The little book of
Digital Learning

Other titles in the series

The little book of Induction

The little book of Webinars

The little book of Virtual Classrooms

The little book of Coaching

The little book of Video Learning

The little book of Performance Consulting

The little book of Blended Learning

The little book of Learning Strategy

The little book of
Digital Learning

By Andy Lancaster

The Charity**Learning**
Consortium

With thanks to

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Carl Makins, St John Ambulance

Tom Boyesen-Corballis, The Prince's Trust

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Foreword

Andy Lancaster's award-winning book **Driving Performance Through Learning** is *the* manual for learning and development (L&D) practitioners. So who better to guide us through a blueprint for successfully embedding digital learning into the workplace?

The use of learning technologies is now commonplace but this fantastic little book will help ensure that you're using them both wisely and well – that you start by identifying needs, thinking about context and accessibility, as well as the learner experience and journey. Technology is just a tool. It's how L&D practitioners inspire learners to use these tools that makes them a success, and one that can be sustained over the long term.

Martin Baker
Founder and CEO, Charity Learning Consortium

When evaluating digital learning think FACTS.[1] Is it **F**lexible, **A**ccessible, **C**ollaborative and **T**ailored, supporting a practice **S**tep-change?

Why digital?

Digital learning refers to any learning supported by technology. It can be purely digital – virtual classes, videos, podcasts, eLearning, augmented or virtual reality – or part of a blend alongside face-to-face sessions.

Effective digital learning uses appropriate technology to support needs. Don't get seduced by the promise of technology and then look for an application!

Digital learning solutions are useful to:

- Provide scalable access for dispersed staff
- Facilitate just-in-time learning in the flow of work
- Empower self-directed learner choice
- Connect learners in communities
- Target resources through curation
- Enable learners to co-create solutions
- Extend learning beyond programmes and work
- Present simulations

Always consult learners in the design process to ensure you're giving them what they need

Foundations first

The following principles,[2] underpin effective digital solutions:

✓ **Start with users:** Don't make assumptions – explore learners' needs

✓ **Don't reinvent the wheel:** Find out how others have succeeded

✓ **Design with data:** Use analytics to track success and inform improvements

✓ **Keep it simple:** Don't over-complicate – make solutions user-friendly

✓ **Iterate:** Create a working prototype, test it, get feedback then improve it

✓ **Make it accessible:** Be inclusive – think about diverse learner needs

✓ **Understand context:** Consider scenarios where the solution will be used

✓ **Build services:** Make tasks easier, not more difficult

✓ **Be consistent:** Use an underpinning design

✓ **Share:** Your insights may help others
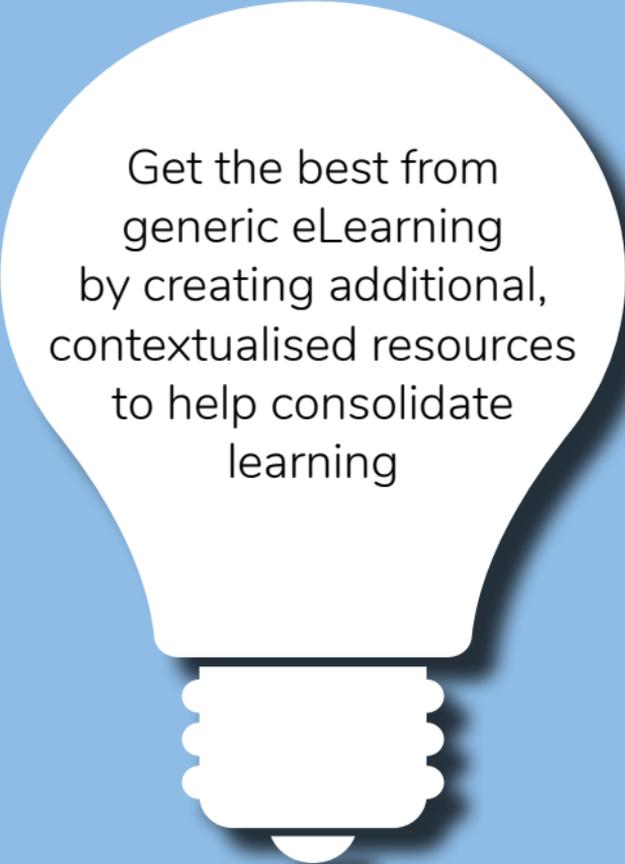
Get the best from
generic eLearning
by creating additional,
contextualised resources
to help consolidate
learning

Off-the-shelf eLearning

Generic eLearning is useful when a scalable solution on a common theme is needed. For example, more than a million staff and volunteers have access to the Charity Learning Consortium's eLearning.

