

E-LEARNING IN THE UK ARMED FORCES Case Study

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Abstract

The Defence Training Review (2001) identified that Defence had failed to exploit advances in technology to augment existing training programs. To enable the distribution and tracking of e-learning activities the MOD entered into a partnership with BT to deliver an e-learning platform, the Defence Learning Portal (DLP). The launch of the portal, coupled with the drive to initiate training transformation across Defence, has highlighted many difficulties associated with the design and delivery of distance learning packages for learner populations of mixed ability and motivation.

The viability of e-learning in the UK Armed Forces was considered using the Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) e-learning package as a case study. A questionnaire survey of personnel at six military training and operational units was complemented by focus group studies to establish the success of the e-learning package and the perception of e-learning amongst service personnel.

Research findings indicate that e-learning can be successfully employed within blended learning strategies, but did question the existing learning culture and its compatibility with adult learning theories. Focus group feedback suggests that military personnel respond more favourably to formal pedagogical training techniques and may not readily accept responsibility for self-directed learning. Furthermore, traditional military training techniques appear to create a culture of dependence on direction and discipline.

Experience within the DLP has shown that there is still a reluctance to fully support e-learning strategies at senior management level. Defence continues to face difficulties associated with accessibility and accreditation of learning material. However, ongoing research into mobile learning technologies and Web 2.0 capabilities should further enable distributed learning in operational and field environments. In the interim, the Defence Centre for Training Support will continue to provide expertise and guidance to ensure that appropriate training methods and media are deployed to facilitate the distribution of learning across Defence.