

The Learning Bank Prospers



The X4L Learning Bank Project continues to prosper and pay dividends to all involved.

The team continues to work well together and has developed a significant pool of expertise in e-learning practice. Expertise developed to date includes e-learning design principles and practice; technical solutions for e-learning and interoperability; methodologies for establishing learner requirements; new media design and development; skills in the use of a wide range of tools to support e-learning and robust project management practice.

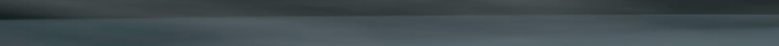
The first year of the Project concentrated efforts on the following: research to explore what learners and tutors would like to gain from e-learning activities in general and from the Learning Bank in particular; use and evaluation of the tools available to support the Project, for example, the IntraLibrary repository; up to date knowledge of technical and pedagogical aspects of e-learning and creation of high quality learning content

for the Project's target curriculum: hospitality and catering, business studies and study skills.

The Project team has now completed other work which has moved the Project forward. Recent developments have included evaluation of the tools we are using and those which would suit other users' needs, testing and evaluation of new tools, application of web design expertise to create learning content which is accessible for all learners, review of virtual resources for re use in content creation using existing subject gateways and search engines and training tutors in the use of X4L tools, for example, the Jorum + Reload editor.

The Learning Bank is now poised to move into new and exciting areas of the Project delivery including tutor and learner training and evaluation of learning models to identify best practice in the delivery of effective learning episodes which incorporate the Learning Bank's principles, processes and products.

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The project team has reviewed a number of tools which are available to use in content development for e-learning.
10 of 10 Users Prefer Accessibility - page 2
Accessibility requirements affect all users. We outline the Project's work in spearheading accessibility as a usability issue.



<http://www.sbc.ac.uk/thelearningbank/>

From The Cyber Edge - A Tutor Writes

The Learning Bank has established links with tutors through research and practice. Tutors have engaged with the Project as advisors, validators, subject specialists and triallers and their role will be increasingly important as the Project team moves towards making learning objects available for use in the target curriculum areas.

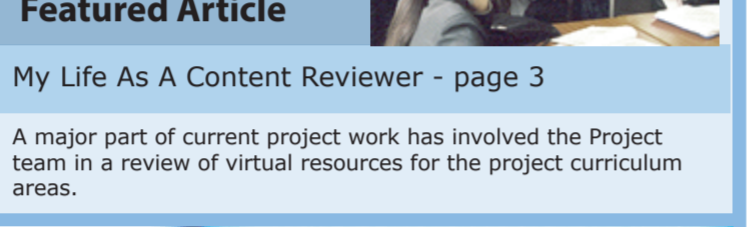
Bob Glover, Deputy Director of Business Studies and a Teaching Fellow at the University of Central England, is an enthusiastic member of the Project team. We asked Bob to describe his role within the Project:

"I was approached to get involved at the early stages and saw the potential benefits of the Project for myself, other tutors and learners straight away."

Bob's response to the Learning Bank has been welcomed and, for him and his colleagues, the Project provides a way into the sometimes daunting world of e-learning.

The next phase of the Project will give Bob and other tutors a chance to select and use learning objects with students. He already has lots of ideas as to how to use e-learning materials with his learners.

The Learning Bank team looks forward to continued work with all of the tutors on the Project.



My Life As A Content Reviewer - page 3

A major part of current project work has involved the Project team in a review of virtual resources for the project curriculum areas.



About Bobby

Bobby is a comprehensive web accessibility software tool designed to help expose and repair barriers to accessibility and encourage compliance with existing accessibility guidelines.

Available both as a standalone program and as a free web-based utility, it grades webpages according to global web standards and international accessibility legislation.

Bobby Ratings

Bobby reports cover three levels:

Priority 1 Accessibility problems seriously affect a page's usability by people with disabilities. A Bobby Approved rating can only be granted to a site in which none of the pages contain accessibility errors.

Priority 2 Accessibility problems are those which you should try to fix. Although not as vital as Priority 1 access errors, the items in this section are considered important for access.

Priority 3 Accessibility is only awarded to sites which meet Conformance Level AAA for the Web Content Guidelines. All accessibility issues have been addressed.

10 out of 10 Users Prefer Inclusive Design



Accessibility requirements can affect certain types of users but an inclusive design is beneficial for all. We outline the Project's progress in developing broad brush as well as more specific accessibility standards.

The Learning Bank materials are being created based on the idea that accessibility is a subset of usability. Therefore our learning objects are being designed to be accessible by all. Of course this is easier said than done.

We're moving towards a concept of 'inclusive design'. Recent BBC research seems to show that visually impaired users resent the provision of text-only e-learning resources and

that they in fact actively prefer the inclusion of pictures and graphics.