Off-the-peg eLearning can provide savings in cost and development time. It's particularly useful for topics with common principles, like health and safety, data protection, computer skills and management principles. However, check that the content, look and feel align with your context. A poor fit can frustrate or alienate learners.

Off-the-shelf eLearning can also provide widely recognised certification or badging, which may be valued by learners and the organisation. Members of the Consortium have issued more than 40,000 online badges since 2017 for a wide variety of eLearning.
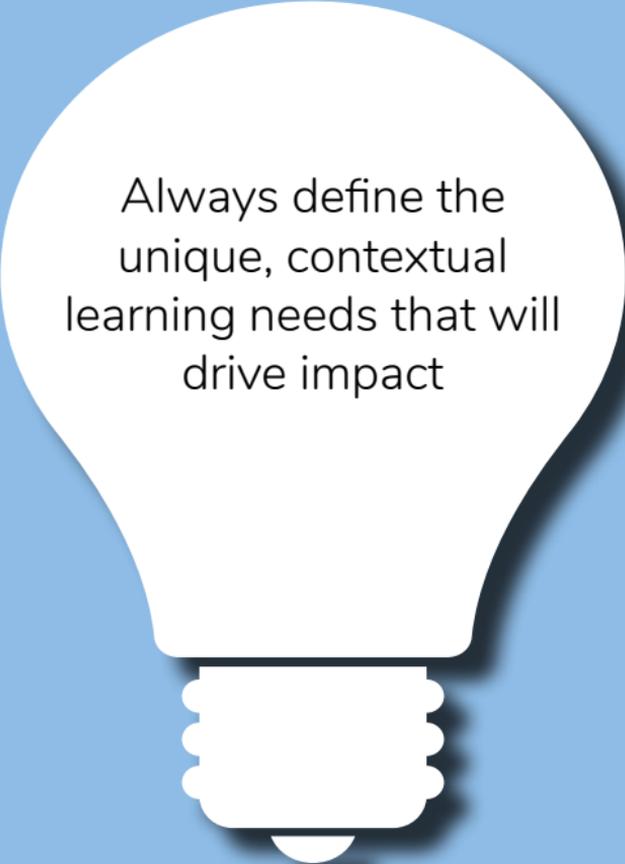
Always define the unique, contextual learning needs that will drive impact

Bespoke eLearning

Unique organisational contexts can demand custom solutions. Bespoke eLearning courses and resources work well alongside generic eLearning in a mix-and-match approach.

Bespoke eLearning may have higher upfront costs but that's often outweighed by the fact that it addresses specific scenarios – this can have great impact, especially over time. If it's for a large group, the development cost per head can become more persuasive. You also own the intellectual property rights and control updates and branding.

Your decision isn't simply based on whether to create bespoke eLearning in-house or outsource. If you anticipate creating several courses, it may be cost-effective to recruit a dedicated developer. For a smaller volume, consider outsourcing some projects – or just some parts of projects – to a learning design company.

Capture as much footage as you can when recording – it might be useful later

In-house videos

Most people have a smartphone for shooting cost-effective videos. In-house creation can be authentic, driving impact. For higher production quality it's inexpensive to hire equipment.

Keys for creating effective in-house videos:

- Plan and storyboard a compelling narrative

- Think about orientation: landscape or portrait?

- Get the lighting right – avoid backlighting

- Ensure backgrounds don't detract

- Invest in microphones – sound quality matters[3]

- Is the shot to camera (direct) or to an interviewer (conversational)?

