

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'

TAFE NSW - Western Institute

NEW SOUTH WALES
DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION
AND TRAINING



Exploring Flexibility

29 November 2002

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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Case Study Summary

Western Institute's RTO Case Study focused on how the Australian Flexible Learning (AFL) Framework products and services assisted two Travel and Tourism sections of the Institute to implement flexible learning programs that will benefit students in a widely dispersed geographic region. The project has allowed a small group of staff to focus on how best to use technology to communicate with their learners and to deliver flexible learning activities. Staff have used *'FlexWays'* to build an individual staff development plan, and familiarised themselves with the resources available in the Tourism Toolboxes. They have learnt how to go about customising the *'Toolbox'* resources for local use. The benefits of *'LearnScope'* have been researched and ascertained through joint participation in a current project and surveying previous participants.

We have involved two part-time travel teachers, both new to TAFE, and the teachers responsible for managing Travel sections in two major centres, Orange and Dubbo. Normally, each section would work independently to develop teaching and assessment resources. The project has enabled a whole of Institute approach to Travel planning and teaching. As a result the new teachers are developing a solid grounding in planning for blended learning programs in 2003, and acquiring the skills to enable them to deliver flexibly. The faculty has developed an e-learning site to act as a communication tool, and the team is keen to put the site into action.

Through the use of the Faculty e-learning website teachers will be able to communicate with both teachers and learners through regular message boards and emails. Western Institute are using the tool to deliver a blended learning strategy which is consistent with the needs of their students.

We believe blended learning would suit our learners better than wholly online learning because of bandwidth restrictions and equity of access issues. The benefits are that learners will be oriented into their course through meeting their teachers and fellow learners face-to-face. Teachers will provide guidance, support and assistance to learners in both face-to-face and online environments. Learners can participate in learning from home, work or a TAFE Access centre, using resources in a variety of media.

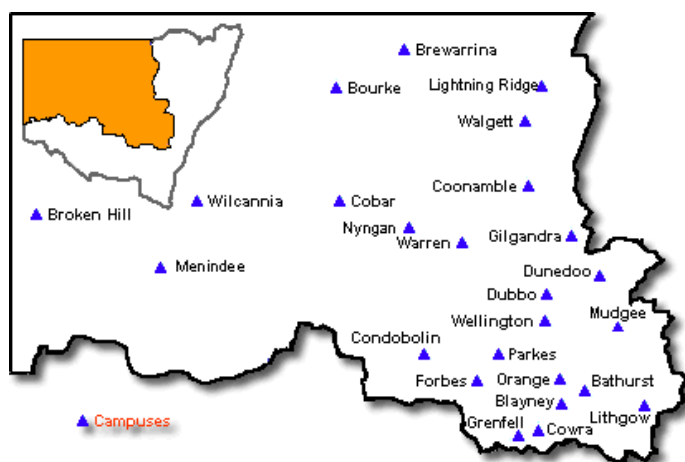
To manage change from face-to-face teaching and learning to blended flexible delivery, Western Institute has focussed on developing strong communication between the various business functions. Sharing the knowledge is critical to the success of this strategy and Western Institute's staff are encouraged to communicate their experiences with other teachers across the business of the Institute.

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1.0 Flexible learning background

TAFE NSW Western Institute is geographically the largest TAFE NSW Institute. It services an area covering 48% of New South Wales, including some of the most isolated and remote communities in Australia. Western Institute also offers vocational education, training, and consultancy services throughout the Pacific Islands and South East Asia.



This project aimed to enhance the teaching ability of two sections within the Community Services, Health, Tourism & Hospitality faculty of TAFE NSW Western Institute to develop learning options for students which are flexible and appropriate to students needs and teachers abilities. The faculty is an Institute leader in innovative approaches to flexible delivery, especially in the Welfare, Child Studies and Nursing disciplines. Within these program areas, over 80% of courses are offered in a flexible learning mode. The two participating Travel and Tourism sections in this case study project are only beginning to move into flexible delivery and therefore their participation will significantly assist the take up of flexible learning strategies within their program area.

