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The use of online learning as continuing professional development within animal welfare organisations: A case study with IFAW

Implications

Online learning should be an engaging learner experience which facilitates meeting learning objectives.

Introduction

Views on animal welfare and ethics differ worldwide, which becomes a problem when international animal welfare organisations want to speak with one, unified voice in their duties. Through developing technologies there are new opportunities to engage and teach people around the world about animal welfare topics, though their usefulness is still being investigated. Previous research using online courses indicates they can be used as a useful supplementary tool which allows for flexible learning (Klupiec et al. 2014), though investment in development is required for success (MacKay et al. 2014). Articulate has been chosen by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) as an online teaching software platform to provide international members with continuing professional development. The aim of the online course is to ensure IFAW staff are up to date with the organisation’s current values and policies for protecting animals. Usefulness of the online course will be tested based on five key themes; demographics, confidence, attitudes, knowledge, and course feedback.

Material and methods

The course was designed with IFAW to meet six key learning objectives across five units. The learning objectives are: 1) Recognise IFAW’s key principles and approaches; 2) Outline IFAW’s definition of animal welfare; 3) Explain the importance of using ethics and science to guide IFAW’s principles; 4) Outline the arguments for why humanity should be concerned with animal welfare; 5) Appreciate that the international history of animal welfare is diverse and complex; 6) Draw on what you have learnt in Topic 1 to answer the end of session quizzes.

Each unit contains three Articulate packages, each one which lasting approximately 20-40 minutes (except the fifth unit which contains only one Articulate package). The titles of the units are: 1) Introduction to Animal Welfare Conservation and Ethics; 2) Understanding views on Animal Welfare; 3) Effective Arguments for Animal Welfare; 4) Animal Welfare and Conservation; 5) Policy and Practice in Animal Welfare. Data is collected using a questionnaire distributed to 281 IFAW staff hosted by survey monkey to compare responses pre- and post- online course completion. It is predicted that confidence, attitudes and knowledge will improve after completion of the course.

Results

Statistical and observational analysis can be used to judge the usefulness of the online course for international animal welfare education. Indicators for usefulness are based on changes of knowledge post-course to align with IFAW values and policies. Non-completion may influence results and so course feedback should provide an understanding on which topics were missed with participant’s reasons (e.g. did not find the topic engaging or felt they knew enough about the topic to move onto next topic). Feedback can therefore provide suggestions on how online learning should develop to meet learners needs.
Conclusion

Preliminary participants suggest the course will be well received due to the interactive and engaging capacity of the online course using Articulate.

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