The main problem with this approach is that it is difficult to cater for a wide range of sometimes conflicting needs: catering for cognitive disabilities needs a very different approach to catering for physical impairments. Additionally, intellectual accessibility can often be overlooked. For example, how does one create Basic Skills e-learning materials for students with poor literacy?

In an attempt to address some of these issues we are trying two very different web-technologies Flash and XHTML/CSS:

1/ Flash - In its latest incarnations has become much more accessible to screen-readers. Although it can have drawbacks, its benefit seems to be that it can provide an interface that enables a cross-browser/cross-platform solution for rich-media materials: audio commentaries, video streams with synchronised text transcripts. Our accessibility developments have included adding dynamic text to target different educational levels and keyboard shortcuts for users with physical impairments which make use of a mouse difficult.

2/ XHTML/CSS - We are very keen on the idea of a semantic web: to separate content from design. This enables users to access the same content but with the ability of viewing it as they decide: with or without pictures, using a Braille tablet or on a screen. We are currently using CSS stylesheets, Javascript and cookies to enable persistent user stylesheets which change text size according to user preference.

The next development is for us to add stylesheets which alter colours and colour contrasts for users with dyslexia and colour blindness. Other developments have also included keyboard shortcuts for easier navigation. We are also very proud that our current XHTML template validates as 'Bobby AAA Approved'.

Although we continue to face hurdles on the way towards creating engaging cross-browser / cross-platform / accessible learning materials we feel we have made a good start towards what sometimes feels like the search for the holy grail.

Spec Praisers

The Learning bank heaps praise on SCORM and IMS Specifications

standards to which learning objects should be produced, and the technical requirements for both content and interoperability.

Work done by **The Learning Bank** has shown how the SCORM Specifications can be used to increase the granularity of user tracking to provide a smoother e-learning experience for the student and feed back more useful and detailed information to the tutor. A recent update to these standards, called SCORM 2004, includes support for IMS Simple Sequencing giving the prospect of true differentiated e-learning and courses that adapt to the e-learners' knowledge and skill levels.

Chris Poole, Senior Content Developer with **The Learning Bank**, says, "None of this work would have been possible without

the commitment to the emerging Specifications that colleges and software suppliers have shown."

The future of X4L at South Birmingham College will see **The Learning Bank** working to the new IMS Learning Design specifications to create learning episodes around the content produced and an exploration of SCORM 2004.

Links:
http://www.nln.ac.uk/materials/tutors/paving_the_way.asp

The Learning Bank Team

A major part of our current Learning Bank work has involved the team producing a review of virtual resources for the Project curriculum areas.

The team is currently immersed in a vast search of the world wide web looking for suitable educational materials in the curriculum areas of study skills, catering and marketing as part of the 'content review' aspect of the project.

The task has been challenging to say the least. The team are devoting a great deal of time and work towards ultimately creating a comprehensive database of freely available virtual resources that will be made available to the curriculum tutors.

