

CASE STUDY

The Home Office: Using e-learning to combat FGM

A Virtual College Case Study



Home Office



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The background

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a procedure where the female genital organs are injured or changed and there is no medical reason for this. A 2015 study estimated that approximately 137,000 women and girls who have migrated to England and Wales are living with the consequences of FGM.

The Home Office identified that professionals who have responsibilities to safeguard and support women and girls would benefit from accessible training on FGM.

The challenge

Engaging learners with a clear narrative

The Home Office identified that effective, multi-agency training for safeguarding professionals would help improve the support and protection provided to women and girls.

Their brief to Virtual College was to create e-learning content which comprehensively addressed what FGM is, its health impact, how to identify women at risk and how to sensitively manage the subject by understanding cultural influences on the likelihood of FGM.

Most importantly, the course needed to reinforce the necessity of a multi-agency approach and give learners clear actions.

This e-learning course would be completely free to frontline safeguarding staff, including healthcare professionals, police and educators.

The solution

Helping to keep learners immersed

Virtual College worked with a wide range of stakeholders in addition to the Home Office including FORWARD and the Metropolitan Police, using its skills and experience to managing a complex content authoring and storyboarding process through multiple public sector organisations.

FGM is an intensely personal issue requiring great sensitivity and empathy from frontline staff, including understanding the cultural reasoning behind it. Feedback sought from Virtual College’s safeguarding learners was that contextualisation enhanced their understanding, as well as making courses more engaging.

To fully involve learners and encourage their emotional investment in preventing FGM, Virtual College used a storybook pedagogy focusing on the story of a young girl called Hope. This linear narrative helped make every element of FGM practices and prevention unequivocally clear, engaging the learner’s interest.

Hope’s story offers the learner an opportunity to effectively use the information to see if they could spot opportunities for different agencies to intervene at appropriate points during the course of Hope’s story.

The storybook narrative was complemented by the graphic elements of the course by the extensive use of hand drawn ‘water colour’ imagery and backgrounds. These were produced by scanning pencil and ink drawings into the computer where they were digitally painted using a drawing tablet pen used to simulate a water colour effect.

This technique ensured that the drawings kept a traditional look, whilst also providing the flexibility to make any quick edits and changes as required.

It also meant that potentially disturbing and graphic images were softened, encouraging learners to stay engaged with the course materials.

Due to the sensitive subject matter of this course, Virtual College had to be very careful to draw the line between keeping the learner engaged through interaction and not trivialising the important information within the training. Too much interactivity could jar with this intimate storybook experience so it was used sparingly to support the flow of the course.

Interactivity was mainly used to complement the learning narrative, providing learners with a chance to reflect on the information they had received in the previous section. Reflective exercises, knowledge quizzes, well-placed challenges and conversational narrative were used.



The results

Delivering a successful learning solution

Since the FGM course was launched, it has had widespread positive and lasting impact for learners and the organisations they work for. The learning content has been very effective, helping learners retain information and communicating the risks and signs of FGM clearly and sensitively.

A Home Office official commented: "Virtual College's passion for the project and their understanding for the sensitivity of the subject, together with their experience of developing products for our target audience meant that the end product was innovative and tailored to the needs of the learners."

Since the project started in 2014:

- Over 200,000 learners have completed the course across the UK
- 98% of learners would recommend the course to others
- An incredible 90% of learners said they would do something differently as a result of taking the course.

Raising awareness of FGM, its types and 'at risk' indicators were essential aims for the Home Office. Close textual analysis of the learners' evaluations shows the e-learning has undoubtedly achieved this, with long-lasting positive effects:

"The biggest thing I learned from the course were the myths surrounding FGM."

"It has been a vital and worthwhile piece of training and has raised my awareness of law in relation to FGM as well as different types of FGM."

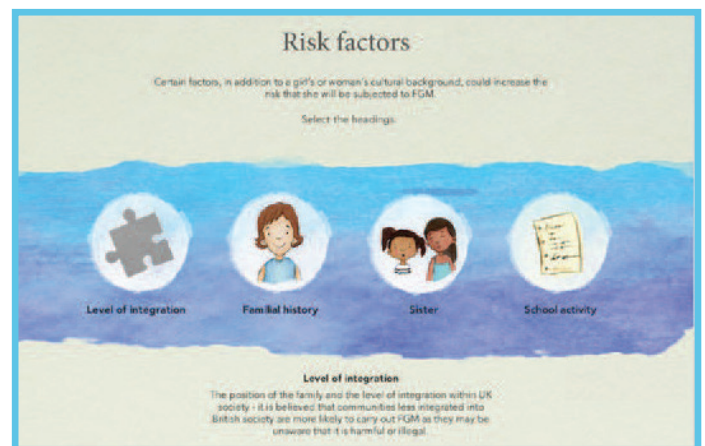
"It reiterated for me the immense damage both physically and psychologically that FGM has."

"I will be better informed that it is everyone's responsibility."

"It was a very informative course, organised in an accessible format."

From the audience's responses, it's clear the content strategy is effective, successfully achieving the goals of the Home Office and stakeholders. Learners themselves feel more knowledgeable and better equipped to deal with the serious and pressing issue of FGM.

A Home Office official concluded: "Evaluation feedback on the course is excellent. Comments from learners demonstrate that the course has had a real impact on how they would respond to cases of FGM, enabling learners to know what to look for and how to respond with confidence."



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About Virtual College

With over 2.9 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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