Case Study

Transforming learning and development at Royal Voluntary Service

Learning and development at Royal Voluntary Service has been transformed into a vibrant, dynamic offering. Find out how the L&D team has encouraged self-help, turned its eLearning site into a one stop shop and inspired a new learning culture.

About Royal Voluntary Service

The Royal Voluntary Service, founded in 1938, has become a British institution. The charity has 1,200 employees and a huge volunteer 'army' of 20,000 people throughout England, Scotland and Wales. Volunteers are central to its vision: 'Inspiring and enabling people to give the gift of voluntary service to meet the needs of the day'. Volunteering is seen as a precious gift of time that makes extraordinary differences, enabling Royal Voluntary Service to deliver 800 different services. Supporting volunteers, helping them to develop their skills, is vital to achieving this.

When Royal Voluntary Service joined the Charity Learning Consortium in 2005, as one of its founding members, it's eLearning system was clunky and the focus was purely compliance. There was also no L&D team to drive eLearning, so not surprisingly, it wasn't that popular.

Today the much-loved charity has an L&D team which is creating multimedia, bespoke resources and courses as part of a blended approach to learning. Content used includes a wide range of eLearning and videos from the Charity Learning Consortium.

The L&D team are focused on supporting the learning culture at Royal Voluntary Service, on developing a great user experience, and aligning everything to the organisation's core values and needs. How did they achieve such an incredible transformation? Members of the L&D team explain some of the challenges they faced along the way, and how they overcame them.

The learning challenges

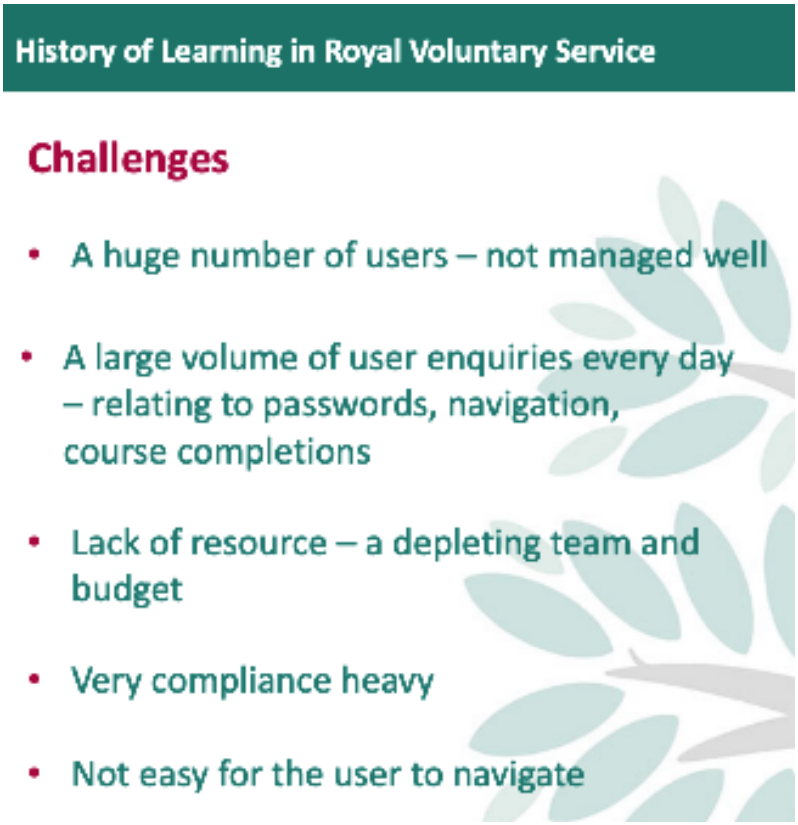
Volunteers carry out vital work in the community, but with 20,000 of them, as well as 1,200 staff, the sheer volume of numbers using eLearning created real challenges for the charity's small L&D team. Jen Williams and Peter Wright, Digital Learning Designers, found that a large part of their day was spent answering queries.

The charity's eLearning site wasn't easy to navigate, which made it difficult for people to find what they needed. eLearning had traditionally been focused on compliance, so it didn't have a great reputation to start with, so this just made matters worse. All round, it wasn't a great experience for anyone. "We had a huge number of inquiries every day," explains Jen. "We'd spend our days answering phone calls and emails about passwords and site navigation and courses not completing properly."

