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Flexible learning objects for teaching, learning and sharing: implementing a multi-institutional collaboration.

Dawn Leeder & Tom Davies
Clinical School, University of Cambridge

Contact: Dawn Leeder
Senior Research Associate & Multimedia Developer
Box 151, Addenbrooke's, Cambridge CB2 2QQ
T. +44 (0)1223 217561 F. +44 (0)1223 216484 Email: dcl25@cam.ac.uk

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Abstract:

Discussions with a number of individuals engaged in teaching statistics and epidemiology (in broadly medical contexts) have revealed a real need for a bank of high quality e-learning resources to support and enhance teaching in this traditionally difficult area. Creation of these resources is very costly; typically amounting to more than one institution can afford to fund. Yet many of these resources are generic and can be used, re-used and shared between institutions. So a collaboration was proposed to produce and share these resources in a cost-effective manner.

Flexible learning objects present a number of educational advantages compared with more traditional course-based approaches. Because they are stand-alone resources that encompass a single "chunk" of learning, they can be used in many different ways and across disciplines. Entire courses may not be appropriate for re-use in different institutions (the "not invented here" syndrome) but individual learning objects can be selected and re-used as components of a much wider course. Resources may be presented in different formats within customisable virtual learning environments to suit individual learning styles and address disability issues and technological constraints. Material can be kept up to date more readily: it's much easier to update a single resource than an entire course. Web-based materials can be indexed and stored in a fully searchable database and can thus be retrieved and downloaded directly to the user's desktop. Their use can also be monitored.

This paper outlines the approaches adopted in the formation of a collaboration between a number of UK FE institutions to develop e-learning resources to support teaching and enhance learning in statistics and epidemiology for medics and other health professionals.

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