

London Borough of Brent e-Learning solution for benefits training



"I find HBLearning very thorough, informative and easy to access whenever I need it."
Florence Maurice, Assessment Officer,
London Borough of Brent.

Overview

■ The challenge

The London Borough of Brent realised that in order to achieve successful transformation of its Benefits Service it required an innovative and flexible training solution. Under pressure to deliver more training, the Council was struggling to balance its training needs against the resources it had available to deliver training. It needed a practical approach to training that was accurate, up-to-date and would utilise resources that were already available.

■ The solution

Following a comparison exercise with alternative products, the Council selected Capita LGS' e-learning package, HBLearning, to complement its in-house training team. This decision was based on the fact that HBLearning comprises various learning techniques including flowcharts, case studies, worked examples and data tables – providing a different approach to traditional training material by incorporating graphic imagery that stimulates learning by applying visual association of rules and real life situations to the theory.

■ The benefits

The introduction of HBLearning has enabled the Council's training team to increase the amount of training it delivers and bring training needs up to date, with noticeable improvements identified in the legislative knowledge and confidence of staff. The flexibility of the e-learning solution facilitates alternative training methods with the material being available 24/7 to everyone involved in the Benefits Service, including staff based at off-site locations and home workers. The key benefits to the Council since implementing HBLearning include; an increase in the amount and availability of training provided, improved staff knowledge and confidence, improved service delivery and staff retention in the Benefits Service.

London Borough of Brent

e-Learning solution for Benefits Training

Background

Brent is one of the biggest London Boroughs with a large number of residents and a housing and council tax benefits (HB/CTB) caseload of more than 38,000 administered by over 120 Benefits staff. The Benefits Service has undergone major transformation in recent years, focusing on delivering the highest standards of customer service to meet the needs of the Borough's diverse population.

The Council recognised that in order to achieve successful transformation it required an innovative training solution to ensure that staff training needs were met. Following a comparison exercise with alternative products the Capita LGS e-learning package, HBLearning, was selected to complement the face-to-face training delivered by the Council's in-house training team.

Following an initial period funded by the DWP Performance Standards Fund, the Council decided to permanently subscribe to the tool after receiving feedback from staff that the trainees were extremely receptive to the HBLearning approach. This is the first e-learning package to be used by the Benefits Service and has proven to be a successful training solution enabling training to be accessed when and where it is required.

The challenge

When facing the challenge of ensuring that all staff are properly trained in the ever-changing requirements of the HB/CTB schemes, most authorities struggle to balance training needs against the resources available to deliver training. The development and maintenance of course material in addition to providing actual delivery days can be tough for authorities with dedicated training resources and almost impossible for those without, particularly when meeting the need for both new-starter and refresher training.

With over 120 staff in the Benefits Service, the high demand for training meant that there was pressure to deliver more training than could be met by available resources. Jenny Franklin, Brent's Training and Policy Officer, needed to find an alternative solution to training delivery in order to update and support the Service's wider training programmes.

Although external resources had been used in the past, these had proven costly and the Council needed a practical approach to training that was accurate, up-to-date and would utilise resources that were already available.

"Coming from a non-revenues background, HBLearning is very useful. I use it as a daily reference tool and the quizzes during new-starter training. I constantly receive the HBA alerts which I find very helpful."
*Minesh Shah, Assessment Officer,
London Borough of Brent.*





A fresh approach

Capita LGS' HBLearning e-learning tool was developed as a national product through the DWP Performance Standards Fund by Capita LGS in conjunction with South Bucks District Council. When developing the tool the objective was to take a different approach to traditional training material by incorporating graphic imagery that stimulates learning by applying visual association of rules and real life situations to the theory. The use of various learning techniques including flowcharts, case studies, worked examples and data tables, supplements the text-based coursework and provides a motivating learning environment for the user.

HBLearning's modular coursework covers all areas of HB/CTB and both new starters and experienced practitioners can use the intuitive menu to access almost 600 elements of learning and reference material within seconds. The complex legislation has been carefully broken down and reworked into small logical learning units making them easier to process and absorb, and helping users understand how these learning units piece together to form processes and concepts.

Through the use of professionally designed graphic imagery, the coursework brings the legislation to life and makes it much easier to remember than text alone, with every picture in HBLearning specifically designed to convey a concept. Numerous case studies are provided to allow for the application of learned knowledge to real-life scenarios and hundreds of carefully crafted questions are delivered using a range of different question formats and styles.

Following an initial evaluation period, the Council rolled HBLearning out to the assessment teams and used the e-learning tool in the training of 12 new starters. The training team found that the visual style kept the trainees interested and engaged whilst the quizzes allowed them to put their knowledge to the test.

"In Brent we started looking at HBLearning in its infancy and liked what we saw. We have rolled it out to our assessment staff and the feedback that we are getting is excellent. Staff find it user-friendly, informative and fun. We recently compiled a training needs analysis (TNA) of all our staff asking what areas of their work they were lacking confidence in, and we have found HBLearning to be an invaluable tool in developing staff learning skills. HBLearning is working well in conjunction with e-government, which is currently also being rolled out within Brent, and is used as both a TNA tool and a reference tool."
*Jenny Franklin, Training and Policy Officer,
London Borough of Brent.*

The availability of HBLearning to all staff at any time, as well as the HBAAlert summary service, allows everyone to keep on top of refresher needs at a time that suits them and is also used as a reference tool to answer questions on specific areas or types of claims.

The trainers use HBLearning as part of their wider training package, to input content into their presentation slides and have also been known to test themselves on HBLearning prior to delivering a course.

The benefits

Following the introduction of HBLearning the training team was immediately able to increase the amount of training delivered and bring training needs up to date with noticeable improvements identified in the legislative knowledge and confidence of staff.

The flexibility of HBLearning has enabled training to be provided in alternative ways with the material being available 24/7 to everyone involved in the Benefits Service, including staff based at off-site locations and home workers.

HBLearning has also been used as a development and Training Needs Analysis (TNA) tool by the management and training team and has assisted staff in the completion of their IRRV NVQ qualification. The overall performance of the service has benefited from the increased training which has contributed to an improved Comprehensive Performance Assessment score, improved staff retention and overall improvements that have resulted in Brent's Benefits Service being awarded the 'Most Improved Team of the Year' at the 2008 IRRV Awards.

Key results:

- Increase in amount and availability of training provided
- Improved staff knowledge and confidence
- Improved service delivery
- Staff retention has improved across the Service.

The constantly changing social security legislation means that training will always be at the top of the agenda for the Benefits Service and HBLearning will continue to form an intrinsic part of Brent's training programme. The introduction of the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry also places greater emphasis on the involvement of key stakeholders in the delivery of the Service. The future rollout of HBLearning to the Council's One Stop Shops, the Housing Department and key Registered Social Landlords will ensure that they too can benefit from the e-learning solution.

"HBLearning is an invaluable tool for providing training for individual officers as well as supporting our in-house group training sessions. It also enables us to evaluate the knowledge of staff/trainees through the online test facility."

*Jonathan Cartwright, Training Officer,
London Borough of Brent.*



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Visit HBLearning at www.hblearning.co.uk and take a three minute tour or sign-up for the HBAAlerts service.