

CASE STUDY

Wigan Council adopts e-learning in order to provide training to the early years sector

A Virtual College Case Study





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John Brewder
Assistant Business Partner

The background

With a population of around 300,000 across an area of 77 square miles, Wigan is one of the largest metropolitan districts in England. The borough is based around the two main towns of Wigan and Leigh, and several smaller towns and villages of the former Lancashire coalfield.

Wigan council is one of ten authorities in Greater Manchester who have come together to form the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA); a governance body set up to boost economic performance and help deliver a brighter future for Greater Manchester and the North West.

In April 2012, AGMA began a contract with Virtual College in order to make training accessible to over 70,000 council staff and the external private voluntary and independent sector.

John Brewder, Assistant Business Partner at Wigan Council, said: “We have over 1500 members of staff working in the Early Years sector, including child minders. In January 2013 we rolled out e-learning to the early years sector at Wigan Council using the platform and content we have access to through the AGMA contract. By the beginning of April 2013, we had successfully provided online food hygiene training to 300 members of staff working in the Early Years sector.

“By 31st May, over 950 staff were registered on the system and 128 different courses were being studied.”

The challenge

Due to the nature of the sector, early years staff are scattered across different venues, with many working in private day care settings across the borough, as well as child minders working from home. In addition, limited resources and difficulty in getting cover make it difficult for staff to attend anything other than compulsory training.

John commented: “Training was being delivered six days a week, simply to ensure that all early years staff could complete their mandatory training. Our early years staff have always been keen to learn new skills but it was not possible to offer face to face training courses in anything other than compulsory topics. Our challenge was to use our resources more effectively.

“We needed a solution which would allow us to provide cost effective mandatory and non-mandatory CPD accredited training to individuals.”

Limited resources, shrinking budgets and a dispersed workforce resulted in limited training opportunities.

The solution

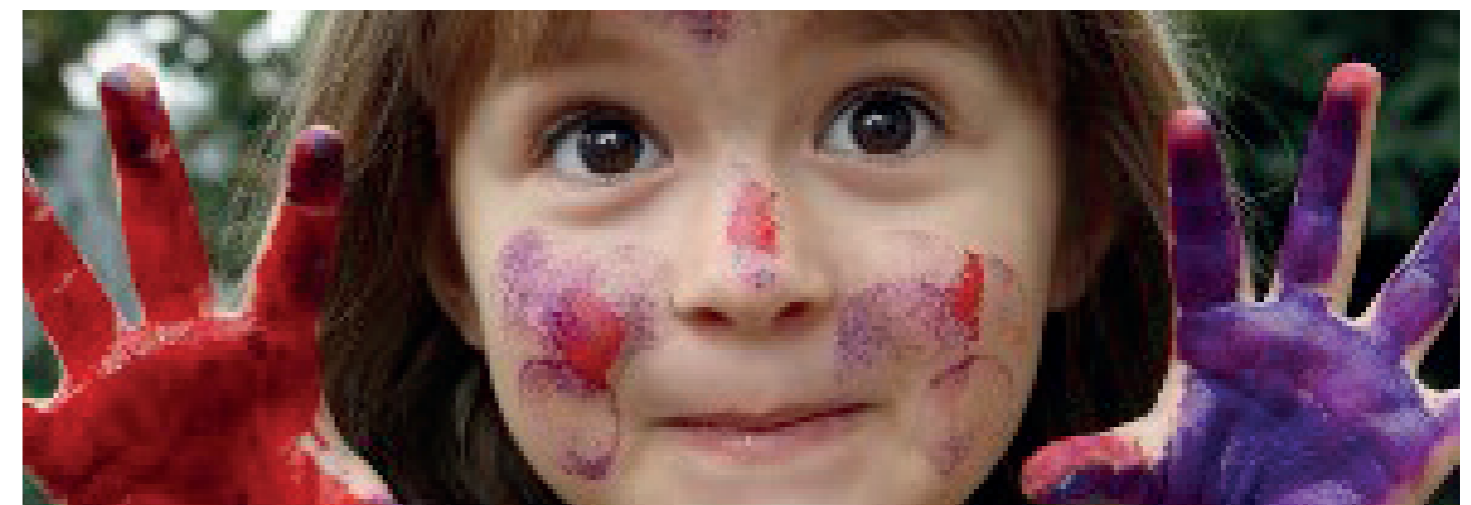
The contract between AGMA and Virtual College introduced Wigan Council’s early years sector to the concept of e-learning as a training method.

John said: “We had initial consultations at manager’s events and child minding conferences to identify whether e-learning would be an effective training method for us. We also set up focus groups to help steer the project.

“E-learning addressed many of the challenges we were facing. It was a more cost effective way to deliver mandatory training to the early years sector and would allow us to offer staff further training opportunities.”

Wigan Council identified that a number of staff had limited IT skills but this did not prove to be an issue due to the simple user interface of Virtual College’s Learning Management System and courses.

“You can register learners in bulk which saves a great deal of administration time. The initial implementation and training from Virtual College has given us the ability to look at how e-learning can support additional people in the local community.”



The results

E-learning has brought a number of benefits to Wigan Council's early years sector including increased staff engagement, increased productivity and time and cost savings.

In just four months, 950 accounts had been created in the Learning Management System, with the most popular courses being Child Accident Prevention, Food Hygiene and Safeguarding Children.

Laura Murray, Manager at Little Foxes Nursery said: "I completed the Level 2 Food Safety & Hygiene course in one hour and 15 minutes. Before this e-learning course was available, I would have spent a full day out of the nursery."

John commented: "We have seen increased engagement from staff and it is fantastic that individuals are now able to complete courses that previously they would never have been able to do. "So far we have only rolled out e-learning to around half of the Early Years sector, but we aim to increase this figure significantly over the next few months. We have always included those directly affected by the introduction of e-learning in discussions and in focus groups which has resulted in very positive feedback and engagement.

"E-learning has had a direct impact on productivity due to the fact that individuals no longer have to take time out of work to complete their training and of course, when attending face to face training, you have to take into account the amount of time and the cost involved with travelling to different training locations.

"We anticipate that the new skills individuals have gained from the additional courses they can complete through e-learning will also have a positive effect on job and customer satisfaction."

Laura continued: "We recently had a child with autism enrol at our nursery. Usually we would have had to send the individual who would support them on an external course, whereas using the additional courses available through e-learning allowed me to give the training to all members of staff."

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What next?

“ Wigan's early years training programme will be supported more and more by the use of e-learning.

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John said: "In the future, we hope to introduce a much wider variety of courses to the early years sector in order to provide further opportunities for development.

"The requested learning function in the Learning Management System allows individuals to identify their own training needs, which has seen an increase in engagement. We therefore hope to explore this function further.

"Eventually, Wigan's early years training programme will be supported more and more by the use of e-learning which will become an ever important tool in the development of our workforce. We are keen to identify how e-learning can support additional people within the local community."



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About Virtual College

Since 2006, we have provided training to every NHS Trust and now work with over 60 local safeguarding boards. Over this period, we have donated more than £200,000 to healthcare and safeguarding charities.

We are part of Virtual College, which has over 1.75 million learners and is growing at a rate of 1000 per day across public and private sectors.

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