ROI case study

From libraries to classrooms, Cardiff CC makes efficiency savings with e-learning

Rebecca Johnson used to spend over an hour a time photocopying delegate material for Cardiff City Council's Sickness Absence classroom course. Thankfully all that is set to change as the council embraces e-learning and reduces the number of classroom based courses. This will be achieved by introducing e-learning into the learning and development blend which is good news for Rebecca, Learning and Development Advisor for Cardiff Council, who says "I'm looking forward to not standing at the photocopier for so long anymore and being able to get on with something else!"

But it's not just in Sickness and Absence training where changes are being made. Employees at Cardiff studying for the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) level 3 are now able to support their studies with online content. Students can download modules online, access relevant articles and tutor's course notes from one easy learning management system.

Cardiff supports its students with a Dynamic Learning Environment platform provided by Learning Pool, the public sector e-learning exchange. Currently Cardiff's DLE houses 35 units of the ILM level 3, plus relevant support material.

The DLE enables learners to download useful support material, enter into discussion forums with their fellow colleagues and students and, once they have written an assignment, students can upload work for marking. The DLE is particularly useful in supporting the new standards of the Institute of Leadership and Management course, which were introduced in October 2007.

"The DLE has enabled us to manage the whole of the ILM programme flexibly. Learners can access their work, resources and feedback in their own time. Keeping track of ILM candidates has been made easier," thinks Beverley Hassell, Learning & Development Lead Advisor, Cardiff Council.

On a recent visit the external verifier for ILM recognised the amount of work that had gone into the DLE and its benefits. "During my recent visit I was given a presentation by the staff of their new e-learning system. I was extremely impressed when I saw what the system can do for learners who are working on the new unit based management and team leading awards recently introduced by ILM. This is a system that will help everyone involved make the most of the e-learning and development opportunities available to them," said Alison Burns, ILM external verifier for Cardiff Council.

Away from ILM, Cardiff Council is also repurposing existing e-learning courses from Leaning Pool to train staff on sickness and absence as part of a blended learning programme.

As Rebecca Johnson says "We've found that some people can get bogged down with policy questions during a classroom skills course so the idea is that the e-learning gives them the policy and procedures background they need before they even get to the classroom. This cuts down on classroom time and ensures all learners are starting from the same knowledge base."

And the council has plans to introduce more e-learning. Forthcoming courses include a Cardiff specific Induction module to complement the Introduction to Local Government module currently available through the Learning Pool catalogue,

an Emergency Planning module to help the silver tactical officers within the organisation respond to an emergency and a module to support users of the Training and Events branch of SAP.

But it's not just the HR department who see the benefits of e-learning. Other service areas such as libraries are also beginning to recognise its benefits and are introducing it within their departments.

Toby Philpott, Senior Library Assistant for Cardiff says "With libraries scattered across the city it is always difficult for staff to attend training, or even stay in daily contact. The DLE lets us offer general Learning Pool modules, as well as specialised modules for library staff, which are accessible from anywhere, 24/7. We can supplement that e-learning with notice boards, forums, newsletters, glossaries, etc. It seems like the future."

The efficiency savings created by the new way of delivering the ILM programme and the council's other e-learning activity will come from saved time and saved cost. The number of handouts that traditionally accompany classroom based training will be cut by more than half, saving money from expensive photocopying materials. In addition, the fact that tutors don't have to print out assignments to grade them also means less paper.

Like all local authorities Cardiff is efficiency aware and is so committed that it has signed up to the Green Dragon Environmental Standard. Some parts of the authority have already achieved level 5 of the standard while others still have room to improve.

While some efficiency gains have already been made it's apparent that Cardiff is committed for the long haul. Rebecca says "Our ILM programme supports our Management Development Programme which is designed to increase the capacity of our managers. This will, in turn, make Cardiff a more efficient authority."