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Interview
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Diving headfirst into CPD

National governing body, British Swimming has developed an online Personal Learning Space, where trainees access online course materials and can record their own reflections on training, and store evidence. Colin Dalziel, Operations Director of Pebble Learning, explains.

British Swimming identified the need to support training programmes with increased levels of online provision, as a viable way forward in providing scalable, flexible training that meets the needs of both trainees and the organisation. This was just the start of a whole new approach to delivering, supporting and assessing training within the organisation.

The Amateur Swimming Association (ASA)/British Swimming is the national governing body for swimming, diving, synchronised swimming, water polo and open water in Great Britain. British Swimming works closely with the Institute of Swimming (IoS) and has accreditation from the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA). One of the key roles of the organisation is to provide training and accreditation for coaches and teachers in a wide range of disciplines. For a number of years British Swimming had been offering bite-sized online coach development programmes. However, with the economic downturn taking effect and the demand for alternative approaches from the coach community, British Swimming was looking at innovative and fundamentally cost-effective ways to expand its online course provision.

this new knowledge into practice, which is why a tool that was underpinned by reflective scaffolding was really high on our wish list."

British Swimming had heard of the personal learning and assessment system PebblePad through the bespoke version used by the Institute of Learning (IfL). "With the learning platform to host our course content, scaffolded templates to prompt participants' reflection and the ability to receive them for assessment, accreditation and archiving, we were really excited," explains Lucy. A project team was put together and the aim was to plan how all the systems could be brought together, to offer a seamless route for a prospective teacher or a coach to go from seeing an advertisement for a course, registering and paying for the course and then automatically get access to the course material, assessment guidelines and mentor support. Team member, Matthew Wheeler: "Once the project team got together to scope the project we were all really confident we could make British Swimming's vision a reality."

The project team met regularly over a period of six months and communication was key: "Having open and honest dialogues is a key

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Finding a solution that could be fully integrated into existing systems to allow British Swimming to expand the use of online training and development activities was the challenge faced in the autumn of 2011. Lucy Stone, E-Learning and Resource Development Manager at British Swimming, explains: "With a background of working in further education, I challenged the organisation and the sport sector's perspective of what E-Learning actually was and the type of software solutions that were being used." Having a platform that enables materials to be made available to participants in an online course was essential, but there also needed to be the ability for the participants to also produce reflections and evidence of their learning, as Lucy explains: "It is all well and good having bite-size pieces of course content. However, even when these courses have built-in quizzes, it doesn't mean the participant has actually learnt or developed a mechanism of transferring

success factor when working with multiple suppliers, and colleagues from British Swimming were excellent at facilitating this," explains Matthew. With a lot of background work taking place on the technical side of things, the E-Learning Resource Development Team, led by Lucy, began to produce some really innovative learning content. By spring 2012 the project was taking shape and work on how user data was going to be passed around and managed by all the systems was moving forward. After collaborative working from the key partners, integration work was undertaken to remove the need for staff at the Institute of Swimming (IoS) to manually enter data into their systems, a procedure that was previously time-consuming and was prone to risk of data entry errors.

Once the integration was completed, learners' data on attendance at Continuing Professional

Development (CPD) events could be automatically transferred from one system to another as could any assessment grades and

decide to submit them for assessment, which really encourages and builds confidence in learners of all abilities."

positive for British Swimming, both in the pool and in its online provision. With the systems and processes now in place, British Swimming can concentrate on building more courses into the online format that has already proven to be a real success. Lucy sums up the experience to date: "This has not been an exercise in just trying to be innovative, we have looked at the affordance the latest technology has provided us and realised how much more efficient and effective we can be across the organisation whilst at the same time providing a better experience to our learners and partners." ●

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tutor feedback. This has resulted in a much more efficient and robust mechanism behind the scenes to match the innovative content being delivered to learners. With all the systems happily talking to one another, the first online programmes were launched in autumn 2012, roughly twelve months after the project was first conceived. Each training programme has an online training package that is available to those who have signed up for the course. These courses include a range of materials including video and interactive tasks for trainees to complete. When the course goes live the participants can log in directly through the booking website and have instant access to the course materials and assignment templates. Over the duration of the course, the participants can work on their assignments and receive formative feedback from the tutor teams at British Swimming.

Providing timely and detailed feedback in both formative and summative forms to learners has also been an obvious benefit to British Swimming. The system has an assessment space where organisations make content available to their learners and where submissions can be viewed and fed back on. This is all stored and archived as an accurate record of the whole assessment process. Something that is really important for all training providers. Going online has saved us a lot of resource just in the respect of not having to print and store large volumes of paper! Through the process of developing these new online CPD courses, British Swimming has been able to start to work with other sport-related organisations across Europe, the most well-known being the Dame Kelly Holmes Legacy Trust which is supporting athletics coaches in their professional development through a

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When the assessment deadline arrives, the final pieces of work are locked for final grades to be added by the tutor team; this in turn starts the Internal and External Verifier processes to make sure the grades and feedback are fair and accurate, before the data is pushed back and stored electronically in British Swimming's registration system. "The feedback from the teachers and coaches taking the new online courses has been really positive and the online tutors are empowered too," explains Lucy. She added; "over the next few months more courses across different coach levels will become available online." Matthew added: "Learners become more reflective, whilst at the same time the structure helps transfer their new knowledge into their practices. Their reflections are 100 percent private, until they

similar online approach. Use of this new online tool is not limited to just these online courses; members of British Swimming staff are now using the new system to support their own personal staff development needs as well as appraisal processes. With staff recording their activities on an ongoing basis, evidence of achievement and development is readily available to staff when it comes to appraisals. "Having engagement from across the whole of British Swimming was an unexpected benefit of the project, as the more people that know and understand what we're trying to achieve, the easier it is to sell to our wider workforce. We have had opportunities to evangelise about the system at the staff conference and have buy-in from our highest levels of management," explained Lucy. The future is looking very

For further information:
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