

A fresh look at learning at Addaction

About Addaction: Addaction is a charitable organisation that changes lives. It strives to ensure that every person with drug and alcohol problems has access to the best services and support to enable them to change their lives and unlock their full potential. Addaction does this in more than 100 locations across the country from Aberdeen in Scotland to Penzance in the South West, using our 1,200 staff.



Velda Christina Barnes and her colleagues Kayleigh Smith and Guy Pink at the HR Excellence Awards.

Re-evaluating learning

April 2011 saw the introduction of the first Learning and Development Strategy for Addaction. The Strategy and supporting Learning and Development Policy was developed after a comprehensive consultation across the organisation - including staff from a variety of different roles and representing 10% of our total workforce, volunteers and service users. An analysis of organisational spending on external training over the previous two financial years was also undertaken to provide a financial context from which to build the business case for bringing the majority of the charity's Learning and Development provision in-house.

The Strategy was approved by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and had the full support of the charity's Trustees. Against the background of the Public Spending Review and uncertainty about future funding levels, the SLT supported the creation of a new internal Learning and Development Team to deliver the Strategy.

[Guy Pink, Addaction's HR Director says](#)

"Learning and Development is an absolute cornerstone of what we are about as an organisation and what we offer to our staff. We devised our learning and development strategy, got the buy in from our trustees and senior staff and then carried out an extensive training needs analysis. Our staff told us they like online learning, but that it must be part of a blended learning solution. So that is what we have done. This means that we can introduce mandatory units around, for example, safeguarding children and report on this, provide the suite of learning options that are part of our link with CLC as well as providing the face to face delivery staff expect. We also ensure that our appraisal process has personal learning as one of its four elements. Ultimately this is all about up-skilling our staff and improving as a business and L&D is a critical component of making this happen".

One of the key aims of the Strategy is to achieve equity of access to learning opportunities for all staff across the organisation, one of the main issues of concern highlighted during the consultation process. One of the key visions of achieving this aim was to develop a comprehensive online learning

offering, which includes both mandatory eLearning modules alongside modules for personal and professional development. Whilst many organisations in different sectors utilise online learning, Addaction is unusual in the Third Sector in its decision to invest in the creation of an eLearning developer post.

Technology and implementation

In partnership with the Charity Learning Consortium (CLC), Addaction implemented a new Moodle Learning Management System (LMS). At a cost of just under £10.00 per employee, CLC provides an externally hosted Moodle LMS as well as a comprehensive menu of standard content covering key areas such as Health and Safety, ICT skills and Diversity and Equality in addition to personal development, leadership and management modules. All standard content is provided by leading eLearning companies and is reviewed and updated regularly.

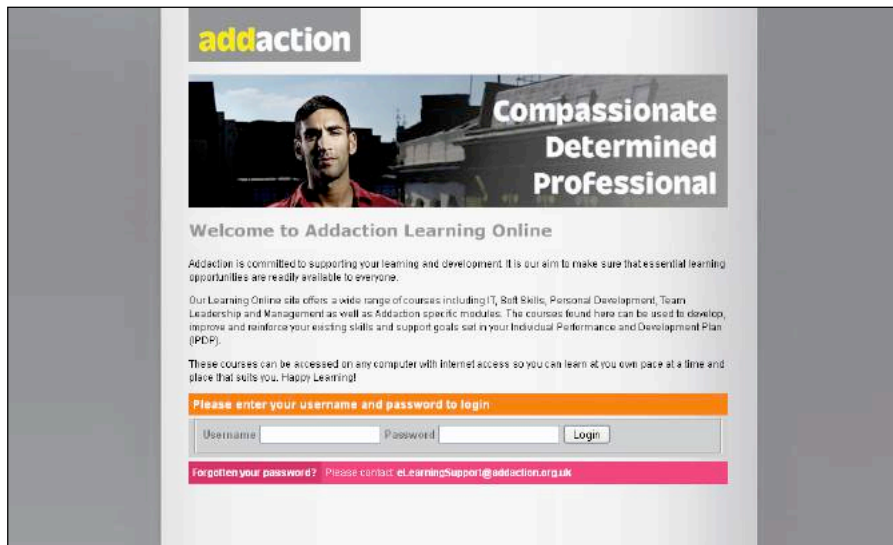
The Moodle LMS also enables bespoke eLearning modules to be hosted and a new eLearning developer post was created to produce modules to support the specific learning needs of the organisation. Employing an in-house eLearning designer ensures modules are 'future proofed' as they can be very easily and swiftly amended to reflect any changes in legislation, policy or best practice - as well as enabling Addaction to respond quickly to support identified business needs. The charity is also able to ensure that its bespoke modules reflect not only the relevant policies and legal obligations but also fully reflects its values and culture.

