

e-learning in the voluntary sector in Wales

October 2004 – August 2005

- The research project was funded by ELWa (Education and Learning in Wales) and co-ordinated by the WCVA (Wales Council for Voluntary Action)
- e-learning officers were placed in the 19 County Voluntary Councils in Wales to conduct research and champion e-learning in their counties
- You can find out more about the research findings for Pembrokeshire in the PAVS brochure 'e-learning in the voluntary sector in Pembrokeshire' and on the PAVS website at www.pavs.org.uk/e-learning.htm.

Aims of the e-learning research project

- To explore e-learning in the voluntary sector and find out what's currently happening in Pembrokeshire
- To explore the benefits of e-learning as well as the drawbacks
- To raise awareness amongst voluntary groups of what e-learning can do for them

A summary of findings for Wales

- The knowledge of, and participation in, e-learning in the voluntary sector varies across Wales:
 - Between 50 and 70 percent of organisations are aware of e-learning.
 - The understanding of e-learning is somewhat confused.
 - Far fewer people have taken part in e-learning than have heard of it, with between 16 and 58 percent of respondents having experienced it in some form.
 - Over 500 venues may be available for e-learning delivered by, or for, voluntary organisations were identified.
 - Over 2000 computers and 200 laptops were identified as being available for use by voluntary organisations.
 - The distribution of venues and resources identified was not evenly distributed across Wales.
 - 134 venues with disabled access and facilities and a computer were identified.
 - There were fewer venues with specialist software or adaptations for people with disabilities.

- The following actual or potential **benefits** of e-learning have been identified for people in the voluntary sector:
 - It can enable learners to progress at their own pace, to miss out bits they already understand, or repeat bits they don't understand.
 - Learners can make mistakes in private, without the shame.
 - It can enable learners to fit learning into their own schedule, rather than being dominated by providers' timetables or availability.
 - It gives people a choice of place where they learn.
 - People can learn at home, reducing travel time and expense, especially in rural areas.
 - It can provide learner support, eg training needs analysis, learning styles analysis, job search skills, as part of the learning experience.
 - Introduce visual aids into learning, so the learner can see events happening.
- The main **groups** that have been identified as benefiting from e-learning through the voluntary sector are:
 - Disaffected young people.
 - People with mental health problems.
 - Disabled children, young people and adults.
 - Older people.
 - Community groups in disadvantaged areas.
- **Barriers** to effective use of e-learning act in three ways: barriers to staff and volunteers, barriers to organisations and barriers to people receiving services.
 - Barriers to staff and volunteers include fear of technology, lack of knowledge about the resources available and a perception that e-learning does not involve any social interaction.
 - Barriers to organisations include funding for equipment and/or courses, staff time, quality and availability of courses (especially in Welsh) and lack of infrastructure.
 - Barriers to engagement of people receiving services include those for staff, with lack of computer skills being highlighted.

In addition, the ability of public sector organisations to work with voluntary organisations emerged as a barrier, particularly in the area of coordination of plans and the lack of impact of the e-learning strategy on the voluntary sector.

The full report compiled by the WCVA is available from the PAVS website at www.pavs.org.uk/E-learning.htm. It contains a detailed discussion of the findings from the counties in Wales as well as recommendations for voluntary sector organisations and funding bodies.