

CASE STUDY

Stafford and Rural Homes engage in online training

A Virtual College Case Study



“Online learning can provide a solution to some significant challenges.”

The background

Created in 2006 to own and manage the former council housing stock owned by Stafford Borough Council (SBC), Stafford and Rural Homes (SARH) is the largest landlord in the area with over 6,000 homes across Stafford and the surrounding area.

SARH also delivers a number of local independent living schemes, maintains the housing register on behalf of Stafford Borough Council and delivers an award winning telecare home safety and personal security system for the elderly and vulnerable.

In 2015, SARH was named number 10 in the prestigious 'Sunday Times Top 100 Best Not-for-Profit Organisations to Work for' list.

The challenge

As SARH is a 24/7 operation, employing 176 members of staff, providing suitable training within this type of operation creates its own challenges.

“There is no doubt that taking staff off the job for classroom-based training automatically creates a loss of productivity and some operational disruption,” explained Jo Hough, Assistant Director of Organisational Development.

“In practice, it would be difficult and costly to run the number of classroom-based training sessions required to meet our different working patterns.

“For this, and many other reasons, online learning can provide a solution to some significant challenges.

“We have always been driven by a need to achieve value from our training and the effects of recent Government announcements have only highlighted this requirement.”

The solution

The team at SARH has used Virtual College's online learning solutions for the social housing sector since 2013.

They have a gold membership package which gives them access to 5 sector specific courses and 12 additional titles which can be selected from a wide range of 24 courses.

Jo commented: “Although face to face training is still appropriate in some cases, it is almost always more expensive than online learning.

“Our blended solution allows us to demonstrate best practice in terms of quality and value in training delivery.”

SARH operates an 'Investing in You' programme for its staff. They undertake mandatory online training in what they have branded the 'Famous Five' courses: Equality & Diversity, Data Protection, The Bribery Act, Customer Care and Value for Money.

Jo continued: “We use Virtual College's learning management system to distribute and manage the online learning which is much easier than booking external trainers and so on.”

These online courses are studied by a wide variety of SARH staff from across the organisation. The majority of learners are office based but they are given a range of flexible location options for studying, including 'The CUBE', a dedicated learning area or learning at their workstations using the headphones provided.

New starters undertake the online learning as part of their induction programmes and are given 3 months to complete the mandatory courses.

There is a rolling programme for existing staff including a refresher programme. In total, over 150 staff undertake this online training.

“Our blended solution allows us to demonstrate best practice in terms of quality and value in training delivery.”



The results

To encourage participation in the training, an internal competition was initiated which was promoted via SARH's internal e-shot newsletter and internal briefings.

"Even though the potential prize was of minimal value, the competition stirred our staff's competitive instincts and had a very positive impact on ensuring there was a high level of participation in the training," explained Penny Johnson, SARH's HR Business Partner.

"People have different learning styles and our staff like the fact that the online courses allow them to study at their own pace, in their own time.

"Our training programmes are audited externally and internally so it is important that we can use Virtual College's learning management system to easily track and report learner engagement and understanding.

"We have over 90 different job functions within SARH including HR, IT, Call Centre Operatives, Housing Officers and independent Living Co-ordinators.

"In spite of this complexity, we would like to move to a position where we map online learning course to individuals' job roles. We believe in giving our staff the opportunity to develop skill sets that allow them to undertake a greater variety of work."

“ We can use Virtual College's learning management system to easily track and report learner engagement and understanding. ”



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About Virtual College

With over 2 million online learners, Virtual College is one of the leading providers of e-learning in the UK. For over twenty years, we have provided online courses to individuals and companies across the world, breaking down the boundaries of traditional learning to deliver cost reducing, time efficient training. Unlike many other e-learning providers, our training extends to actual programme and qualification creation and delivery - resulting in a unique blended solution. The knowledge, experience and feedback that this delivery provides helps ensure that we strive to continually improve our solutions.

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