- A tripod supports stability; the camera grid supports composition

- Six minutes is an optimum length[4]

- Build in pauses to support learning[5]

- Provide transcripts and/or subtitles for accessibility
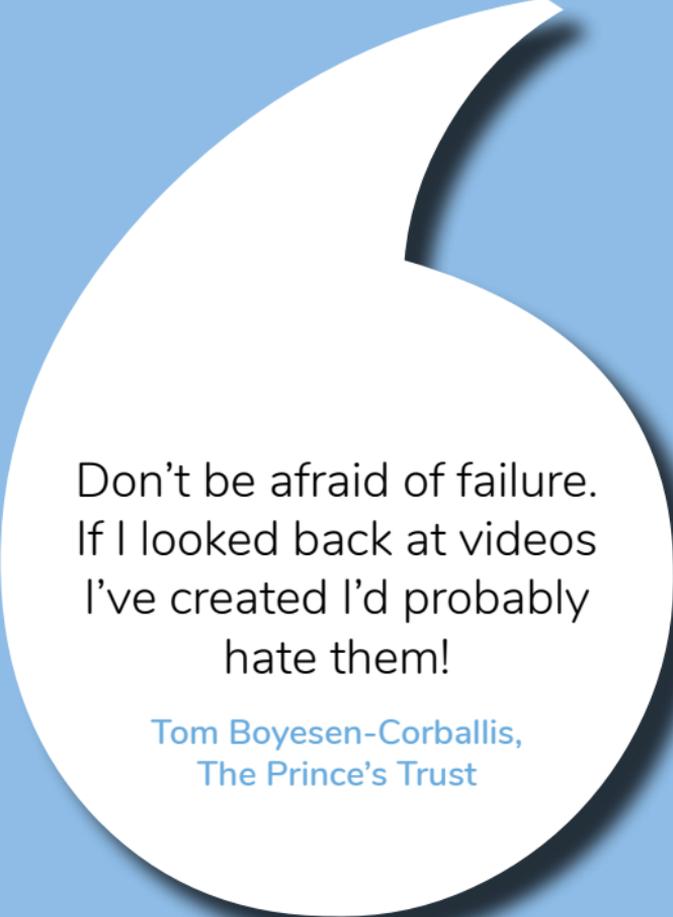
Don't be afraid of failure. If I looked back at videos I've created I'd probably hate them!

Tom Boyesen-Corballis,
The Prince's Trust

Case study: The Prince's Trust

Tom Boyesen-Corballis, Digital Learning Manager, has created hundreds of videos and animations for learning and development at The Prince's Trust.

Self-taught, he creates programmes using 'bundles' of content. These might include bespoke in-house-created video and animation alongside eLearning from the Charity Learning Consortium, designed documents, and instructor-led webinars and training sessions.

Video and animation can be funny and engaging, says Tom, bringing a dry subject to life. They can be watched at leisure and complement face-to-face instruction, leaving trainers to concentrate on a collaborative, coaching style.

Find out more at **clc.link/digital-learning**
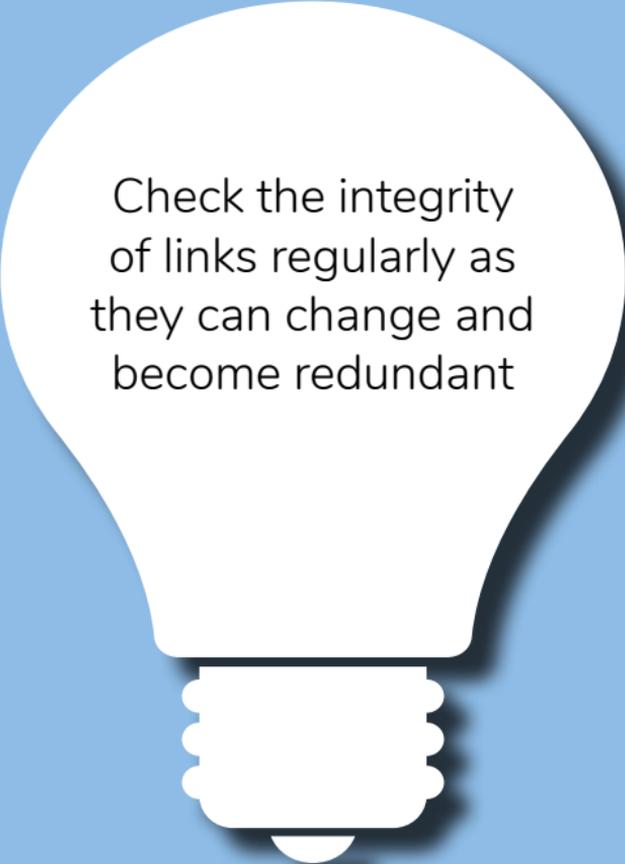
Check the integrity of links regularly as they can change and become redundant

Free videos

Free videos enrich learning with diverse perspectives which can be a refreshing change from corporate branding and messaging. However, do ensure that content fits your culture. The RSPCA, for example, subscribes to the Clear Lessons video learning library – its charity-specific topics can really complement a blended approach.

