture based upon the needs and preferences of the end-user.

Elearn.WA has recently developed a reputation as a leading-edge practitioner in the development of accessible online learning options for people blind or vision impaired. The TruVision product is fast developing a national and international reputation as an accessible and useful online learning product.

Elearn.WA's success can be attributed to the expertise of its learning solutions and product development teams, and its commitment to produce educationally sound and innovative blended learning in genuine partnerships. The organisation has a solid foundation in flexible learning pedagogy and has applied this to projects within the AFL Framework for the last two years. This Case Study has provided the opportunity to reflect upon the knowledge and expertise that the organisation, and its partners, have gained from the use of AFL Framework products and services.

3.0 Getting started

This case study is built around three discrete projects and five AFL Framework products and services. The overall objective of the case study is to document how Elearn.WA, and its partners, used AFL Framework products and services to increase training opportunities for disadvantaged clients.

The three projects were carefully selected. They involved senior level organisational support, and committed resources to promote flexible learning cultures that ultimately would benefit disadvantaged client groups. The projects, which ran throughout 2002, are described below:

- TruVision to the Power of Three: Implementing TruVision with blind and vision impaired communities.
- Exploring Toolboxes for Objects: Developing learning and assessment objects with people who are unemployed.
- Accessible and Industry-Driven: Developing learning and assessment objects for people who are blind or vision impaired who are also interested in gaining employment in the call centre industry.

At least four out of the five chosen AFL Framework products and services were used at some time during the life of each of the three projects.

Each of the five AFL Framework products and services was felt to have a close relationship with the overall objective of the case study. The rationale for the selection of the five products and services is explored below.

3.1 Online Toolboxes and Equity Products

The TruVision Online Equity product suited the case study perfectly. Not only is it a highly accessible and engaging product, but it also was developed by Elearn.WA in conjunction with its partners the Association for the Blind of WA, the Royal Blind Society of NSW and the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind. This guaranteed a level of understanding and ownership in the implementation phase.

3.2 LearnScope

Staff at Elearn.WA have undertaken a number of LearnScope work-based professional development projects, and identified these as particularly useful in the development and testing of flexible learning strategies. All three projects were fuelled by the LearnScope initiative.

3.3 Flexible Learning Leaders

Elearn.WA Director, Frank Bate, was an inaugural Flexible Learning Leader in 2000, and is the foundation Project Manager of the Knowledge Tree: An E-Journal of Flexible Learning in VET, which forms part of the Flexible Learning Leaders Alumni (Wollemi Ring Leaders). The evolution of Elearn.WA is closely related to the knowledge gained, and the networks that arose, from the Flexible Learning Leaders initiative.

3.4 Access and Equity in Online Learning

There is a growing body of research around the subjects of accessibility and universal design. Much of this research has been undertaken as part of the AFL Framework. The research products released under "Access and Equity in Online Learning" were felt to be particularly useful to Elearn.WA's accessibility projects.

3.5 NET*Working 2002

Staff at Elearn.WA have taken part in online and offline NET*Working conferences since 1997. The conferences have proven to be a catalyst for new ideas and extended networks. In planning the case study, it was felt that further discussion and debate, particularly in relation to issues of accessibility, would deepen knowledge amongst staff at Elearn.WA, and its partners.

4.0 Putting flexible learning into practice with AFL Framework products and services

4.1 TruVision to the power of three: Implementing TruVision with blind and vision impaired communities

The primary objective of TruVision to the Power of Three was to work in partnership with the Association for the Blind of WA, the Royal Blind Society of NSW and the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, to implement TruVision online learning environments for the benefit of learners that are blind or vision impaired.

AFL Framework products and services used:

- Toolboxes
- LearnScope
- Access and Equity in Online learning
- Flexible Learning Leaders
- NET*Working 2002

The product

The story of TruVision began with an inspiration. Or rather, an inspirational address delivered by Mark Bagshaw at the Spotlight on the Provider Conference in Perth, Western Australia in March 2001. Bagshaw, Chair of the Australian Disabilities Training Advisory Council, challenged participants at the conference by sharing some sobering statistics about the participation rates of people with a disability in education, training and employment. The statistics painted a gloomy picture, and things were apparently getting worse. Bagshaw suggested that providers of education, training and employment services should not see people with a disability simply in terms of a social responsibility, but also as a potential market.