Travel and Tourism is an identified growth area for Western Institute, with travel and tourism being developed in Lithgow, Bathurst, Orange, Cowra, Dubbo, Bourke and Broken Hill, and has recently seen the first appointment of a full time teacher to Orange Campus. The head teacher of Tourism and Hospitality at Dubbo Campus has management responsibility for Travel and Tourism. New part-time teachers had been recruited to both sections, and as they were both new to the TAFE teaching environment, their need for training and information was immediate.

This case study will focus upon the experiences of the group of teachers, who are beginners in the learning process, and the manner in which they utilised the Australian Flexible Learning (AFL) Framework Products and Services to effectively enhance their knowledge and ability as well as plan for future flexible delivery of Travel and Tourism courses.

Our objectives in participating in this case study were:

1. To develop learning options for students which are flexible and appropriate to their needs and teachers abilities;
2. To focus the experiences of a group of teachers who are beginners in their own learning process of flexible delivery;
3. To identify the professional development needs that this learning process will require.

2.0 Getting started – Selecting the right AFL Framework products and services

The AFL Framework products and services selected for implementation in this case study were a mixture of new products/services, which were being used for the first time, and the familiar ones. The new products and services selected and the reasons for selecting them are set out below.

FlexWays

Product Description

FlexWays is a web based professional development planning resource for people working in Vocational Education and Training who want to develop their skills for a flexible learning environment. With FlexWays you can create, save, print and edit a personalized professional development plan. The starting point with FlexWays can either be scenarios or your own goals.

We chose to use FlexWays because it is a highly flexible product, and promotes thinking about planning for professional development.

How we used it

FlexWays was used by all team members. Each person created an individual professional development plan that established their goal, identified the skills they require, planned a series of learning strategies and identified the resources they could use to achieve their goal. It was anticipated that the implementation of this plan would extend beyond the length of the case study project and will be supported by additional funds from TAFE NSW Western Institute.

The familiar products and services were LearnScope and Toolboxes.

LearnScope

Service Description

LearnScope is a national team-based professional development project providing opportunities for teams to increase their skills and capabilities in using technology in the delivery of VET.

We chose to use LearnScope as a research focus because many faculty staff have been involved in projects. We were keen to identify and experience the benefits of participating.

How we used it

The faculty of Community Services, Health, Tourism & Hospitality has been an active participant in LearnScope during 2000 and 2001. In fact the faculty was also involved in the first round of funded projects in 1998 and was successful in the funding round for 2002. Team members will draw upon the extensive learning that other faculty staff have gained from these projects by interviewing them and documenting the information and then seeking to apply these insights to their own emerging practice.

Toolboxes

Product Description

A Toolbox is a collection of online training materials comprising learning activities, resources and user guides to match the national training packages. These resources can be used to support classroom based delivery or flexible delivery.

We chose to use Toolboxes because they were readily available, and represent a leap forward for flexible delivery.

How we used it

The Community Services, Health, Tourism & Hospitality Faculty is keen to increase the uptake and customisation of the Toolboxes. To this end, all Toolboxes pertaining to the areas of delivery within the Faculty have been purchased and staff are beginning to explore how they might be used in online and mixed mode delivery. The NSW Toolbox Champion is prepared to support and assist staff developing the necessary skills to implement the Toolboxes within their teaching areas. As part of this case study team members will implement (and customise if appropriate) at least one section of one Toolbox within their current teaching. The Toolboxes to be used by this team were those relating to tourism & hospitality training, namely:

Retail AQF III Travel Sales & International Retail Sales, AQF V & VI Common Management Units, AQF II & III Tourism and Hospitality Toolbox Common Elective Units.

The Toolboxes had been purchased but were underutilised by Travel and Tourism teachers. The project aimed to assist the implementation of the Toolboxes by encouraging the use of the resources, which are accessible to all teachers.

PUTTING FLEXIBLE LEARNING INTO PRACTICE WITH AFL FRAMEWORK PRODUCTS AND SERVICES!

What we did

Toolboxes

The team explored Toolboxes as CD Rom resources rather than online. This choice was deliberate. Fully online was rejected as a preferred delivery option in the initial stages. Teachers, as beginners, did not have the confidence to delve straight into the online environment. We researched various aspects of the relevant products, with a view to sending CD ROMs to students as learning resources. The Toolboxes reviewed were AQF III Travel Sales & International Retail Sales, AQF V & VI Common Management Units, AQF II & III T & H Toolbox Common Elective Units.

