



ADVICE AND GUIDANCE FOR E-LEARNING CONTENT PROVIDERS

Becta's advice and guidance website [<http://www.becta.org.uk/industry/content>] is aimed at all organisations, companies and individuals involved in designing and creating e-learning resources, in both the public and the commercial sectors. This leaflet provides a brief introduction to some of the main areas of digital content development and the help and support that the website offers.

As resources for e-learning develop, technology advances and educational strategies and policies change, there will be new challenges and demands that face content developers. Becta would like to hear from you on how these issues affect you and your needs in creating content (email contentdevelopers@becta.org.uk). We can then respond by continuing to develop the website and targeting its services in a way that helps you.

Are you involved in developing digital content for the education sector?

Did you know that Becta (British Educational Communications and Technology Agency) offers information, advice and guidance for content providers on various aspects of the process?

THE E-STRATEGY AND E-LEARNING PROVISION

Becta is undertaking a leading role in the development and delivery of the e-strategy published in March 2005 by the DfES: 'Harnessing technology: Transforming learning and children's services'.

In relation to the provision of e-learning, the e-strategy highlights the following three problems which Becta will address:

- The quality and range of resources available to teachers;
- The quality and degree of innovation of those resources;
- The embedding of e-learning and ICT across the curriculum.



WHAT CAN BECTA OFFER?

QUALITY EVALUATION

Becta carries out wide-ranging research into e-learning resource issues, including user needs, new technologies, interoperability and ICT in the curriculum. Becta also manages several key services – Curriculum Online, the National Grid for Learning, aclearn.net and the National Learning Network materials development programme, for example – so we have considerable knowledge and expertise on quality e-learning resources, for all ages and across all subjects and topics.

Becta works in partnership with the British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA), EMAP, and EC&T magazine to run the BETT Awards, which highlight excellence in educational product design. We are also currently working to produce a quality framework which can be used by ICT content developers to judge the fitness for purpose of their resources and by practitioners to inform their purchasing decisions.

SOME ISSUES TO CONSIDER

USER NEEDS

Understanding your target audience and their needs is a vital part of the content creation process. Who are they? Will they be using your e-learning resource at home, in the classroom, alone, as part of a group, with face-to-face support, with online support? What will they want to achieve by using the resource? How much prior knowledge of the subject will they need? How will their learning be assessed?

The answers to all these questions and to many others will inform the development of your e-learning resources, and determine the features and elements that are appropriate for different target audiences. In addition to analysing the needs of your target audience, you will also need to carry out user testing as the product develops. Becta is experienced in planning and co-ordinating user trials as part of a content development process.

Advice on identifying needs and carrying out user testing is available on Becta's website.

CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS

If your e-learning resource is intended for use in schools, you will need to ensure that it meets the requirements of the relevant curriculum subject(s). Becta's website provides information about the different curricula, for example the schools' curricula of the four UK nations (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) with regard to locating various topics, themes or skills at different stages within the documents. Avenues of enquiry for more detailed curriculum explanation or research are also indicated.

Digital content does not always need to cover a broad subject area. Teachers are more likely to focus on specific aspects of a topic in the classroom and use resources that are tailored accordingly. Becta offers advice on targeting the level and depth of your resources appropriately, and provides information on what schools, colleges and Adult and Community Learning providers need to make the best use of e-learning resources.

It is important to engage the services of subject matter experts as part of the development process to ensure that the curriculum requirements are appropriately met. Sourcing this appropriate expertise from within the public sector and integrating this input into a commercial development model can prove challenging. Becta has experience of facilitating effective partnerships to ensure that curriculum requirements are met and can therefore provide advice based on experience.



LEARNING STYLES

Learning styles are complex and frequently misunderstood – they encompass how learners process information, their sensory preferences and the approaches learners adopt for particular tasks. When creating e-learning materials it is important to take these factors into account when planning both the structure and presentation of your content.

Advice and guidance on what learning styles are, and how you can tailor your resources appropriately, are available on the Becta website.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

As an educational content provider you need to be aware of the different platforms, hardware and systems that your potential audience will be using to access your resources. The equipment available in schools and colleges varies considerably, from the most basic stand-alone PC to sophisticated wireless broadband networks, running learning platforms.

Becta has undertaken some pioneering work by commissioning content to be developed to meet internationally recognised technical specifications and standards through the National Learning Network materials development team. Many lessons have been learnt and disseminated from these experiences and Becta continues to lead by membership of international standards bodies.

The emphasis on personalised learning, in which learning takes place in any place and at any time, means that it will be increasingly important for resources to meet common specifications. Becta is undertaking work identifying the issues and challenges around home/educational institution links.

Becta manages consultations on specifications and standards with the development communities. It provides appropriate technical information on a range of topics including content packaging, authentication and management systems to enable you to develop your e-learning resources to particular specifications and ensure that they reach the widest audience possible.

METADATA STANDARDS

How will your target audience find your resources? The effective use of metadata in e-learning resources is essential to enable users to locate the resources that are most appropriate to their needs. Becta and its partners are working to establish common metadata vocabularies and tools to assist content developers, ensuring that users can access information quickly and easily.

Becta's website provides details of the metadata and other standards required for e-learning resources submitted to Curriculum Online and the National Grid for Learning, together with links to other metadata information.

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

As both digital content and technology become more innovative and creative, accessibility for users with disabilities and impairments remains a key issue. Your resources should be compatible with various assistive technologies, and enable customisation or alternative access so that all users can make effective use of them.

Becta provides guidance and links to further information on making e-learning resources accessible, as well as keeping you up to date with current developments in the field.



LEGAL ISSUES

There are a number of legal issues relating to aspects of the development and distribution of e-learning resources, including copyright and data protection, e-commerce and internet safety.

Copyright issues are particularly important if existing materials are being repurposed and reused in new e-learning resources, for example photographs of artefacts contained in cultural institutions such as museums and galleries. It is also essential to be aware of the principles set out in the Data Protection Act if you are collecting personal information from users, such as date of birth, while financial transactions carried out online are subject to e-commerce guidelines. You must also ensure that your users – particularly children and young people – are safeguarded from any potential abuse whilst accessing your resource.

Further information about all these issues can be found on Becta's website.

KEEP IN TOUCH

Visit the website at [<http://www.becta.org.uk/industry/content>] for advice and information on all the areas of content development mentioned in this leaflet. You can also sign up for the monthly news bulletin for content providers and join the pilot email discussion group for a new networking opportunity.

We welcome your feedback and ideas, so if you have any comments or questions, send an email to contentdevelopers@becta.org.uk or contact the team at Becta, Millburn Hill Road, Science Park, Coventry, CV4 7JJ Tel: 024 7679 7229/7059



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