Elearn.WA founders, Frank Bate and Jean Macnish, came out of the conference feeling that they had failed to see a potentially huge and highly motivated cohort of learners. In retrospect,

we believe the reason for this was a mixture of apathy and ignorance. However, we did not intend to dwell on this, we were determined to do something.

In a curious twist of timing, the AFL Framework had given the go ahead for an innovative online product development initiative specifically targeted at equity groups.

After long conversations with my business partner, Jean Macnish, about potential disability groups that could benefit from the development of an online learning product, we decided to approach the Associations of the Blind in Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria to determine if there was any interest, and if so in which areas.

The Associations reported that there was very little in the way of online learning resources for people blind or vision impaired, and that there were significant training and employment opportunities in three areas:

- Information Technology
- Business Studies
- Call Centres



The TruVision Orientation Room

A proposal was prepared in the area of Information Technology (TruVision) as a first step. This was supported by the Online Equity Products selection panel, and TruVision was born.

In July 2001, multimedia development, educational design and project management staff at Elearn.WA embarked upon a sharp learning curve, patiently mentored by staff at the Associations for the Blind in Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria

TruVision was guided by universal design principles. Although the primary target audience was learners who are blind or vision impaired, the project was cognisant of a need to build a learning environment that could cater for the needs of everyone. In its final form, two versions of the learning environment are provided – both invisible to the other.

For learners with significant vision impairment, TruVision provides an audio and text-based interface so that the learning context and interactions can be heard through a combination of screen reader and streamed audio. For people with vision, TruVision presents a highly graphical version which allows sighted learners to take advantage of the visual aspects of the online medium.

The advantage of this approach is that, to the end-user only one interface is presented, and with some improvements in the use of XML, only one environment will need to be maintained.

Chris Edwards, Manager of the RVIB College, was an integral member of the development and user-testing teams. Chris provided guidance in the overall project design. A particular pearl of wisdom shared at an initial project meeting was:

“Don’t develop an online learning environment for people who are blind or vision impaired; develop an online learning environment for everyone that is accessible for people who are blind or vision impaired”.

August 2001

Chris had some initial issues with IT content, but displayed a passion for helping to create online environments that were something more than text on a screen:



Chris Edwards talks with Frank Bate about implementing TruVision

“When we first looked at TruVision we had some issues as to how online learning was going to work with people who are blind and visually impaired.... The thing that we thought that was very important in the early discussions with TruVision was how do we make online learning enjoyable, and let the learner who is blind and visually impaired feel like they are part of a new learning experience, rather than simply using their screen reader which is the way they access it - a voice technology to simply readout pages of text. I think that with TruVision, we effectively use descriptions to create a scene of what the images are”.

August 2002

TruVision took nearly 12 months to build, and in March 2002 each of the partners decided that they were ready to take the next step.

The service

Elearn.WA recognised the LearnScope initiative as an excellent way of testing online products and services with end-users, and learning from the experience. In March 2002, an innovative proposal was developed that would cut across state boundaries allowing learners who are blind and vision impaired to work together on TruVision content, collaborating across Australia through accessible online discussion boards and chats. This proposal – TruVision to the Power of Three – was discussed with the LearnScope national Project Manager, and ultimately the LearnScope Project Managers in each State.

The concept was not supported by the States, but the partners were not fazed. Although the national concept didn't go ahead, the Associations for the Blind in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia all undertook LearnScope projects, and had the opportunity to trial and reflect upon the success of the training program. A national network of learners undertaking TruVision is still one of Elearn.WA's goals for 2003.

Reflections from implementing TruVision

From a professional development perspective, the outcomes of the TruVision product development and LearnScope professional development projects have been significant. Brenda Moulton, a trainer from the Association for the Blind of WA, made these comments after undertaking her first LearnScope project:



Brenda Moulton, trainer at the Association for the Blind of WA, and TruVision content specialist

“When we first commenced the LearnScope professional development project, I had no previous knowledge or experience of online learning. It has been a very steep learning curve for me, and I have found it to be very interesting and exciting. I think the success or failure of online learning depends on its design and how it is facilitated. Any design should be flexible to cater for different learner's needs. The sites that have been suggested for us to visit during this professional development program outline the different approaches that can make learning more interesting and certainly more 'fun'.

