We’ve all heard the buzz-word m-learning but no one seems to agree on exactly what mobile learning is, and how it differs from e-learning.

Mobile Learning Consultants **Float Learning** define m-learning as: “the use of mobile technology to aid in the learning, reference or exploration of information useful to an individual at that moment or in a specific use context.”

Meanwhile the **eLearning Guild** describe m-learning as: “any activity that allows individuals to be more productive when consuming, interacting with, or creating information, mediated through a compact digital portable device that the individual carries on a regular basis, has reliable connectivity, and fits in a pocket or purse.”

At Aurion Learning, we see m-learning as being about:

> Delivering learning content and experiences to learners when and where they need it. It is learning that can be accessed at any time and any place to support performance. Typically m-learning is accessed via a mobile device that facilitates just-in-time learning and on-demand learning. m-learning can be formal or informal, structured or unstructured. It is flexible, self-paced and self-directed. m-learning is driven by the learner, rather than the technology learners use to access it.

Many people are trying to predict the technology winners of the future – in other words which platforms will become favoured for m-learning delivery. Instead, we should be focusing on developing m-learning that is platform independent. Have a look at the 22 joint-nation **Mobile Learning Environment (MoLE)** project currently working to create a platform independent set of tools aimed at learning collaboration and information sharing on mobile devices.

**So what kind of technology does m-learning involve?**

Mobile learning is supported by a variety mobile devices and technologies that facilitate the delivery of documents, presentations, multimedia, notifications, news, assignments, quizzes and educational courseware that can all contribute to m-learning. These include:

- Smart phones e.g. iPhone, Android and Blackberry
- Laptops
- Tablets e.g. iPad, Android devices
- Kindle
- iPod
- Personal media players e.g. iPod
- Gaming devices e.g. xBox 360.
While certainly due careful consideration, m-learning should not focus on the technology it runs on – rather the single most important aspect of m-learning is the learner – it’s a combination of how, when, where they access the learning content and what they do with that learning content that really matters.

**So is m-learning just e-learning on a mobile device?**

It’s a BIG mistake to think that m-learning is simply e-learning on a mobile device, and an even bigger mistake (and often costly one) to assume you can simply transport existing e-learning to make it work on mobile devices.

M-learning requires a different pedagogical approach to e-learning for a number of reasons:

- **Access:** the way learners access m-learning is different to how they access e-learning (e.g. mobile phone screens can limit the amount and type of information that can be displayed versus office-based desk-top computer).

- **Short courses:** m-learning is also best suited to short bite-sized learning courses, theory, information relay rather than long or very practical based courses. No one wants to complete an hour long learning course via a mobile phone.

- **Less structured/less formal:** m-learning is often less structured than traditional e-learning which often sets out specific learning objectives.

- **On-demand:** m-learning is more about just-in-time and on-demand learning at the moment it is needed (think a repair worker out on a job who can access a quick check-list of ‘to-dos’ when they are actually on the job or the Bloom Liverpool Project – a fantastic example of delivering mobile learning to taxi drivers) whereas traditional e-learning is more about comprehension and retention. With e-learning, learners are expected to learn information and retain it for a later time when they will actually apply it on the job.

- **Assessment:** Mlearning requires a whole new strategy for assessment. Traditional Elearning often includes a final knowledge check / assessment with the initial results recorded on an LMS but given that there is often a time delay before the learner is actually meant to put the learning into action, it can be difficult to measure and evaluate long-term behaviour change and the effects on the business. The time between Mlearning taking place and the learner putting what they have learned into action is relatively short, so it can be easier to measure behaviour change and impact on the business.

**What makes good m-learning?**

- Bite-sized short chunks of learning
- ‘Just-in-time’ ‘just-enough’ or even ‘just-for me’ learning
- Easy to use
- Practical and contextual
- NOT e-learning delivered on a mobile device
- Informal – ‘on the go’ learning
- Interactive (including appropriate opportunities to share knowledge)
- Knowledge distribution rather than knowledge presentation
- Portable – can be accessed anywhere the learner goes with their device
- Platform independent (however this is still somewhat aspirational).