This was far from ideal, especially as they were only a small training team, with limited resources.

Three key things helped the L&D team transform learning and development to the vibrant offering that it is today.

They transformed the eLearning experience, encouraging self-help; turned their eLearning site into a one stop shop for everything related to learning and development; and have spent considerable time and effort to inspire a new learning culture at Royal Voluntary Service.



> "The Consortium has always been very supportive of our changing needs, as our volunteer numbers and eLearning offer has grown. We have customised our site to optimise the experience for our users. Staff at the Consortium are always on hand to offer their expertise and help with this, offering bespoke solutions and processes to suit our organisation. They're readily available to answer our many questions and have a really professional and friendly team."
>
> *Stacie Lloyd, Training Manager*

Improving the learner experience and encouraging self help

When Pete Wright joined the charity in 2017, he started keeping a spreadsheet to analyse where all the enquiries were coming from. This helped the team understand what needed to change.

Improving navigation and signposting on the charity's eLearning site, introducing self-help elements, such as a FAQ document, were made a priority.

Changes like these have made a massive difference to the user experience.

The FAQ document explains how to log in, find and access courses from different types of devices, and aims to answer any technical issues users might experience.

As a result, they've noticed a huge reduction in enquiries.

"Previously we'd be swamped with daily phone calls and emails about basic issues such as users accessing the site. These could take the whole morning to sort out. The phone barely rings for stuff like that now," says Pete.

"We aim to inform people so they can solve their own problems, rather than doing everything for them. It means they're better equipped to work their way through the site successfully."

"We've tried really hard to make everything bright and simple, to make it less overwhelming for the user and to make their learning pathway a little clearer," adds Jen.

"We've really focused on user experience. We want to make sure learners have the best experience possible so they're going to come back!" *Jen Williams*

Developing a ‘one stop shop’

The L&D team have transformed their eLearning site into a central hub for everything related to learning and development.

Rather than have resources spread out across the organisation, on various systems, everything is now in one place. The charity’s Learning Site doesn’t just offer eLearning, it’s a document library for anything related to development. Staff and volunteers can find a range of multimedia resources to help them, including:

- The full training portfolio and a training calendar so users can see an up to date version of what face to face courses are on offer and when
- Workbooks as alternatives to eLearning modules, so there’s a choice of how to access materials
- Webinars
- Videos and tutorials
- Bespoke resources and courses created in-house. Pete and Jen are using a variety of tools such as Storyline and Powtoon to create engaging, interactive content.
- Training packs enabling managers to deliver face to face courses locally Videos and tutorials
- eLearning provided by the Charity Learning Consortium
- PDFs

Once logged in to the system, a short welcome video explains how Royal Voluntary Serice’s eLearning site supports people in their roles.

A compliance matrix and learning pathways have also been developed, to show what training is essential or recommended, to lead them through a learning journey. The team is planning to do further work to enhance this, continuing to develop learner pathways and develop a wide range of resources to support soft skills and personal development. Optional feedback buttons have also recently been added to some modules, as a trial, with comments helping to inform the work that the team carries out.

> **“We want our site to be the only our volunteers and employees to access learning materials. We want to minimise them seeing the site as being just for compliance or mandatory training and be somewhere they want to come, rather than have to.”**
>
> *Jen Williams*

Investing in a learning culture

When Stacie Lloyd was first promoted to Training Manager in 2018, she made the learning culture at Royal Voluntary Service her top priority.

She spent time with key people across the organisation including the CEO, directors and heads of departments, to understand the business needs and challenges. She created a training needs analysis and an ambitious corporate training plan and portfolio. She also developed a strategic intent, to outline how the L&D team would support the organisation's needs.

> **"It was months of work to bring training, learning and development to the forefront of the charity, which had been missing for quite some time. But we've got a real buzz around learning now."**
>
> *Stacie Lloyd*

The team is continuing to build on this momentum, sending out communications as often as they can - and not just about mandatory training that people need to book onto: "We try and send out some inspiring ones as well!"

