

Case study – Ministry of Defence

April 2015

L&D:
Evolving roles,
enhancing skills



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About Towards Maturity

Towards Maturity is a benchmarking research company that provides independent expert advice and support to help organisations modernise learning in order to accelerate business performance. It leverages the data of its in-depth Benchmark Study, the largest learning benchmark in Europe. Since 2003 over 3,500

organisations and 17,000 learners have contributed to Towards Maturity's leading benchmarks. Thanks to the support of Towards Maturity's Ambassadors (27 learning organisations), annual benchmarking findings, case studies and resources are available to download for free at www.towardsmaturity.org

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Ministry of Defence case study

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Organisation summary

Defence College of Technical Training (DCTT) comprises four schools. It provides new recruits with technical training needed for an engineering career across multiple disciplines including maritime, mechanical, aeronautical communication and information systems. The colleges support over 40,000 military students per year with an age range of roughly 18–32 in these highly technical subjects.

Background

For four years between 2009 and 2013 Colonel Garry Hearn, a serving army officer with over 35 years’ experience, was the principal of a large, then Defence College for Communications and Information Systems (renamed Defence School of CIS in 2012). This was a multi-site college with over 1,000 staff, 600 of which were trainers providing staff with a range of courses. He now programme-manages the transformation of training and associated business areas for four schools within a college construct (akin to an academy). In 2013 he was honoured with an OBE for his educational leadership in his role and is also a Fellow of the CIPD.

Garry explains:

‘Following initial army training, new recruits would come to our college to build initial technical skills resulting in NVQ level 3 or above in a relevant specialism. Our students would then leave to take up roles on ship or in base for three to five years to build their experience and capability. During

stage 2, they would then return for a technical upgrade in their skills, with the colleges often partnering with accredited universities to provide staff with degree-level qualifications that will help them progress their career.’

The culture in the MOD has always embraced learning and development, but it was clear that old ways of delivering the service had to change.

What was driving change?

Garry Hearn and his senior management team realised that the college needed to make changes to really respond to customer needs:

‘It was clear that the college was inwardly focused rather than concentrating on the needs of our customers. Pass rates were poor and we were missing something in truly engaging our students. We needed a more forward-looking programme that met the needs of our customers.’

‘We have two types of customers – our students and the front-line command – and the first questions that I asked to redress the balance were “What is our contribution to the business of defence?” and “What do our customers really want from us?” It was clear that the front-line command were looking for an efficient service that delivered agility in the workforce. Leaders in the field were looking for support at the point of need. Students, on the other hand, want an effective, quality, motivating training environment that results in accreditation. All requirements

can be satisfied but we needed to approach our delivery differently.

'My aim was to bring agility to learning. Traditionally access to knowledge was kept in the brick walls of the college. Now we can take training to the person without always bringing the person to the training.'

Knowing how to change

The operational environment of the college is extremely busy and in 2009 no one was looking ahead, as they were too caught up in delivering training from day to day:

'It was critical for us to create the time to think in the midst of our business. To do this we formed an innovation cell: a small team of three people who would establish a vision about what success looks like. We had to take into consideration the fact that practice, process and policy all shape the behaviour we need to change. To address all of these issues, our innovation team consisted of an organisation development professional who could consider change, communication and stakeholder engagement; a technologist who looked at the enabling role of IT; and an education expert who would provide the credibility and authority behind the recommended routes about how we wanted people to learn.'

The innovation cell recommended a number of changes to modernise learning in the workplace. Bloom's taxonomy was used as an anchor point for the ongoing strategy to create a holistic approach to delivering learning interventions that resulted in practical proven capability. This identified the need to change the type of teaching to blended and experiential. Teams within the college are now equipped to understand the demand for skills and turn that demand into a blended learning programme that delivers the hard

skills needed. In creating the blend, they focus on which elements are best addressed using self-paced learning and which need to be team based. The college is prepared for learning to be distributed and delivered at a distance. Today the team don't just turn a request into a PowerPoint-driven classroom course; they apply imagination and innovation to the process to identify the best methods to use to achieve the results for their customers.

Introducing change

In order to land substantial change to the L&D strategy, Garry had to ensure that the team had complete buy-in to the new approach:

'Introducing change is never easy. For us it started by presenting our existing L&D staff with clear independent evidence from both learners and experts that we needed to change. Next we moved into a programme of evidence-based teaching to build the new skillsets needed.'

The clear focus on evidence was critical to establish credibility for change; only then did the college introduce technology to support the learning process.

Pilot activities were also used as a critical part of the change process. Instructors could see how the new approaches were working in practice and had the opportunity to test new ideas and adjust them and then bring them into the mainstream.

It was also critical to be aware of the dynamics in play. Individuals adopt change at different levels, and while passionate top-end leadership helps to influence, the students themselves also helped. Once they had experienced a great blended learning environment, they expected more and started

to challenge the older-style instructors, who then sought ways to meet their demands.

Scaling up

Now all work within the college is aligned to the career maps of individuals and the teams no longer just deliver courses. They understand how a career path can be enhanced and identify and deliver the interventions needed for an individual to progress their career.

To support this a number of new roles are now in place:

- **Project managers** – each new programme is a change programme often looking at an entire career stream of an individual. Mapping and delivering the learning and support that individual needs across their career requires a team of individuals working together. The project managers own full programmes of work; they put the business case together and project-manage through to delivery.
- **Technologists** – exist to provide an enabling role, looking at IT capability both within the school and beyond to ensure that solutions can be delivered.
- **Educationalists** – dedicated specialists exist both in the core team and also in the schools to help challenge thinking and introduce innovation. They also consider the skills and competencies required by the instructors to support the changes in delivery methods.

Garry explains why these roles are so important:

'As we move up in learning and education we tend to design in our own image. It is critical to challenge our own thinking and when we are designing policies for people who learn differently, we need to be

dragged out of our own processes into innovation. We want L&D professionals to be imaginative and a sound educational evidence base provides us with the confidence needed to continually innovate.'

The model has now extended beyond the original college and a matrix of teams run across four schools and 40,000 military students. To scale effectively, it is critical that each school owns the issue of change rather than it being seen as a purely top-down initiative. To achieve this the innovation cells have been replicated in each of the schools.

The impact of change

The first impact of the approach is to save time. By shifting a residential two-week course to a series of interactive online content, forums and instructor contact, the longest any student took was six days. Instead of 16 attendees, an unlimited number could take part. This increase in access has meant that the college now provides access to students based around the globe. In the first year of their VLE going live, they had over 150,000 incidences of access to education and training as opposed to the previous 16 residentially based students.

While staff costs were reduced by 23%, the shift to a more student-centric approach was applauded in a recent Ofsted inspection, which rated the first school to be inspected since the changes as outstanding. What is more, the shift in learning models had a direct impact on first-time pass rates, which in some areas shifted from 82% to 98% in the first nine months.

The business-critical role of L&D

Garry shares his view:

'Moving forward I believe that L&D has a critical role to play to help shape what the business needs to do in order to achieve its goals for the future. Our business leaders often do not have the time to think about capability needed for the future when they are busy delivering the short-term goals of today. Moving forward I see the need for building capability to be owned by the business front end. L&D are there to support the front line and to work with them to define what a successful service person looks like and to identify what attitudes are needed. We then need to work with the front line to build the creative and analytical skills into staff who are able to identify and exploit opportunities so that we come up with solutions to new and often complex situations.'



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