Maximise learning by curating playlists for key initiatives, highlight timings – so people know which segments are most relevant – and provide reflective questions linked to your organisational context.

Warning! Remember intellectual property rights. You may have to link to a video, rather than download it on your learning management system (LMS). And don't ever sell someone else's content as part of a solution without permission.

Keep online sessions to no more than 45 to 60 minutes long to maximise engagement

Virtual classes

Even pre-pandemic, at RSPB virtual classrooms had become so successful they were the default training method, with face-to-face courses the exception.

Webinars and virtual classrooms can be effective when:

- People are geographically dispersed
- Access to content/experts is needed at scale
- Content is delivered in chunks
- Lead times are short
- You have challenging logistics
- Recordings are available, when appropriate

Tips for virtual classrooms:

- **Collaborate creatively:** Use whiteboards, word-clouds and quizzes
- **It's a team effort:** Have a presenter-expert, tech support and a host-facilitator
- **Mix things up:** Interact every five minutes

Think about the learning journey. People – not products – should be at the heart of everything

Carl Makins,
St John Ambulance

Case study:
St John Ambulance

St John Ambulance hadn't made wide use of online learning before the pandemic. When Covid struck, it needed to rapidly upskill thousands of volunteers to support the NHS, while providing vital first aid training to key workers in businesses and schools.

The charity adopted a blended approach. It designed new programmes using a mix of interactive eLearning, webinars, videos and virtual sessions to impart knowledge while saving precious face-to-face time for practice and verification.

The results have been staggering. Not only were the charity's free online courses accessed by almost 60,000 workers, but thousands of St John volunteers have since given more than a million hours of care in hospitals, on ambulances and as vaccination volunteers.

Find out more at **clc.link/digital-learning**

When creating
in-house podcasts
don't over-commit –
be realistic about
frequency

Podcasts and audiobooks

Podcasts and audiobooks are increasingly popular - you can listen and learn in the flow of work and other activities.

Consider recording in-house podcasts using a smart device and external microphone. You can share practice tips from staff or insights from managers and leaders.

To make a great podcast:

- Respect everyone's time: 10-20 minutes is ideal
- Plan the content, even though it's often a conversation
- Provide a text transcript for accessibility
- Consider your distribution channels

Three podcasts to shape your practice:

- CIPD Podcasts
- Learning Now Radio
- Women Talking About Learning

Identify key specialists and good practice experts and ask for contributions

Blogs and vlogs

Encourage staff to create in-house blogs and vlogs (video blogs) to provide insights about their activities and learning. Model John Stepper's Working Out Loud principles:[6]

- Build collaborative relationships
- Be generous
- Make work visible
- Have purposeful sharing and discovery
- Be curious

Blogs and vlogs can be shared by linking to websites via your intranet or LMS, social platforms and email.

Five thought-provoking learning bloggers:

- Donald Clark
- Helen Blunden
- Harold Jarche
- Cathy Moore
- Julian Stodd

Consider investing
in a design package
such as Canva, Infograpia,
Piktochart, Snappa,
Venngage or
Visme

Infographics

An infographic presents images and minimal text for the quick comprehension of information, principles and/or processes. They're excellent for bite-size learning, topic refreshers and performance support. Here are six Ds for creating an effective infographic:

- **Define** the purpose and create an engaging title

- **Distil** information into key themes, headings, questions or bite-size text

- **Develop** a logical flow

- **Design** eye-catching graphics, charts, images and icons to minimise text

- **Direct** people to further information using links (clickable if possible)

- **Deliver** via channels where they can be easily found and accessed

Get infographic design inspiration at Infographics Archive.

Develop an excellent relationship with the IT team to support staff to use smart devices securely

Smart devices

Smartphones, tablets and apps have transformed our lives and they're key for accessing learning, especially for dispersed workforces. They aren't necessarily expensive to develop and offer a tailored learner experience.

Pyramid Learning, for example, quickly developed a free Covid education micro 'course' in 10 languages, delivered via text messages using Arist. People in hard-to-reach places, such as refugee camps, joined via a WhatsApp group. Pyramid has since developed free project management resources also delivered using WhatsApp and texts.