Whilst the organisation could have had bespoke modules developed externally, the costs involved would have been prohibitive - the cost of having just three modules developed externally exceeds the annual salary of the eLearning developer who, in her first year of employment, has already published six modules!

Kayleigh Smith, eLearning Developer says:

"I find my role as Addaction's eLearning Developer incredibly rewarding. I really enjoy meeting different colleagues based all over the country to discuss and develop specialist content for new online modules. I utilise my background in design to translate and apply this content into effective, colourful and engaging virtual learning environments"

An additional benefit of the Moodle LMS is that it has a function to enable online booking for face-to-face training sessions delivered by internal trainers. This system was implemented in January 2012 and has resulted in several benefits. As the system will create waiting lists where courses are full, this assists trainers with planning future events as it is easy to see where the demand is. Additionally, as the system sends reminders to delegates, the 'did-not-attend' rate has improved from 10-12% to less than 5%. The other tangible benefit has been the reduction in administration time. Dealing with bookings before the implementation of the online system took an average of two full days per week. This is now reduced to just two days a month to update the events on the booking system and represents a cost saving of £4, 500 per annum.



Creativity and collaboration

The eLearning developer utilises a range of software including Flash, Illustrator, Photoshop and Captivate to build modules and create the unique graphics for that particular module. Each module has been created with its own unique design and style to reflect the content, with defined aims and objectives which support and complement organisational policies and procedures. For example, a Safeguarding Children module has a 'family' of animated children that users can interact with throughout the programme. Whilst a Mutual Aid Partnership (MAP) module is based on a Satellite Navigation system, complete with maps, cars and driving route to guide learners through the module. The eLearning developer has a background in graphic design and all imagery produced for modules is the charity's own it does not incur any copywriting costs.

Whilst each module has a unique design, the developer currently uses a similar structure for each module. This is ultimately to give the end user some consistency of experience. Addaction were aware that introducing mandatory eLearning may be met with some resistance or even scepticism and so wanted to aim to reduce barriers and make the user experience straightforward and positive. Since the launch of its first mandatory module, Safeguarding Children (on 1 December 2011) it has had 740 staff complete this module - which represents 70% of staff. This module was required to be completed by the end of March 2012.

Fundamental to Addaction's approach to eLearning is the principle of engaging the learner throughout and the developer aims to achieve this through creative and innovative design based on fundamental principles of adult learning.

Dave Penman, Project Worker in Lincolnshire says:

"It's an interactive, engaging interface which is extremely user-friendly and easy to navigate. I found that the design greatly assisted my eLearning"

The creation of all bespoke modules is supported by the formation of a panel of staff that have specialist knowledge and skills in the particular content area. The panel will include front line

workers and managers and helps us to ensure that content is not only accurate but also meets the learning and development needs of our staff. Creating expert panels also helps to create a sense of ownership and 'buy-in' from end users, provides development opportunities for the individuals involved and ensures that we are able to share knowledge and best practice across the organisation.



Return on investment

The cost benefit of providing eLearning modules to meet core organisational needs is quite significant. The total annual cost of our eLearning provision is £45,000. Just taking the example of the mandatory Safeguarding Children training, if we were to achieve the aim of ensuring all our staff have basic training in this area through traditional classroom based training, the cost would be in the region of £165,000 excluding travel costs (based on the current cost of NSPCC training in Basic Child Protection). Therefore, for just one mandatory module the cost saving is in excess of £120,000.