Everything the L&D team does is now aligned to the charity's five key values:

1. Stronger Together is about encouraging people from all areas of the charity to get together. People in the organisation may have very different skills, but they're encouraged to learn together.

2. Better when Simple is about offering a variety of easy to find - and use - learning resources. This includes offering workbooks as alternatives to eLearning, so people have the option to pick what solution is best for them.

3. Step Forward is about giving people the opportunity to grow and to develop.

4. Spark Brilliance is about creating a coaching culture. Managers are encouraged to use coaching skills to spark brilliance in their teams.

5. Care and Protect is about supporting people to be safe and legal in their roles. Not only to protect the charity, but themselves as well.

The team have also created a new training request form which they're trialling. They send this out as soon as they get an initial enquiry. This is designed to encourage people to think a bit deeper about their request: the business challenge they're facing, their desired objectives and how they're linked to the organisation's strategy, and whether eLearning, or any kind of learning and development is the right solution. When learning is needed, the form also prompts those requesting its creation to think about the materials they can provide, and the commitment they can make to developing something.

"We want everyone to really think about the learning environment and learning culture at Royal Voluntary Service. Learning isn't always the answer, but when it is, we want it to be a great experience for everyone." *Stacie Lloyd*

A potted history of learning at Royal Voluntary Service

2005

The charity joins the Consortium & launches eLearning but there's no real L&D team to drive this. Stacie Johns is on her own as the Learning & Development co-ordinator.

2013

Compliance was the main focus of eLearning, so it wasn't that popular. There's an L&D team but it's small, with limited resources.

2015

Jen Williams joins the small L&D team as a Digital Learning Designer and starts creating bespoke content, but the system in clunky and much of her day is spent answering learners' queries.

2016

The eLearning site is rebranded and relaunched. Navigation is simpler, and the smart new design makes for a better user experience.

2017

Peter Wright joins the L&D team as a second Digital Learning Designer, working alongside Jen. Together they make significant improvements to the eLearning site to encourage self-help, creating an FAQ document.

2018

The L&D team has grown, with Stacie Johns as Training Manager and three Training & Development Partners. The needs of the business are put firmly centre stage, with a focus on learning culture. Everything the L&D team does is aligned to the organisation's key values.

2019

Learning and development is blended and multimedia. Bespoke resources & courses created in-house are used alongside a wide range of eLearning and videos from the Charity Learning Consortium. The charity's eLearning site has become a central hub, with a focus on individual development rather than just compliance.

Stacie Lloyd

Stacie is the Training Manager for Royal Voluntary Service. She's worked for the charity for 15 years, predominantly in a training or volunteering role. Stacie started her L&D journey as an L&D Coordinator and is proud to have supported the implementation of eLearning in the charity. Stacie then spent a number of years as an L&D Partner, supporting a variety of departments with their learning needs, specialising in retail training initiatives. Stacie also spent a few years as a Volunteer Partner which really opened her eyes to the benefits of volunteering, not only to those who receive the services provided but to the volunteers who gift their time, talents and skills to support their community. Her volunteering background has enabled Stacie to think about how the team can provide the best opportunity to Royal Voluntary Services volunteers and this obviously encompasses their learning experiences. Stacie's team aims to put their learners needs at the heart of everything they do and continuously evolve to develop the most appropriate solutions to suit their needs and learning styles.

Jen Williams

Jen joined Royal Voluntary Service in 2013, working in volunteer recruitment. She moved into the role of Digital Learning Designer in 2015. Alongside Pete, she manages the learning site and creates bespoke eLearning modules, working hard to drive engagement and make the user experience as positive as possible. Jen is a keen runner and is training to complete the Cardiff Half Marathon in October and the London Marathon in 2020 to raise funds for Royal Voluntary Service.

Peter Wright

Peter joined Royal Voluntary Service in May 2017 as Digital Learning Designer. He has worked for over 10 years in the eLearning and creative technologies field and is always looking to the future, to see what trends and developments may lie ahead. Working alongside Jen he manages the learning site, creates and updates the bespoke eLearning modules, works hard to make the user experience as positive as possible, as well as helping to deliver a positive learning culture throughout the charity. In his spare time Pete is a keen runner who can often be seen at various parkruns and 10K events.