Empower learning through smart devices by asking staff and/or volunteers to either:

- **Bring your own device:** Use their own technology
- **Choose your own device:** Select from those on offer
- **Use corporate-owned, personally enabled devices:** Use the organisation's equipment, that allows personal use
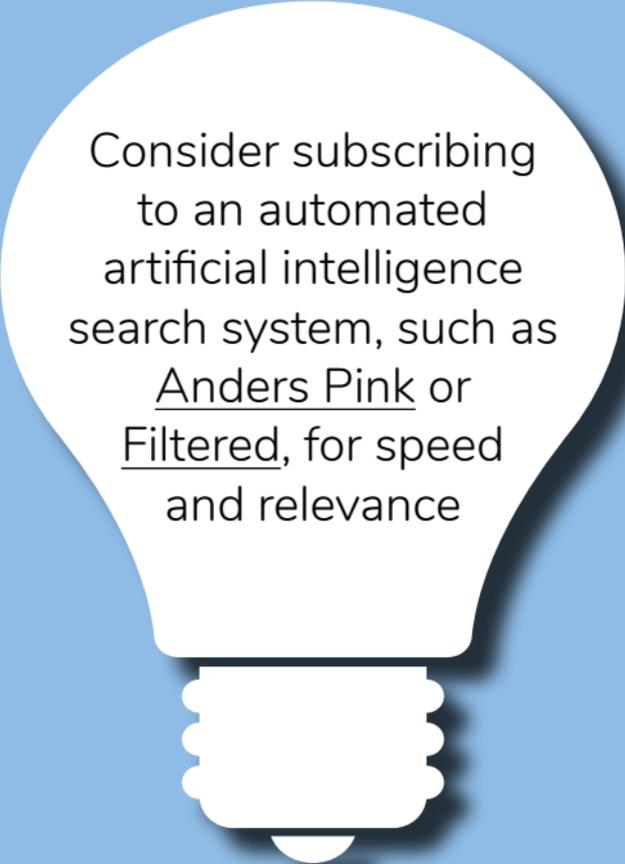
Consider subscribing to an automated artificial intelligence search system, such as Anders Pink or Filtered, for speed and relevance

Curation

Curation is an on-going process to find information – linked to organisational and learners' needs – with explanation that supports application. Curated resources can support quick responses to needs, diverse thinking, discussion and a growing resource library.

My CURATE model:

- **Champion:** Who has the search responsibility?
- **Unearth:** What's the search strategy?
- **Refine:** How are the most relevant resources selected?
- **Aggregate:** How is information linked to wider organisational thinking?
- **Transfer:** How are resources made accessible and searchable?
- **Embed:** How will information about value and impact be gathered and shared?

More detail on the CURATE model can be found in my book **Driving Performance Through Learning** at **www.koganpage.com/DPTL**
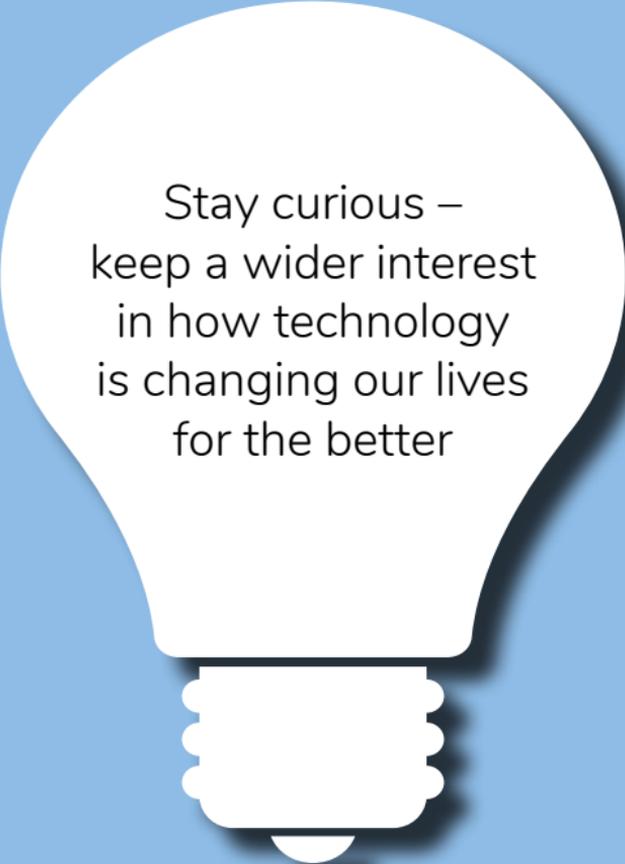
Stay curious –
keep a wider interest
in how technology
is changing our lives
for the better