September 2001

As with many LearnScope projects, the focus was on facilitation. This was no accident. In Frank Bate's Flexible Learning Leaders program, he visited Gilly Salmon from the Open University in the United Kingdom. With the help of Christine Bateman, a Flexible Learning Leader from 2001, Frank helped to bring Gilly Salmon to Perth to share her knowledge on the subject of e-moderation.

Gilly's workshop in Perth had a profound effect on staff at the Association for the Blind of WA, helping to equip them with sophisticated skills and capabilities to professionally implement the TruVision online product:

"The facilitator's role is very important as they must always promote a positive environment, and continually encourage the students to become involved."

[The Elearn.WA trainer] has been a tower of strength to us all with her positive feedback, funny stories and light-hearted comments. If I can facilitate a course half as well as she does, I will be more than happy".

September 2001

Brenda's enthusiasm was not limited to facilitation. After being one of the primary content specialists in the TruVision product development project, she offered the following insights:

"When designing an online course the following should be considered:

- Navigation should be obvious and easy to carry out.*
- Instructions should be given in clear and precise language.*
- There should be plenty student interaction as this helps to maintain interest and involvement.*
- If it is necessary to provide large quantities of reading material, it should be presented in an interesting manner."*

September 2001

Sometimes, the most simple sentiments are the most powerful. Brenda aptly sums up her learning journey:

"Yes I have learnt so much – my poor brain hurts!"

September 2001

Brenda's thoughts about online learning were echoed around Australia within the various Associations for the Blind. On trialling TruVision through a LearnScope project, Chris Edwards from the RVIB shared some of his learning experiences, suggesting that learner motivation and basic information technology skills are fundamental to success in online learning. Chris notes:

"We have found that it is useful to do some of the learning prior to using the online learning resource, and then when we introduce the TruVision online learning resource we want to do that in a classroom environment where people can gain appropriate skills within a classroom environment and get immediate assistance.

One thing that we find with people learning IT who are blind or visually impaired, is that they sometimes get lost, so having someone there is going to really help in building up their confidence. Then what we want to do is, as they have built up their confidence, wean them away so that they can start learning in a more flexible learning environment if they wish".

August 2002

Chris concurs with the theme of universal design that runs strongly through the access and equity and assistive technologies research undertaken as part of the AFL Framework:

"Accessible design is good design. TruVision, as an example of this, does not compromise look and the feel for accessibility. It has high graphical content and high media content and still is very accessible. I think this is something that the developers really have to get their head around".

August 2002

In New South Wales, the Royal Blind Society of NSW saw online learning as a mechanism to reach students in rural and remote Australia. Through the LearnScope initiative, the Society embarked upon an ambitious project to trial TruVision at multiple sites.



Paula Robinson and Mark Walters talk with Frank Bate about implementing TruVision

“We had to look at how we were going to implement TruVision in regional areas, because that is our main aim, to be able to provide training services around New South Wales and the ACT to clients that can’t, due for whatever reason, make their way to a local RBS office. Online learning for RBS has been an issue for the last three to four years or so, and we have been constantly looking at products as to what we could use, but in the past there hasn’t been anything that has been accessible for a totally blind user to use the online learning resource. So TruVision was certainly the first product that had accessibility built in, not just for blind and vision impaired clients, but for anybody”.

August 2002

A clear theme that has emerged in the implementation of TruVision at each of the three Associations for the Blind, has been a desire to create enjoyable and engaging learning experiences for, and with, people who are blind or vision impaired. Compliancy to standards does not necessarily guarantee a positive learning experience.