In order to learn ways to customise the Toolboxes, we joined the faculty LearnScope team in a training session with the NSW Toolbox Champion. The latest Toolboxes demonstrated were exciting, colourful and immediately inviting. The Travel Toolbox is an early product, and by comparison appears quite dated, in style as well as the content driven nature.

We found that using the Toolboxes in CD Rom format required a higher level of IT skill than teachers currently have, let alone the students, to navigate around. Occasional obstacles such as downloading Macromedia would become a barrier.

The AQF II & III T & H Toolbox Common Elective Units is the better Toolbox, more varied and specific.

Teacher – learner and learner – learner interaction is required to motivate learners and overcome isolation, so the Toolboxes will be used for the most part, as a supplementary teaching resource. We are excited about the opportunity to supplement existing print based flexible learning resources with resources from the AQF II & III T & H Toolbox Common Elective Units. The Toolbox resources will be used in printed or electronic format, customised and issued to students as learning exercises.

FlexWays

FlexWays was used to develop individual professional development plans for each team member. The resulting plans can be self monitored and updated. FlexWays allows individuals to set guidelines for progress and identify necessary resources for their plan. The site was easy to use, straightforward and aligned personal goals with organisational goals.

“FlexWays is a good tool to customise your learning goals into achievable components. A loose plan can be turned into a focused, workable document. We learnt through discussion with the group that the best way to use FlexWays is to concentrate on small achievable outcomes and leave the unknown areas to those with more expertise” Teacher, TAFE NSW - Western Institute

The danger alluded to is that if you list everything you need to learn, your plan can quickly become unwieldily, as so many options are provided. We think it also provides staff with information to enable choices to be made from the overwhelming array of development opportunities that sometimes present themselves. A valuable aspect of FlexWays is the collection of skills checklists.

Western Institute has implemented a similar system of professional development planning through the Teacher Annual Review as a requirement of the Crown Employees (Teachers in Schools and TAFE and Related Employees) Award of 2001. Teacher’s performance is appraised by annual review. The process and the tool, which is based on a set of agreed competencies, provides a structured framework that can be used either manually or electronically as a catalyst for discussion to review staff performance, set future goals and identify individual development needs. Western Institute plans to expand the Annual Review process to part time and general staff over the next twelve months.

Leaders of teaching sections can use FlexWays to create professional development plans to monitor and manage their staff, as an alternative for staff who choose not to use the existing Annual Review system, and to maximise learning opportunities. Managing staff development needs is enhanced when the faculty staff development budget can be prioritised according to documented need.

We have recommended that three sections of the Faculty create FlexWays plans for their teaching staff and support staff, as a direct comparison to the Annual Review process, and report back on the benefits for wider faculty implementation.

LearnScope

The team designed a questionnaire for staff who had participated in LearnScope projects since 1998. Overwhelmingly, LearnScope has been highly successful in developing teachers’ confidence and competence in applying technology to their teaching and learning practices. The survey and the detailed responses appear in the appendices of this case study.

As part of our case study, we researched the effects of five years of LearnScope projects on the Community Services, Tourism and Hospitality faculty. Eleven faculty staff have completed the survey (see Appendix 1). Staff reported that LearnScope provided the opportunity to enhance skills and learn new ways of accessing online learning as it is the way of the future for remote locations. The immediate work based relevance was applauded. Every respondent found LearnScope to be a valuable staff development mechanism. It has helped build confidence in using technology to support teaching and learning at an introductory level. The development of confidence has improved efficiency with using the Internet and this learning has transferred to the use of corporate electronic systems. Learning with a team of peers is also highly beneficial.

LearnScope has provided a structured opportunity to develop skill and confidence in using technology for teaching and learning, and incorporating web resources into teaching. It has stimulated teachers to take initial steps in a peer-learning environment, and offered opportunity to enhance skill development in subsequent projects. Respondents cite the integration of skill development into their everyday duties on the job; some have developed even more skills, as a result of the LearnScope “spark”. Sharing knowledge with others, transferring skills and a general improvement in confidence and competence has resulted. All respondents have used skills developed in their LearnScope projects, and adapted their teaching style as a result. The standout application is gaining information from the Internet, which is relevant and up to date for students.