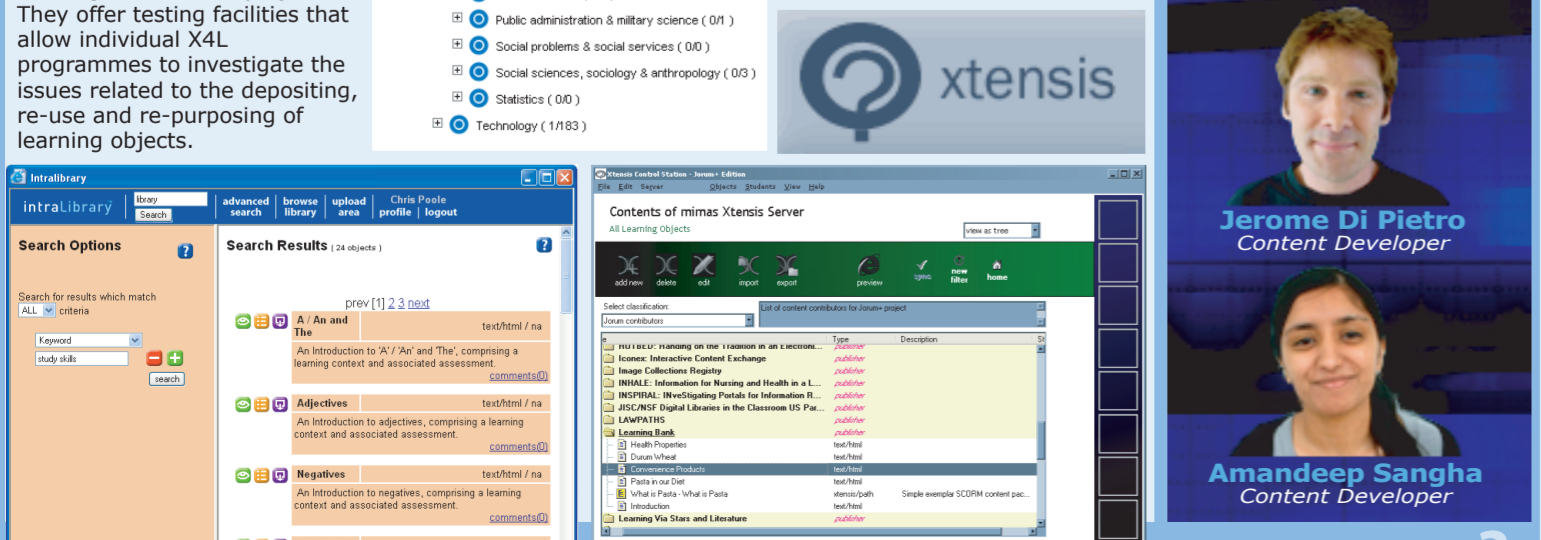
My Life As A Content Reviewer

The enormity of the task really struck home for content developer Nicholas Bullen when he calculated the number of web searches required to complete the task. An estimate of 27 000 searches left Nicholas feeling "weak at the knees".

The review has enabled the team to develop an elaborate methodology to optimise the gathering and capture of content and data. In the spirit of sharing good practice with other X4L projects we have decided to document the entire review process on our X4L forum, from the initial objectives of the review to our established frameworks, search criteria and documentation.

The forum provides a narrative of the highs and lows of the review. Amandeep Sangha, a content reviewer of considerable mettle says, "Although the process can be laborious at times we are aware that the final list of resources will be of great use to our partners and tutors."

The final aspect of our review of virtual resources will form a report outlining the availability and appropriateness of freely available educational content and the identification of any gaps within the curriculum areas.



E-Learning Tools and Tips

Our Top 10 Tools For You

The project team has reviewed a number of tools which are available to use in content development for e-learning. Two lists have been compiled, one with the top 5 basic tools (recommended for tutors new to ILT and non-techies) and a list of our top 5 advanced tools (for ILT proficient tutors and e-learning developers). Some of the tools listed are still in development but have already shown the potential to be incredibly useful to the e-learning community as a whole. These lists are also likely to vary as improvements and new tools become available.

Top 5 Basic E-Learning Tools

- 1. MS Word**
You can create engaging learning materials using Word by adding activities such as pop-ups, drop down menus and drag and drop. Documents can be converted to html web pages and there are a number of other tools available that can enhance Word such as Course Genie (activities), Open Office (exporting documents to various formats) and ICITA's Office Accessibility Wizard (for exporting accessible HTML pages).
- 2. MS PowerPoint**
PowerPoint can be more than a visual aid for presentations, it can also be used for self-paced and student-controlled activities. By using features such as action buttons, hyperlinks, graphics and animations you can use PowerPoint as an effective e-learning tool.
- 3. MS MovieMaker**
Movie Maker is a free movie editing programme bundled with Microsoft XP. It can be used easily by students and tutors to create and edit video clips. You can add special effects, music, and narration to create movies for enhancing e-learning.
- 4. Email**
Email can effectively be used as a tool for communication and collaboration. Student groups and tutors can contact each other, use email for discussion and also exchange information with file attachments. Using email eliminates the restrictions of time and place and also can create a permanent record of teaching and learning.
- 5. Internet**
Don't forget the Internet can also be used as a very effective tool for e-learning. You can set students activities for research such as webquests, encourage collaboration using chat or forums and provide access to your college virtual learning environment (VLE) and other web based learning resources.

Useful Tips

Using Email as an educational tool:
<http://www.e-learningcentre.co.uk/guide2elearning/email.htm>
<http://www.warwick.ac.uk/ETS/interactions/vol1no1/barnes.htm>
Using the internet in the classroom:
<http://www.ozline.com/learning/theory.html>
<http://www.ozline.com/learning/index.htm>
<http://www.netskills.ac.uk/TonicNG/cgi/sesame2mg>
<http://www.vts.rdn.ac.uk/>

Top 5 Advanced E-Learning Tools

- 1. Reload (in development)**
This tool allows users (educators and developers) to create and package learning objects in standards compliant formats. Reload can be used to repurpose and restructure learning materials allowing courses to be ported between VLE's, digital repositories and other sources.
<http://reload.ces.strath.ac.uk/>
- 2. Macromedia Dreamweaver**
Dreamweaver has established itself as the industry standard webpage editor. It enables designers and developers to create a wide range of web based materials. Standards compliant, this WYSIWYG authoring tool includes build-in validation for accessibility, as well as more advanced features such as XHTML, CSS mark-up and Database connectivity.
- 3. Macromedia Flash**
Flash allows developers and designers to create engaging, interactive and accessible learning objects by integrating