This theme was the subject of a conference paper delivered by Frank Bate at EDMEDIA 2002 in Denver Colorado. The conference paper can be viewed at <http://www.elearn.wa.edu.au/pages/links/links/links.htm>

David Gribble, the Manager of Technology, Training and Employment Services at the Association for the Blind of WA is a champion of universal design. In David’s view:



David Gribble talks with Frank Bate about implementing TruVision

“There are two outcomes in accessible online learning for a blind and visually impaired person. There is the bare minimum outcome, where a course meets the basic WC3 guidelines, i.e. the material works with a screen reader or magnification and it is accessible to so that the person can access the content of the course. Now that really is a bare minimum outcome, in that although the person might be accessing the content of the course they may not be having the same learning experience as a person who isn’t blind or visually impaired. If we strip out all that makes online learning potentially interesting, we end up with text on the screen that’s accessible”.

September 2002

David expresses disappointment to the assumption that accessible text is enough:

“The line we think that we need to take in online learning with this disability group is to make it an interesting experience as well, and that means not stripping out all the good stuff but making sure all the good stuff is made accessible as well, or there is an interesting alternative to the inaccessible multimedia content”.

September 2002

Through a LearnScope project, the Association for the Blind of WA developed an implementation strategy that took account of the special needs of people who are blind or vision impaired. David takes a pragmatic view:

“Initially the implementation needs to be in a classroom facilitated environment rather than through remote learning at this point. While we get a feel for the product, we want to have a class that is learning in an online environment, but has that ready access to a trainer/facilitator.

September 2002

One of the key factors in the initial successes of the implementation of TruVision at each of the Associations for the Blind was that there was a high level of ownership of the product.

This can be attributed to the extensive user-testing that went on during the development. Another key factor is that each implementation project was fuelled by LearnScope professional development initiative. The chance to think, and reflect upon, how learners who are blind or vision impaired behave in online settings was invaluable.

At NET*Working 2002, vibrant discussions took place on accessibility issues and strategies. These were fuelled by the experiences gained through the development of TruVision, and the AFL Framework Access and Equity in Online Learning project. These projects both promoted debate on what accessibility means for content developers and in the online learning process (e.g. accessible learning management systems, online discussions and chats).

Accessible content development was particularly timely given that Toolbox Series 5 developers were contractually obligated to achieve all priority 1 checkpoints in the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

Michele Jones, an Educational Designer at Elearn.WA, delivered a paper at NET*Working 2002 in which she shared her views on accessible learning design:



Michele Jones, an Educational Designer at Elearn.WA conducted a tour of TruVision at NetWorking 2002

"The achievement of high standards of interactivity and accessibility is fraught with ambiguities and apparent contradictions".

"TruVision has taught us that accessibility in online learning is not a holy grail or a marketing exercise, but a reasoned decision-making process that is best driven by a knowledgeable assessment of the needs of the end user".

September 2002

In Michele's NET*Working 2002 session, she discussed accessible design, W3C Guidelines and various legislation operating in places like Australia, the UK and the United States. Michele suggested that:

"Accessibility is becoming increasingly important as the Internet becomes part of our daily lives. It is critical that, as online developers, we design materials that are accessible to everyone".

September 2002

A good deal of learning took place in Michele's discussion. Some participants noted some fundamentals of accessible design:

"I realise that I need to be more descriptive with my alt tags so that vision impaired students will know exactly what is being presented on the screen".

NW2002 Participant, September 2002

While others raised some complex issues that had no quick fix or easy resolution:

The issue with things like scripts, applets and programmatic objects needing modification or added alternatives is one I'm still grappling with. The problem with these is that they are underlying or invisible events on a page so it is not immediately obvious to an end user what takes place or doesn't take place unless they are using technologies that cannot/don't support the scripts/applets/programmable objects. Has TruVision managed to tackle this?

NW2002 Participant, September 2002

Others noted the good work that was happening at the various Associations for the Blind:

"I went to a 'screen reader' demo of TruVision by Chris Edwards of RVIB last week, which was great. It is very hard to find examples of inclusive design and it's great to see it happening in Australia".

NW2002 Participant, September 2002

A NET*Working 2002 paper showcased the AFL Framework Access and Equity in Online Learning project. This was interesting and informative, with discussion focusing on the identification of best practice models for accessibility. A fabulous tutorial was presented, that highlighted accessible and inaccessible design. As with many discussions at NET*Working 2002, the TruVision and Access and Equity in Online Learning showcases raised more questions than provided answers. This was a positive outcome, though, as critical questioning is fundamental to the creation of new knowledge.