On the basis of the survey findings, our experience of participating in the LearnScope training session, and the training needs identified through this case study, an application for LearnScope funds will again be submitted in 2003. Travel and Tourism teachers will develop FlexWays plans at the outset of the LearnScope project, the aim being to develop skills in communicating with learners online, and facilitating and managing online learners.

Outcomes against Case Study Objectives

Objective 1: Develop learning options for students, which are flexible & appropriate to their needs & teachers abilities.

The team will implement online communication with students via the e-learning website in 2003, utilising its capacity for email, bulletin boards, diary, online module learning outcomes and assessment guides. A blended learning model, based on face-to-face orientation and use of the existing print resources supplemented by some Toolbox activities will be adopted. Orientation sessions will be conducted to introduce students to the e-learning website, and Netiquette guidelines (protocols for communication) distributed. Learners’ readiness for online communication has to be ascertained and gap training conducted

Objective 2: To focus the experiences of a group of teachers who are beginners in the learning process towards flexible delivery.

Experience from this project enabled teachers to readily identify that their level of training with the CD Rom Toolboxes was not sufficient to develop confidence or competence in using the Toolboxes fully online. Therefore, blended learning, using a mix of face-to-face workshops with print based resources, supplemented with some Toolbox activities, is the preferred option in the immediate future. Toolboxes can be used for teaching reference and resources.

This case study expanded our horizons, provided awareness of what is available and made us look at Toolboxes, and other options for flexible delivery, rather than remaining in the comfort zone of face-to-face and chalk and talk methods. It instilled panic that teaching is changing and we need to keep abreast of it, and put us into a change mentality. It is no longer sufficient to be an expert in your discipline. Teachers need underpinning ICT skills and knowledge to remain current. We identified that we need further training and are taking steps to ensure Travel and Tourism teachers have access to relevant training. It has allowed us to experience some of the difficulties learners may experience and the support requirements we need to establish (eg. helpdesk).

All team members have been encouraged to comment on all aspects of project activities and our project plan was implemented without a hitch. The importance of constructing the plan initially and monitoring progress against the plan throughout the project eliminated any uncertainty or stress. New part-time teachers have been oriented to flexible learning processes and tools.

Objective 3: To identify the professional development needs that this learning process will require.

To implement our flexible delivery plan for 2003, teachers will require additional training in the faculty e-learning platform and, with more experience in using and customising Toolboxes, their usage expand may be expanded.

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

If your teaching section is seeking to move into flexible delivery:

- Start with FlexWays to identify individual goals that align with your organisations goals or business plan;
- Develop a personal professional development plan, using specific skills and outcomes which are achievable within the timeframes you select;
- If skill development is required, consider applying for LearnScope funding to assist your team to develop skills, confidence and competence in an online environment;
- Take the time to preview relevant Toolboxes, purchase them and develop hands on familiarity with the contents. Decide how you feel comfortable using the Toolbox resources – totally online, partially online, as CD Rom etc. Seek advice from your state Toolbox Champion;
- Always keep alert for new information, products and services, because lifelong learning never stops!

4.0 Conclusion

The involvement of Western Institute Travel and Tourism staff in this case study project has stimulated a desire to continue learning, to update skills in information and communication technologies and to try new forms of communicating and delivering to students flexibly.

Where to from here for Western Institute?

- Provide a written report for the Faculty Management Group on the case study outcomes.
- Provide a written report in Faculty Newsletter.
- Maintain ongoing discussion, sharing of resources and approaches between participating teachers through a workshop at the next Faculty Forum.
- Follow on implementing the objectives of this case study into 2003

RTOs wanting to learn from Western Institute's experience in using FlexWays, LearnScope or Toolboxes are invited to contact us.