Velda Christina Barnes, Head of Learning & Development says:

“Whilst there are numerous advantages in providing good quality eLearning, the cost savings compared to traditional classroom based training can be phenomenal. To date, we have launched three modules, mandatory for all staff and we estimate the total cost saving to be in the region half a million pounds. That’s not to say that all learning needs can or should be met through eLearning. We make a clear distinction between knowledge based volume learning which we turn into eLearning modules and skills based learning that we deliver in the classroom as part of our blended approach”

The other advantage of providing such training through eLearning is that it is a fully updatable but permanent resource that, whilst meeting organisational priorities, can also meet individual learning needs. The structure of the organisation's eLearning modules enables staff to learn at their own pace and they can undertake a module in one sitting or break it down into 'bite-size' chunks. Each module is presented to the learner as a series of discrete subsections that can be undertaken individually if desired. Learners can revisit the module or its subsections at any time they wish to refresh or reinforce their knowledge and, as the Moodle LMS is accessed through an external secure website, this allows staff to learn wherever and whenever is best for them. Whilst managers will allow staff time in working hours to complete identified modules, staff can and do access the site in their own time to take advantage of the personal development opportunities afforded by the CLC standard content.

Having a permanent learning resource also assists new staff to acquire required knowledge and competencies quickly and efficiently during their induction period. Our bespoke modules are all designed to provide skills and knowledge that can be applied in the real world, an approach that is supported by the input of our expert panels. This enables new staff to fulfil the requirements of their role in a shorter time frame than would be the case if they had to wait for a classroom training event to become available.

As a health and social care provider, Addaction is subject to certain legislative requirements and recommendations in relation to policies and procedures and ensuring minimum standards of staff knowledge. One of the key advantages of providing mandatory training via eLearning is that it enables the organisation to provide evidence of compliance to interested parties, including funders, commissioners, governing bodies such as the Care Quality Commission and the National Treatment Agency as well as to the SLT and the charity's Board of Trustees.

Addaction is also able to identify where individuals may have additional learning needs that are to be met. Each of our bespoke modules includes an assessed knowledge test which comprises a number of questions selected at random by the system from a question bank. All tests require a minimum pass rate of 80%. The user has a maximum of three attempts but – if they do not pass on the third attempt they are 'locked out' which will prompt notification to the individual's line manager, who will explore understanding and support with any additional learning requirements.

The organisation has also used the Moodle LMS reporting facility to set up monthly automated reports to managers, providing detailed information on the online learning activities undertaken by members of their team. This supports managers in monitoring targets and compliance with completion of modules.

Building for the future

Online learning will remain the cornerstone of the organisation's learning and development provision into the future. It plans to create further bespoke modules to support Addaction's organisational learning priorities and to provide development opportunities to all our staff.

Additionally, the organisation intends to develop the Moodle LMS to enable individuals to record their continued professional development activities and to also identify their individual learning

needs. This will support how the charity enhances its future Learning and Development provision, not just online but also in terms of classroom based training delivery.

Addaction is also looking to develop a range of eLearning modules, including drug awareness and alcohol awareness, aimed at an external market. It has already invested in a separate Moodle LMS that will host such modules, and will pro-actively market these to other organisations, with a view to raising unrestricted income for the charity from the sale of user licences.

Velda Christina Barnes, Head of Learning & Development says:

“We are currently in the process of developing a range of eLearning modules which we intend to market externally to other health and social care providers. Whilst this is a new venture for Addaction we have already had interest from a range of organisations that are looking for cost-effective learning solutions for their own staff, particularly in relation to our specialist knowledge in the key areas of drug and alcohol awareness”

Summary

Addaction’s SLT and Board of Trustees has committed ongoing resources to develop its internal Learning and Development provision against a background of economic uncertainty and potential cuts in funding for the Third Sector.

It has developed its online learning provision to enable it to meet the aims of the Learning and Development Strategy and this has resulted in numerous benefits to the organisation.

- There are tangible cost savings that translate into a significant return on investment. For example, £120,00 pa has been saved using just ONE eLearning module, while a new online booking system also saved an estimated £4,500 pa
- Addaction has addressed the issue of equity of access to quality learning and development opportunities for all our staff across the country.
- It has been able to develop cost-effective, sustainable, innovative and engaging bespoke eLearning modules.
- It has enabled the sharing of knowledge and best practice across the organisation, and enhanced the ability of learning and development to respond to and support organisational business needs and priorities.
- As a result, the L&D team has provided development opportunities to the people who are delivering our services, and can produce evidence of staff learning and competence.

In the future, the charity aims to utilise its experience of developing online learning to generate income. Its investment in online learning will ultimately benefit its service users and help Addaction to realise its ambition to ensure that every person with drug and alcohol problems has access to the best services and support to enable them to change their lives and unlock their full potential.