4.2 Exploring Toolboxes for objects: Developing learning and assessment objects with people who are unemployed

The Exploring Toolboxes for Objects project set out to locate and apply online learning resources to assist unemployed people to engage in training. The project was a partnership with Anglicare WA.

AFL Framework products and services used were:

- Toolboxes
- LearnScope
- Flexible Learning Leaders
- NET*Working 2002

The project had its roots in a desire to learn more about how online assessment objects could be applied to a disadvantaged client group. The project, supported by LearnScope funding, involved an exploration of Toolboxes covering a range of industry areas including:

- Information Technology
- Business
- Electronics
- Occupational Health and Safety

On an initial examination of Toolboxes, the participants of the project were impressed with the breadth and depth of online content available. Some feedback included:



Kath Berry, a trainer at Anglicare WA shares her views of the Office Administration Toolbox

"I was looking at the Office Administration Toolbox. I looked at the filing system, managing record system and I found the exercises really good in this.

I found it easy to navigate, the exercises were clear, you couldn't move on unless you had completed them correctly, which I thought was good. The examples again were very good. Just a bit too much detail for the level I wanted".

August 2002



Bob Philpott, a trainer at Anglicare WA shares his views on Toolboxes

This is not something that I get into a lot. I had a lot of difficulty trying to work out the big picture. I'm looking at content and I'm starting to see a number of areas that, as a newcomer, to this e-learning process, it's not simple for me to understand the jargon that's been used in the wording etc. I'm having trouble finding my way around.

August 2002



Martin Clare, a trainer at Anglicare WA shares his views on Toolboxes

"I have had some difficulty in navigating around through some of these areas. And some of the addresses I've found a bit difficult to find because you've got the different series of Toolboxes: 1, 2, 3 and 4.

It seems a bit all over the place. Why we can't just have something called Toolboxes, and find the list there".

The Exploring Toolboxes for Objects project worked through a range of professional development activities associated with online learning and assessment, with a particular focus on applicability to learners who are unemployed. Some of these issues included:

- Consideration of the Virtual Learning Community as a professional development tool.
- Examination of NET*Working 2002.
- Use of a collaborative environment for professional development and in a teaching and learning context.
- An exploration into educational design.
- One-on-one mentoring by an Elearn.WA educational designer
- One-on-one mentoring with Elearn.WA multimedia programmer.
- Customisation of a toolbox.
- Development of an assessment bank in an electronics course.

By working through professional development activities, and reflecting upon their practices, participants in the LearnScope project came to different understandings of Toolboxes, educational design, and the importance of communication in learning. On completion of the project, comments included:

I've been looking at the toolboxes; I would like to investigate these a bit further because some look very interesting.

*Martin Clare
November 2002*

"This is my first time on the LearnScope project, so coming from a conventional chalk and talk type background; it was quite a new experience to go on the online track. I did develop a small program, in conjunction with a few other people, and we had a bit of a discussion with [an Elearn.WA programmer], and he was able to come up with some good solutions of how he could make this work for us in our training"

*Eric Haskins
November 2002*

*"I did a lot of research by going to the LearnScope webpage and reading articles there, for example, the framework for developing online learning. Also found a really good one about copyright, answers from lawyers, for various questions that we might all have as trainers about what we can use in training. Also, two of us were in that conference, the NET*Working 2002 and that was quite interesting as well, lots of very useful articles in there, learning how to use the chat. I haven't actually posted articles as such, and I don't know if I will get the time to either.*

*Kath Berry
November 2002*

The key outcomes of Exploring Toolboxes for Objects were:

- Customisation and application of information technology Toolbox materials for unemployed clients; and
- Development of a bank of online question-types that can be readily further developed and customised by trainers at Anglicare WA.

The focus of the project was in working *with* Anglicare WA trainers to develop their skills in taking digital material and shaping this material so that it was useful, in an assessment context, for Anglicare WA clients; This seemed like a more sensible and beneficial long-term approach than simply developing online assessment objects *for* Anglicare WA.