5.0 Glossary of Terms

ICT – Information and Communication Technologies

RTO – Registered Training Organisation

6.0 Acknowledgements

Mariella Bates (Teacher in Charge, Orange)

Kerrie Thorncraft (Part time teacher, Orange)

Jonathon Pratt (Head Teacher, Dubbo)

Sonya Hogan (Part time teacher, Dubbo)

Merelyn Treanor (Organisational Improvement Facilitator)

Kate Baxter (Faculty Director).

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Sample FlexWays Plan

This sample plan is from a head teacher who used FlexWays to develop a specific plan to assist him improve record keeping associated with flexible delivery. You will note that the plan is brief and targeted to one goal.

My Printable PD Plan

Professional Development Plan for....

My FlexWays Goal:

I want to support teachers and students working in a flexible learning context by developing and/or maintaining record keeping and course administration systems.

Relation to my Organisation's Goal(s):

My plan reflects the move of our organisation to offer quality, valid flexible education and training opportunities.

Skills I Plan To Acquire:

Skill: Develop, implement and maintain assessment recording procedures.		
Evidence: Accurate record ring of flexible students progress and assessments	Deadline: 9/11/2001	Status: In Progress
Strategy: Other	Resource: Assessment computerised recoding - clams - and hard cover evidence of participation	

Skill: Manage student records (assessment, progress, enrolment).		
Evidence: All entires by teaching staff up to date and accurate	Deadline: 9/11/2001	Status: In Progress
Strategy: Other	Resource: Clams record keeping, paper based contact evidence	

Skill: Co-ordinate allocation of tasks and responsibilities.		
Evidence: Tasks successfully performed due to matching tasks and responsibilities with staff that have the necessary skills	Deadline: 9/9/2001	Status: In Progress
Strategy: Action Learning	Resource: Teaching personnel with specific skills,	

Skill: Become familiar with file management procedures.		
Evidence:	Deadline: 9/8/2001	Status: Do Later
Strategy: Action Learning	Resource: Staff services, professional development opportunities.	

Appendix 2 – LearnScope Survey Results



How Has LearnScope Benefited You?

As part of our RTO Case Study project, we researched the effects of five years of LearnScope projects on the Community Services, Health, Tourism and Hospitality faculty. Eleven teachers, head teachers and support staff who had participated in projects between 1998 and 2002 responded.

1. Which LearnScope project(s) were you involved in?

Eleven faculty staff completed the survey.

1998 – 2 participants
1999 – 2 participants
2000 – 8 participants
2001 – 5 participants
2002 – 4 participants

Many respondents have been involved in more than one project. The projects have been designed to build skill development, and to different staff each with each project.

2. If you have been in more than one project, what made you come back for more?

An opportunity to enhance skills and learn new ways of accessing online learning as it is the way of the future for remote locations. The immediate work based relevance was applauded.

"...the opportunity to learn, especially with new technology, as I knew that it was definitely one of my weak spots"

"The first project opened my eyes at an introductory level. The second project increased the skill base"

"...continued relevance to teaching within section and developing/implementing other ways to improve student support"

"...the relevance and the challenge"

3. How has your LearnScope experience been beneficial to you?

Every respondent found LearnScope to be a valuable staff development mechanism. It has helped build confidence in using technology to support teaching and learning at an introductory level. The development of confidence has improved efficiency with using the Internet and this learning has transferred to the use of corporate electronic systems. Learning with a team of peers is also highly beneficial.

"It helped me develop skills for online delivery and gave me a hunger to learn more"

"Undoubtedly, the experience of working with peers in the same area was beneficial"

"It provided introductory skills in the Internet, email and teleconferencing. This was a good springboard for growth in these mediums since"

4. Specifically what skills have you developed through LearnScope projects?

LearnScope has provided a structured opportunity to develop skill and confidence in using technology for teaching and learning, and incorporating web resources into teaching. It has stimulated teachers to take initial steps in a peer-learning environment and offered opportunity to enhance skill development in subsequent projects.

Respondents listed the following skills:

- Skills to effectively manage my email, creating folders;
- Teleconferencing;
- Opens your eyes as to how technology can supplement face-to-face teaching;
- Use of CD Roms and the computer room for theory lessons;
- Using bulletin boards on the Net;
- Accessing and navigating the Internet;
- Researching on the Internet, specialised searches;
- Web page design, writing html, writing for the web;
- Putting modules online;
- Customisation of Toolboxes;
- Have written a module for use in online delivery.

