



Training for New E-learning Role Profiles: the Case of E-virtue Project

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Abstract

Since the beginning of 21st century, the term “e-learning” has become the most prominent feature of distance educational systems. Various tags are currently used to describe it, but for the purposes of this paper, a definition of e-learning that encompasses an educational orientation has been chosen: e-learning describes the application of computer hardware, software and networks to any aspect of teaching and learning. In this context, the e-Virtue project (<http://groupspaces.com/eVirtue/>), funded by the European Commission in the context of LifeLong Learning Programme, conducted an in-depth research of the competences and skills necessary for trainers so that they meet the requirements of emerging, technology-based training job roles. Six new specialized e-learning professions have been identified and described, namely: E-learning architect, E-learning content developer –full-time specialist role, E-learning content developer –part time role, E-learning curriculum designer, Online tutor and Virtual classroom facilitator. Because of the European scope of the project and of the technological nature of the professions, descriptions have been based on the European e-Competences Framework (e-CF), an emerging CEN standard that is compatible with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). In addition, a set of guidelines to design trainings that would provide qualifications that match the specifications of each of the new role roles has been developed, to be used by Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, employers and employees. These are based on a thorough review of current training and educational offers and present in a practical way a complete structure of learning units that should be designed by VET organisations who are active in the field of e-learning professions. In order to design the guidelines, we collaborated closely with training institutions as well as policy makers and experts in the field of e-learning professions from five European countries: France, Germany, Greece, Poland and United Kingdom. The training guidelines are centered on learning outcomes, offer ideas on the development of learning units and present examples of how they can be realized.

1. Introduction

Current needs and trends in education point to directions that are different from the ones reflected in the current e-learning specifications [Docebo, 2014]. Some of the major trends that are related to the requirements of learning technology specifications are:

- Instruction is becoming more personalized: learner-centred, non-linear and self-directed.
- The distinction between face-to-face and distance education is disappearing through the use of e-learning and Virtual Learning (VL), which can take place synchronously or asynchronously. Courses that can be attended from a distance, blended and face-to-face approaches will be dominant in the future [Owston, 2013].
- Lifelong learning is becoming a competitive necessity, resulting in a need for interoperable learning networks and portable learner dossiers.
- Traditional roles in education are changing [Badley & Habeshaw, 2006] toward more specialized roles (course designer, tutor, etc).

In this context of highly multifarious and drastically changing environment one question arises: do learning professionals have the skills needed to take advantage of the opportunities provided by learning technologies?

In the following sections, we shall present six new job roles that answer the above question, together with a set of training guidelines that assist VET organizations to develop courses that lead to relevant qualifications.

2. The e-Virtue project

The answer to this question has been researched in the context of the e-Virtue project [<http://groupspaces.com/eVirtue/>], funded by the European Commission in the context of LifeLong



Learning Programme, The project identified new roles, which best enclose the key competences and skills required to fulfil the emerging professional requirements. Furthermore, e-Virtue developed a set of Training Guidelines for Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, employers and employees.

2.1 The six e-learning role profiles

e-Virtue project identified the following six emerging role profiles (not job descriptions):

1. *E-learning architect*, who is responsible for the development and implementation of an organisation's strategy for the use of e-learning technologies. Their main task is to set the goals for the application of learning technologies within the context of an organisation's business strategy. They will engage with key stakeholders, develop capabilities, recommend the purchase of e-learning platforms and tools and report on progress to senior management.
2. *E-learning content developer – full-time specialist role*, who develops digital learning content in all forms. Their main task is to undertake sophisticated projects that require the skills only normally found in multi-disciplinary teams including: creative specialists, technical specialists, content specialists.
3. *E-learning content developer – part time role*, who designs and/or develops simpler forms of digital learning content including reference materials, slides, assessments, screencasts, interview videos, podcasts, etc.
4. *E-learning curriculum designer*, who designs new learning programmes. Theirs is the important task to analyse a particular learning need and to determine the most appropriate methods and media for meeting that need.
5. *Online tutor*, who ensures the successful delivery of extended online and blended distance learning programmes and supports students as they engage in these programmes. This role is also responsible for communication with students and grading assignments.
6. *Virtual classroom facilitator*, who designs and delivers real-time, online group sessions using web conferencing tools.

Because of the European scope of the project (with partners from France, Germany, Greece, Poland and United Kingdom), and of the nature of the professions that were defined, these six role profiles are being mapped to different European Frameworks of Qualifications.

One of those frameworks is the *European Qualification Framework (EQF)*, which acts as a translation device to make national qualifications more readable across Europe. The core of EQF concerns 8 reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do ('learning outcomes'). Levels of national qualifications will map to these reference levels, ranging from basic (Level 1) to advanced (Level 8).

In addition, e-Virtue adopts the *European e-Competence Framework (e-CF)*, which is a reference (now a CEN standard) framework of 40 ICT competences that can be used and understood by any ICT user, companies, the public sector, and educational and social partners across Europe. It is structured from 4 dimensions:

- Dimension 1: Five e-Competence areas, derived from the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) business processes: PLAN-BUILD-RUN-ENABLE-MANAGE
- Dimension 2: A set of e-Competences for each area (40 competences in total)
- Dimension 3: Proficiency levels for each e-Competence (e-1 to e-5 which are mapped to the EQF levels 3 to 8)
- Dimension 4: Samples of knowledge and skills relate to e-Competences in Dimension 2.

