



"Whilst we have utilised other providers across the organisation in the past, we have struggled to achieve a provider who can match the breadth of learning available through Virtual College and to the quality and standard we have grown to love from Virtual College's products."

Debbie Crawford, Head of Learning Central, Central Bedfordshire Council

## Central Bedfordshire Council

Digitising SEND training for 20,000 learners across four local authorities



### Central Bedfordshire

#### Challenge

A training solution that could reach 20,000 learners and provide a consistent level of understanding that supported employees and parents to be 'SEND ready', whatever their capacity.

#### Solution

Four online courses which were fully accessible, had a bespoke graphical design and were relevant and relatable to all the learners.

#### The results

Extremely positive results including 97% of the learners saying that the e-learning enhanced their knowledge or skills, 95% saying they would recommend it to their colleagues, and more.

**Central Bedfordshire Council is a local authority based in the heart of Bedfordshire. They have over 3,000 members of staff and work to support the development of both internal and external staff workforces across the children and adults care sector. They also work on behalf of neighbouring local authorities to provide safeguarding training.**

### What they wanted to achieve

Safeguarding training is hugely important to Central Bedfordshire Council. Having already worked with us on a course about online abuse, they asked us to support on their next project – a training course about Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND). It was recognised that there was a lack of understanding of the different levels of SEND across the four local authorities and their partner health agencies in Central Bedfordshire, Bedford Borough, Milton Keynes and Luton – as well as with parents who had children or young people with SEND and did not fully understand what support was available to them across the BLMK (Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes) footprint.

Therefore, a training solution was required that was suitable for both employees and parents and provide a consistent level of understanding that supported everyone, whatever their capacity. Overall, they hoped it would result in improvements in the quality of the SEND assessments; satisfaction from the children and parents in regard to the support mechanisms in place, and a coordinated and improved approach that was consistent and well understood.

## The challenges they faced

To achieve this, there were big challenges facing them. The biggest was ensuring that the training met the needs of everyone – it needed to be thorough and detailed enough for the practitioners whilst also ensuring that it wasn't too complex for parents. With four local authorities sharing the commitment of the development, and a potential of over 20,000 learners to go through it, this was no easy feat. There were learners of many different roles and from many different establishments, ranging from school and nursery staff to health staff, volunteers and those in the private sector. This vast range of learners meant that there were lots of different needs and requirements to be met, and these had to be taken into consideration during the development of the training.

## How we helped them

Our project managers were on hand to offer support from end to end of the project, ensuring that deadlines and objectives were met. We also created, designed and built four modules. First, there was an introductory module where learners are encouraged to self-assess their understanding of the subject before completing the course, and again after completion of the course to capture the average learning gain. This was followed by three modules that learners could complete in their own time:

- 1. Context and legal framework**
- 2. Graduated response and person-centred planning**
- 3. Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)**

To ensure that the content was correct and relevant, a steering group was formed with representation of subject matter experts to define the content and review progress as the content was built.

When it came to the technical side of the e-learning, we ensured that all modules included a variety of different media such as challenges, quizzes, and animated videos.

It was important that the training was recognisable and accessible to all the learners, so we ensured this happened in a variety of ways. There was the bespoke graphical design that incorporated a combination of the council's stakeholder colours; the inclusive design elements to ensure that each module was fully accessible, such as screen reader options, alt-text, keyboard-only navigation and transcripts, and, lastly, the relevant and reliable content, such as council-specific documents and references.

## Results

Three months after the training went live across the pan Bedfordshire region, feedback was gathered from the learners. This is how they rated the modules.

**97%**

said the e-learning enhanced their knowledge or skills

**93%**

found the e-learning engaging and interactive

**91%**

rated the overall experience of the online learning as 'good' or 'excellent'

**95%**

would recommend this e-learning to their colleagues

**94%**

said the training met its objectives 'mostly' or 'completely'



## Advice to other local authorities

Debbie Crawford kindly gives advice to other Local Authorities about e-learning development.

**"Without a doubt using a bespoke e-learning solution and having it tailored to meet your local perspective is a great way of delivering knowledge and information. It can provide an emotional engagement in the subject matter that drives practitioners to utilise the learning in their day-to-day practice. We adopt several different models around e-learning. Although it is often fine just to do the e-learning, sometimes we ask people to undertake the learning as a pre-classroom activity and then bring them together virtually or in a classroom to test the learning through case studies and discussion. This reduces the length of time that a practitioner is away from their job role. We often advise some of our partner organisations to get the team to undertake a specific e-learning activity and then discuss in team meetings with case studies tabled that are relevant to their job role".**



Debbie concludes by expressing that there is lots of flexibility in the approaches that local authorities can adopt when using e-learning and it has provided Central Bedfordshire Council with a great way of ensuring their local workforce are confident and competent and are able to support their local people well. Most importantly, it gives them the capacity to ensure that the greatest number of people can access learning at a time they choose. The largest benefit of e-learning is that it is available for the learner 24/7.

## Quotes from learners

**'The course helped to refresh my memory on the laws around SEND and who to contact, or put parent in contact with, if there were any concerns.'**

**'I find the case study provided was a useful aspect of the training. It enabled me to understand and increase my knowledge of the importance of person-centred approach.'**

**'[This is] a new role that I am taking on. Had limited knowledge previously but feel now I can confidently say what services are available to take to other staff.'**

**'The training was a good reminder of the needs of SEND students and the different support agencies that are available to help them.'**

## About Us

At Virtual College, our purpose is simple, to change the shape of workplace training. All our training resources are built with one objective: to put your learners first. This not only means designing engaging and interactive courses, it also means providing the highest-quality information at all times.



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