

Lara Williams reports on the Navy's hopes for electronic training as it pipes aboard a learning content platform

Elearning sets sail

The Royal Navy is synonymous with highly specialised workers, trained to maintain UK security at a moment's notice.

And projected cost and time savings from the organisation's new content management system should mean maintenance personnel spend less time in the classroom and more time at sea.

The learning content management (LCM) platform, designed by education specialist OutStart, will roll out courses designed specifically for trainee operatives on the Type 45 Destroyer, the Navy's new craft that is under construction.

It is estimated that LCM will cut the cost of maintenance training delivery by a third.

Operatives need to know how to fix things when they go wrong, and the Navy has technical manuals that detail how its complex systems work.

These manuals have traditionally been kept in print format, but on the Type 45 Destroyer they will be replaced by an electronic version.

Royal Navy Lt Commander Simon Lees heads the Type 45 Destroyer training unit, and says he



Online learning will help to ensure that operatives on the Type 45 Destroyer are ready for action

will create about 100 courses to train operatives in the various systems on board.

'We already owned the technical information, so reusing the data to come up with a training system made sense,' he says.

Much of the 85,000 data modules included in the LCM plat-

form – which include Jpegs, diagrams, video clips and text – is data that the Royal Navy already buys as technical information.

As well as cost benefits, the LCM system will allow easy changes to data, ensuring that information is kept up to date.

Lees' team is working on the

rollout, and he expects to start training operatives in early 2008.

But Lees recognises that the implementation has already presented some challenges.

He says there was a skill-set deficiency among the training designers and that the team underestimated the time required for implementation.

'We didn't push back our deadline; we just had to drive our people harder to meet it. We had to lay off other activities such as designing classrooms,' he says.

'For us it is an ambitious project, but if we fail to achieve it our ships will not sail. The Navy will not allow a ship to sail without the correctly trained personnel on board.'

Lees has already started work

on the next OutStart project, which will involve training programmes for operatives on the Royal Navy's two recently purchased aircraft carriers.

The new training programmes will be based on the Type 45 Destroyer model, but improvements to the theory are also being considered carefully.

'We are doing the best we can do today,' says Lees. 'But there is always room for improvement.'

The Navy uses Scorn 2004 data compliancy, an international standard for training media. Technical data, meanwhile, is in S1000D, an additional global specification.

Lees says Cordra 2 is the project that will bring these two international standards together, so that training designers working on aircraft carriers will not be struggling with two different data specifications.

According to US Army research, training course lengths can be reduced on average by 50 per cent using electronic training media.

Lees believes that a saving in course length of at least 20 per cent can be achieved, and hopes that future projects will come close to the US saving.

The OutStart contract is the first LCM system deal to be awarded under the remit of the recently extended Defence Learning Portal (DLP) initiative.

The BT DLP deal, awarded by the Ministry of Defence, has the potential to accommodate up to 300,000 elearning users across the three forces.

MoD ships its first elearning courses
www.computing.co.uk/2071125

Online learning facts and figures

Worldwide spending on elearning software will grow at 15.6 per cent annually between 2004 and 2009, according to analyst Gartner.

A 2004 survey by the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education found that, in responding UK universities, fewer than three per cent of courses were delivered predominantly online. As much as 75 per cent had no substantial online elements.

Higher-education establishments are keen to use elearning. More than 90 per cent of lecturers who responded to a poll by online learning specialist WebCT said classroom-based teaching is more effective in conjunction with elearning.

About 80 per cent of organisations believe that embedded elearning is at least somewhat important, according to Forrester Research.