Besides EQF and e-CF, the e-Virtue project has been linked to the *European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)*, which aims to ease the validation, recognition and accumulation of work-related skills and knowledge acquired during a stay in another country or in different learning situations (formal, non-formal, informal). ECVET does not concern itself with how long or where somebody has learned something, but rather which learning outcomes have been acquired. Those learning outcomes are grouped into learning units, which are then assessed and furnished with ECVET credit points.

3. Training Guidelines in three steps

The main objective of Training Guidelines (TG) is to present, in a practical way, a *structure of learning units* that should be offered by Vocational Education and Training (VET) organisations in the field of "Virtual Learning professions". In this sense, the TG for the six identified role profiles will provide information on:



1. units of learning outcomes in line with the European Qualification Framework (EQF), with suggestions for a proper development of key competences
2. ECVET point attribution methodology
3. a labellisation process.

In the sections that follow, we shall present the three steps approach that e-Virtue has followed to organize the TG.

3.1 e-Virtue Training Guidelines Manual: units of leaning outcomes and proper development of key competences

The e-Virtue project has developed a TG manual, which does *not* provide a step-by-step method for determining learning units, it is *not* a series of recipes and it is *not* a fill-in-the-blank-type guide. Instead, these TG aim to describe approaches to training design, by offering ideas on the process of developing a learning unit, and by providing examples of how it can be done.

The manual is organized into three sections:

Section 1 provides an overview of the manual and of the basic principles underlying determining and structuring learning units. These principles cover key areas that all facilitators should keep in mind when undertaking any training program. So, the intended purpose is to create an awareness of issues around designing and facilitating the key components of a learning unit, such as the entry behaviour (which specific skills participants must have prior to beginning the instruction?), the learning event (what is the purpose and your expectations, and how these fit the needs of participants and relate to their individual roles and objectives?) and the assessment (which is the best approach to measure the results of how the trainee will be able to use that training?). For each of these learning units components, the manual provides principles, practices and helpful tips.

Section 2, the most extensive, consists of TG for each of the six role profiles. First, there is a short description of the role profile with emphasis on its key competences, with tips on how to develop/improve these key competences. The key competences per profile, taken from e-CF, are the following:

E-learning architect:

- E-learning Strategy Alignment
- E-learning Strategy Development
- Purchasing
- Education and Training Provision (to learning professionals in order to be able to support the e-learning strategy)
- Needs Identification
- Project and Portfolio Management
- Relationship Management
- Technology Trend Monitoring
- Business change management

E-learning curriculum designer:

- Design of learning solutions
- Needs identification
- Documentation production
- Relationship management

Full time specialist e-learning content developer:

- Technology Trend Monitoring
- Documentation Production of the e-learning content design
- Design and Development of e-learning content
- Needs Identification
- Relationship management
- Quality management

Part-time e-learning content developer:

- Design and Development of e-learning content

Virtual classroom facilitator:

- Design/Preparation of the live lesson/session
- Live facilitation/Session Delivery

Online tutor:

- Learner Communications
- Progress Management

- Live Facilitation/Session Delivery

Finally, Section 3 contains several appendices with additional practical material for general reference, such as a sample workshop agenda and a training-plan checklist.

Based on the principles of distance learning, every chapter begins with a list of *key concepts*. These do not comprise a glossary nor are they merely dictionary definitions. Their purpose is to highlight the essential terms which are used. The terms are then explained in the text of the section. The *purpose* of each chapter is also placed upfront. In many ways, the purpose gives the aims and objectives for the section. A *reference* list of the resources cited in the manual is provided at the end of every section.

A *checklist* is provided at the end of each chapter, which summarizes the ideas presented in the chapter. While there is no such thing as a recipe for training, a checklist may be used as a reminder or quick reference. Also, if a simple problem occurs, the checklist may be used for a quick solution.

Finally, at the back of the TG manual there is a comprehensive *Glossary* – apart from the key-concept lists mentioned above – with definitions that help the learner understand unfamiliar terms or get an overview of the basic concepts that are covered.

3.2 ECVET point attribution methodology

After having determined and structured the learning units in the VL field and after relating them to the EQF/e-CF, the learning outcomes have been weighted with respect to the overall qualifications. This is the stepping stone for a future attribution of ECVET credit points to the learning units. The main calculation method is based on the assumption that a full qualification in one of the six role profiles, which encompasses all learning outcomes of a specific job role as have been stated in the training guidelines, is equal to 100%. On this basis every learning unit of the qualification has been weighted with respect to the respective overall qualification (e.g. learning unit 1: 12%, learning unit 2: 5%, etc.).

3.3 Labelisation process

Labelisation is a process of recognition of training rules/principles for training organisations, which develop training courses that are in line with job market requirements in the field of VL. The e-Jobs Observatory Label of Excellence, which was developed through the European project PIN, has been adapted to the environment of VL to be used for this purpose.

The Label can increase the visibility of training organisations; thus attracting more learners. In parallel, learners will be able to recognise those VET organisations providing trainings which meet the demands of the labour market; thus increasing their possibilities to find a job following the completion of the training, which will in the long-term have a positive impact in the decrease of unemployment. Training units which are evaluated and found to be in conformance with the requirements set out in the TG will be awarded the e-Jobs Observatory Seal of Market Compliance.

4. Conclusions

This paper presented the design and development of Training Guidelines for six new job roles that describe the skills and competences in the emerging sector of e-learning / virtual learning. These roles and guidelines have been developed in the context of European project e-Virtue, have been evaluated by experts in the training and labour market and are available for free, together with the labelisation process, at the e-Jobs Observatory.

In the next phase we plan to develop and offer training courses based on the Training Guidelines and the learning outcomes of each profile.

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