Overall the LearnScope project was a very positive experience for all concerned. The Project Manager at Anglicare WA sees the project as a useful step in becoming more client-focussed and attuned to the needs of this disadvantaged client group:



Maja Katanic, Project Manager at Anglicare WA shares her views on the LearnScope project

"I have to say that I'm impressed how far we've gone with this project, it hasn't been easy we've had a couple of glitches with our IT system, and with different workloads that team members have had, but still we've managed to achieve quite substantial outcomes particularly with the implementation phase that we're moving into now".

*Maja Katanic
November 2002*

4.3 Accessible and industry-driven: Developing learning and assessment objects for people who are blind or vision impaired who are also interested in gaining employment in the call centre industry



The interface of the learning object developed as part of the Accessible and Industry Driven project

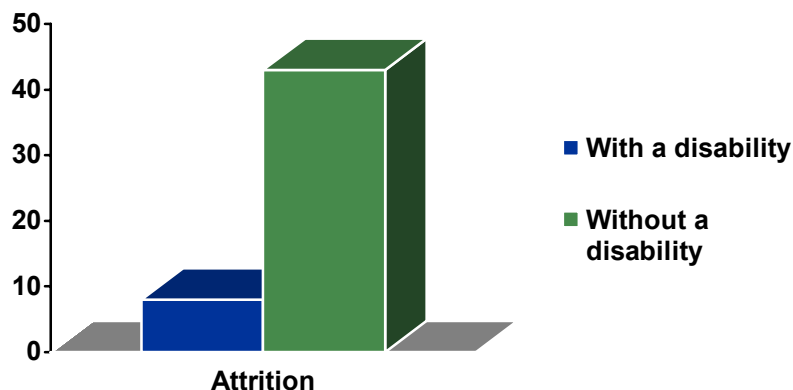
Perhaps the most exciting initiative undertaken by Elearn.WA in 2002 was the Association for the Blind of WA-Elearn.WA-Royal Automobile Club (RAC) of WA Accessible and Industry-Driven Call Centre Project.

This was exciting for a number of reasons, but primarily because it offered the greatest potential in placing people who are blind or vision impaired in to sustainable employment.

People with a disability are more stable and reliable call centre employees according to Washington Mutual, a financial services company based in Seattle USA, who conducted a longitudinal survey involving 30,000 employees over a three year period (see National Organization on Disability website, article EmployAbility - The Business Case published June 2001).

The study revealed that there was an 8 percent attrition rate among people with disabilities compared with the overall call centre attrition rate of 45 percent.

Figure 2: Comparison of Attrition Rates in Call Centres: People with a Disability Versus People without a Disability (Washington Mutual Case Study)



The company concluded that employees with disabilities have better attendance patterns and are more loyal and committed, and have put in place a strategy to actively recruit people with a disability into their call centres.

The RAC of WA is the biggest call centre operator in Western Australia. It has three call centres employing just 150 operators. After discussing training and employment options with the Association for the Blind of WA and Elearn.WA, the RAC has decided to adopt a proactive approach to placing people who are blind or vision impaired.

Trudie King from the RAC of WA is enthusiastic about the potential of call centre operators who are blind or vision impaired:



“I don’t see why there are any hurdles there at all, with modern technology it’s possible for JAWS to talk to the current infrastructure within organisations”.

“I think they’re [people with a disability] are great workers with a great work ethic. I’ve had experience with other disability groups in the call centre game and had no problems at all, in fact if I could clone half of them I would have done”.

November 2002

Trudie King, Project Manager, Call Centres, RAC of WA shares her views on employing people with a disability in call centres

There are a number of barriers that continue to act against the employment of people who are blind or vision impaired in call centre occupations. Some of these are:

- Technology – Headsets used in call centres generally do not cater for operators who are blind. A second channel is required to enable operators who are blind to receive voice feedback from their computer. In addition, most Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software installed in call centres does not work well with screen readers like JAWS or Window Eyes.
- Training - Lack of accessible online learning resources in the call centre industry means that people who are blind or vision impaired find it difficult to obtain the necessary skills to make them competitive in the labour market.
- Employment – Many employers in the call centre industry do not understand that assistive technologies are available to ensure that people who are blind or vision impaired could function adequately in call centre occupations. Employers generally are not aware that there are subsidies and support available to place people with a disability into sustainable jobs.