5. How have you used the skills in your teaching practice?

All respondents have used skills developed in their LearnScope projects, and adapted their teaching style as a result. The standout application is gaining information from the Internet which is relevant and up to date for students.

“I can import pictures from the web into my powerpoint presentations to create reality for my students”

“...to develop lessons”

“Flexible Learning, and I use the web more now to obtain information for lesson preparation”

“Frequently organised and facilitated teleconferences for flexible students; provision of web links for students”

“...greater access to resources for students”; “getting relevant and up to date information for my students”

“Provided skills to facilitate learning through Internet and is beneficial to both flexible and face to face learning”

“I use the modules and Toolboxes for face to face classes and it makes me turn towards Internet as a tool for teaching”

6. Have you further developed these skills? In what way?

Respondents cite the integration of skill development into their everyday duties on the job; some have developed even more skills, as a result of the LearnScope spark.

Sharing knowledge with others, transferring skills and a general improvement in confidence and competence has resulted.

"I have taught skills to my peers and have undertaken two courses online"

"Acting in a higher position and using the computer a lot more in day to day work. Also purchased one at home to further my confidence"

"Use chat sites and set up a bulleting board to confer with international educators on teaching issues"

"...every day in general duties"

"...continued use of skills allows me to stay up to date and reinforces the training"

*"Have done Certificate IV in Web Development. Have worked on online projects"
"freely using the internet"*

7. LearnScope's goals are to focus on developing creative and innovative ways to use new technologies in the flexible delivery of VET services and products. In what ways are you an example of this?

"I did not have any internet skills two years ago"

"I use group email with my flexible students, and provide a monthly newsletter. I have also had higher lever groups complete Internet research projects"

"I went on to look at the impact of new technologies on learning for people with disabilities, Aboriginal students and students with NESB – specifically developed Universal Design learning materials"

"I receive assessments and assignments from flexible students via email and email general information about subjects/courses to students"

"In supporting flexible delivery and embracing new ideas and technologies"

"...looking at customizing Toolboxes for use with trainees that are spread across the Institute"

"I have helped develop several modules online"

"It has motivated my teaching strategies and ways of delivering instead of chalk and talk"

"The training has given me the confidence to deliver modules through flexible delivery which I would not have attempted 18 months ago"

8. LearnScope projects require the learning team to develop the project plan, attend training and facilitated discussion and implement the new skills. Is there any one thing that has made LearnScope work for you?

The team-learning environment was a key ingredient in the success of LearnScope.

“...the group learning environment really worked for me”

“...paid replacement hours meant I could concentrate on the this task”

“Listening to other’s experiences/thoughts/questions/ideas for application”

“...time away from everyday duties to have hands on practice and tuition”

“The practical implementation in a tam based environment”

“...meetings, workgroups, teleconferences, web group”

“I have adopted the LearnScope methods in developing and training/updating teachers in the e-learning site”

The training and facilitator’s motivation”

“Managing the project also gave me skills in developing a project plan, facilitation of training and developing reports”

9. How have you used the LearnScope Virtual Learning Community (website)?

Many respondents replied in the negative. Several respondents have made limited use of the website, with two favourable responses.

“I use it a lot. I am a member of several communities. For LearnScope I use it to keep me up to date on what’s happening”

“To post ideas and have chats with other LearnScope Trekkies”

10. Have you had any negative LearnScope experiences?

While the general response was No, there were some responses.

“No, other that being dragged into the 21st Century”

“The 2001 project experience was excellent as we learnt online, and I discovered this style suited me. However the second part of the project was to write and design a web page. This was a quantum leap with too little experience. Would have been good to have more time and support”

“Coming up with the plan was difficult at the start”

“Only when I did not have enough time to complete some of the tasks”

11. Any additional comments you would like to add?

“The time frames are too tight”

“Fabulous!”

“If it wasn’t for LearnScope I would not be where I am today in relation to the online learning scene”

“Thanks your for the opportunity to go with the future. I appreciate it as teachers can go stale without staff development”

“I think LearnScope is an excellent way of empowering staff with technology skills”