Learning & Performance Institute

Dimensions cuts training costs by £20,000 in 6 months using the Certified Online Learning Facilitator (COLF) programme

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Dimensions
there for the people we support

Dimensions is a specialist provider of a wide range of services for people with learning disabilities and people who experience autism. It is a not-for-profit organisation, supporting around 3,500 people and their families throughout England and Wales.

The headlines...

What was the business need for online learning at Dimensions?

The Dimensions Learning & Development department was being asked to do more with less, so we had to seriously reconsider how to facilitate our training without trainers and staff losing the magical interaction experience.

Why did you choose the LPI COLF programme?

When we saw the excellent programme offered by the LPI, it inspired us to re-think how we facilitated online learning and face-to-face training. We want our online facilitators to have recognition of their commitment and new skill-set, and the LPI certification met our needs.

How was the COLF programme received?

The LPI facilitator was outstanding. The sessions weren't too long – lots of content and food for thought. Delegate feedback was really positive – even though they were all accessing the course remotely, they often felt as if they were in the classroom together.

What benefits have you seen since adopting online learning?

Over the last 6 months we have seen a **reduction of £20,000 in training costs** e.g. travel, accommodation.

The small print...

Real world challenges: Convince the trainers

The first challenge was to convince our own training team that online learning was the way forward. Their initial concerns related to the trainer not being in the same room as the delegate. You heard them cry: 'how can we train people when we can't see the whites of their eyes?!' and 'if we can't see their body language, how do we know what they're feeling?!'

The genius of the LPI COLF programme is that facilitators are trained in the same online environment as their future trainees. So putting the trainers in the same shoes as the trainees was a great way to convince us all how brilliant hosting an online learning event could be.

Soon into the course, we realised we were on a fascinating learning curve about how to facilitate and design online learning events. *Warning to all:* forget about how you currently design your slides! Less is definitely better and a picture certainly says a thousand words.

Convince the staff

The next biggest challenge was to convince staff to book onto an online learning event. Fortunately, some of our Managers had already experienced webinar training and were fully supportive.

Three years earlier, we had introduced e-learning training so we'd already experienced the pain of moving away from face-to-face training. We therefore adopted the same careful introduction to online learning as we had with the e-learning.

When logging into an online learning event we make sure that a training administrator is on hand to guide delegates through the logging in stage – it really works. We opted to use the WebEx hosting platform as we felt this software offered the best interaction tools; the interaction tools are essential and must be included in your design – if not, then you won't 'see the whites of their eyes'!

Lessons Learned

Working in partnership with your IT department is crucial – you must make sure that your internal IT systems will work with your hosting system. My advice is to engage with the IT team as soon as you possibly can. Invite them to an online learning event – get their buy-in and you are halfway there.

Inspiration

We accept that online learning might not suit everyone, so Dimensions Learning & Development offers a blended approach to get the most from our delegates. We are working on several management courses which include live online learning components, allowing a subject matter expert into the event to 'make it real'. We are also going to encourage those who have been through an awareness course to book onto a Masterclass, where we will have a subject matter expert answering delegates' questions - something an e-learning course can't do. Online learning is inspiring!

About COLF

The Certified Online Learning Facilitator (COLF) programme is designed for anyone delivering, or planning to deliver, online learning events including webinars, online classrooms and online meetings. Delegates who pass the course are awarded Certified Online Learning Facilitator by the Learning & Performance Institute.

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