With the help of the AFL Framework and the Western Australian Department of Training, solutions are being found to break down these barriers.

Technology

Technology is a major barrier that currently inhibits people blind or vision impaired from entering call centre occupations. Elearn.WA and its partners, the Association for the Blind of WA and the RAC of WA have attracted funding to develop a secure, dual channel headset system that would enable people that are blind or vision impaired to interact with clients, and receive voice feedback from the computer at the same time.

This system opens up unparalleled occupational opportunities in the call centre industry for people blind or vision impaired.

Training

A customisation of the Call Centre Toolbox – No More Hang Ups – was examined as part of a LearnScope project. It was felt that this resource needed to be better integrated with the customer focus and sales orientations of modern day call centres. Trudie King provided the following feedback on the Toolbox:

"I like the idea of doing a Toolbox, and I like the idea of people being able to learn at their own speed, but unfortunately my feedback with the current toolbox was that they weren't realistic enough, they were a bit too, in my terminology, too fuzzy, too warm. Nine times out of ten in a call centre it's not always a nice scenario, it's not always compliments; there are such things as complaints that come in".

November 2002

An accessible learning object, the Membership Challenge, has been created and will be trialled with people who are blind or vision impaired before the end of 2002.

Trudie King provides the following feedback on the LearnScope project that made the examination of the Toolbox and development of the learning object possible:

"Its really made me realise, the difference in training people with a disability, to get the ultimate goal, how you can adapt what you currently do, its not that hard but you do have to visualize what its like to have that disability to get the learning across in a different way. It's been great".

November 2002

The ultimate objective is to provide a suite of online learning experiences that are both accessible to people blind or vision impaired, and are used by RAC - Western Australia's biggest call centre.

Employment

Most people who are blind or vision impaired require the services of an employment advocate. This advocate helps to ensure that appropriate assistive technologies are installed in the workplace, and there are no other barriers, physical or social that would inhibit the performance of the employee.

The AFL Framework Assistive Technologies for Online Training Delivery Report was used by the project team to enhance understandings of assistive technologies.

5.0 How to get the most out of AFL Framework products and services

The experience of engaging with the AFL Framework over the last two years has created a significant knowledge-base at Elearn.WA. Much of this knowledge is tacit, ill-defined and undocumented.

The following “tips” are an attempt to document some of this tacit knowledge:

1. Needs-Driven Approach

One of the best pieces of advice ever received on the subject of flexible learning was from Jan Tuckwell, a senior manager at Telstra. Part of Frank Bate’s Flexible Learning Leaders scholarship involved visiting large corporations that were undertaking e-learning and knowledge management initiatives. Telstra had a sophisticated approach to both, and Jan reminds us that although the approach could be sophisticated, the need for this approach should be clear and simple. Before undertaking upon any foray into flexible learning the question of “what is the need?” should be rigorously applied. There is little point in engaging with AFL Framework products and services if there is no need for a flexible learning solution. Looking back on the projects that Elearn.WA undertook as the focus of this case study, in each case, there was a clear need for an online learning solution, and this created a level of desire to succeed both at Elearn.WA and with its partners.

2. Think strategically, act operationally

Engaging with the AFL Framework can be challenging, but also can be very rewarding. It probably will call for some strategic thinking about how existing products and services can contribute to organisational goals. In the first instance, there is a need to become acquainted with the products and services available under the AFL Framework. Look at organisational needs, and be creative about how these needs align against available AFL Framework products and services. Operationalise key initiatives by developing proposals. LearnScope is a fertile area in which to develop, test and reflect upon flexible learning initiatives at different levels within an organisation. In addition, there are over 50 Flexible Learning Toolboxes on the market now, so the chances are, there are flexible content and professional development options that will support your niche.

3. Collaborate

The development of flexible learning solutions using leading-edge technologies can be complex and expensive. There are times when collaborative arrangements can save time, effort and avoid duplication. Make contact with organisations that have experienced the roller coaster ride of flexible learning, network with your peers, go to conferences, present papers and share your experiences. NET*Working Conferences are particularly useful for this purpose.