The future

Emerging learning technologies aren't necessarily expensive and over time the cost of them will also go down. Here are some to consider:

- **Wearable tech**, such as smart clothing and glasses, enables information to be sent and received while learning on the go

- **Virtual reality** provides immersive simulations which learners can interact with for compelling, personalised learning experiences

- **Virtual spaces** can be used for social collaboration

- **Augmented reality** enhances the environment or resources by overlaying sensory-rich information, accessed using a smart device camera or dedicated glasses

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** enhances all aspects of learning using accurate, data-driven needs analysis, adaptive learning, personalised recommendations, voice-driven assistants and coach-bots. AI provides key insights on who is doing what, when and the learning implications

Start with the end
in mind to maximise
learning impact

Ensuring impact

Implementing technology doesn't guarantee learning. For real impact using digital learning solutions:

- Recognise that technology alone doesn't make the difference, it's people that do. Everyone must fully embrace initiatives and that may require cultural change

- Ensure that initiatives are aligned to genuine needs. Learners thrive when they see the relevance of using technology in their work, not as a gimmick

- Remember that a single technology is rarely a fix. Technology is best as part of a blend

- Offer ways to connect learners collaboratively for powerful learning experiences

- Support learners. They may need training to use technology and they must be given time to succeed

Beware of fads –
look for trends!

A closing bit of advice

Fads are a curse in the world of learning, particularly in the area of learning technologies. Technologies often promise much but fail to deliver. To use effective digital solutions, first distinguish between fads and trends:

🙁 Fads start with a technological solution looking for an answer. They tend to be brand-focused, spike and fade.

🙂 Trends solve specific problems and address needs, with clear benefits over previous methods. They're rarely linked to a single product and evolve over time.

Great digital solutions solve problems, make things easier, enhance work and productivity. In fact, learners may hardly notice that they're using them.

Find further resources at **clc.link/digital-learning**

Quick tips for success
Best tech for audience size

Participants	Type	Interaction
Up to 20	Virtual classroom	Chat, polls, break-out rooms, microphones, cameras and collaborative tools
Up to 100	Webinar	Chat, polls and break-out rooms
100s to 1000s	Webcast	Chat and polls

References

[1] The FACTS model is taken from chapter five of **Driving Performance Through Learning** by Andy Lancaster, published by Kogan Page.

[2] **Government Design Principles** (2012).

[3] **The media equation: How people treat computers, television, and new media like real people and places** by Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass, published by Cambridge University Press (1996).

[4] See pages 41-50 of **How video production affects student engagement: An empirical study of MOOC videos** by Philip Guo, Juho Kim, and Rob Rubin (2014).

[5] **Fostering generative learning from video lessons: Benefits of instructor-generated drawings and learner-generated explanations** by Logan Fiorella, Andrew Stull, Shelbi Kuhlmann and Richard Mayer, published by the Journal of Educational Psychology (2020).

[6] **The 5 Elements of Working Out Loud** (Revisited) by John Stepper (2016).

Further resources

The CIPD produces factsheets, research reports, podcasts, and guides which can be found at **cipd.co.uk/knowledge**.

About the Charity Learning Consortium

We are a one-stop shop dedicated to providing affordable and effective learning solutions for charitable organisations. Membership includes a suite of eLearning, charity-specific video content, a learning management system and access to a vibrant community for members to connect and share good practice. You also get a whole host of other goodies as part of an annual subscription.

Hundreds of charitable organisations benefit from collaborating with us. Bringing them together enables the Consortium to offer cost-effective, quality eLearning to more than a million people across the UK. Our collaborative approach paves the way for learning and development success, with ongoing support, fantastic networking opportunities, relevant workshops, and an inspirational Charity Learning Conference & Awards.

charitylearning.org

About the author
Andy Lancaster

Andy Lancaster leads learning at the CIPD, where he is responsible for the vision and creation of innovative learning solutions to support people professionals worldwide.

He has more than 30 years' experience in learning and organisational development and a research Masters' degree in instructional design.

He regularly speaks at conferences and writes and contributes to research. His latest award-winning book **Driving Performance Through Learning** provides key insights into designing and delivering learning in the flow of work. Use code FHRDPL20 at **www.koganpage.com/DPTL** to get a 20% discount.

Further resources can also be found at **cipd.co.uk/knowledge**

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