Most of Elearn.WA’s projects in the last two years have come from ideas that have been discussed with peers, particularly the Flexible Learning Leaders network. The Series 2 Retail Toolbox, developed whilst Frank Bate was employed with West Coast College of TAFE, came from a chance meeting with Anne Deschepper from Swinburne University at NET*Working 1999; The Series 3 CyberTots Toolbox came from a joint LearnScope Project with the Open Learning Institute in Queensland; at Elearn.WA, TruVision came from attending a Spotlight on the Provider Conference. Conferences are not just about learning something new, they are about forming partnerships to put in to practice what you already know.

4. Take ownership of the flexible learning agenda

Client focus is everything in the current VET marketplace. The research tells us over and over again that VET clients are looking for higher levels of flexibility and tailoring of products and services. Under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), the design and implementation of flexible learning programs is *your* business. Allowing any part of that business - from product design, learner support, technical support, facilitation, assessment and review - to be managed by an external agency is a risk. Be pro-active and take a leadership role in the partnerships that you form, and develop service level agreements for functions that are managed by external agencies. Be healthily critical about AFL Framework products and services – they exist to serve your needs.

6.0 Conclusion

This case study has provided an opportunity to capture and reflect upon knowledge that has been gained through interacting with AFL Framework products and services. On reflection, we have been surprised by the pivotal role that the AFL Framework has played in the evolution of Elearn.WA. The case study focuses on five AFL Framework products and services. These AFL Framework products and services contributed to the successful implementation of three key Elearn.WA initiatives in 2002.

Some of these products and services have had more impact on our flexible learning capabilities than others. Flexible learning Toolboxes have been central to Elearn.WA's core objective of working with industry and other RTOs to develop flexible learning solutions in niche markets. They provide a mechanism in which a dialogue can begin. As an organisation, we have learnt much about educational design and the use of multimedia to increase and enhance learning, from working on Toolboxes.

Online development is only part of the picture. In one presentation prepared by Elearn.WA for the for the initiation of Toolbox Champions, it was argued that "development was the easy bit". Below is an excerpt from this presentation:

Organisational Requirements for Toolbox Development (Retail, Childcare, TruVision)	Organisational Requirements for Toolbox Implementation (Retail, Warehousing, TruVision)
Externally resourced	Internally resourced/done through professional development projects/done in own time
Management support	Management commitment
Project management expertise	Change management expertise
Small committed team	Whole of organisation approach

Implementing a flexible learning culture is a complex business that is best achieved through a whole-of-organisation approach. However, reaping the rewards of flexible learning at the learner interface can be a very rewarding experience. It's really what the AFL Framework is all about.

Understanding the environments upon which online products impact provides an important feedback loop for future product development. Gaining this understanding requires knowledge of implementation issues, the nuts and bolts of preparing an organisation technically, physically and psychologically for online learning. This knowledge has been gained through LearnScope. The work-based professional development model, championed by LearnScope, has provided significant benefits in the implementation of TruVision at the Associations for the Blind in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia.

AFL Framework products and services like Flexible Learning Leaders and NET*Working 2002 will be more subtle and long-term in their impact on our organisation's flexible learning capabilities. Both initiatives are about networks and sharing. The Flexible Learning Leaders initiative, in particular, had a profound impact upon the establishment of Elearn.WA.

Finally, the Access and Equity in Online Learning project has provided a wealth of resources that confirmed Elearn.WA's orientation towards universal design.

7.0 Glossary of Terms

Toolbox

"A toolbox is a collection of online training materials comprising learning activities, resources and user guides to support program delivery for endorsed Training Package qualifications."

<http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/toolbox/overview.htm#faq1>

Universal design

"The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design".

Ron Mace from the Center for Universal Design:

Blended learning

Blended learning is an approach to teaching and learning that embraces the best of both online and offline learning. A balance between engaging online content and collaborative environments, and classroom-based facilitation and learner support strategies.

TruVision

An online learning environment to support competencies in the Certificate I in Information Technology that is designed to be accessible for everyone including people who are blind or vision impaired.

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