



Gaëlle Delmas-Watson

About SyncSkills

Syncskills is an independent supplier of live online training services. Founded by Gaëlle Delmas-Watson, Syncskills helps organisations and trainers design and deliver live online sessions, provides mentoring and sources subject-matter experts and facilitators for virtual classrooms.

“COLF changed my life!”

The story of how a French law graduate capitalised on the economic downturn of 2008 and used newly emerging virtual classroom technology to build a successful training business.

Working in the UK property and construction industry as the global banking crisis hit in 2008, Gaëlle Delmas-Watson found herself in an 'adapt-or-die' situation.

Luckily, a certification course she had recently completed with the Learning and Performance Institute provided a way out ...and a path to her eventually forming her own successful training business.

Sync
Skills

Online Training with Personality



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Gaëlle Delmas-Watson
Syncskills Founder

The small print...

Beginning the journey

“My journey towards the virtual classroom began when I worked as a conference producer in London. I was managing seminar content, sourcing speakers and doing research on topics, so I would pick up much of the terminology. I think having a law degree helped. So, when the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors became clients, I began to learn about their world; about surveying, property and construction. I became well acquainted with different board members and really enjoyed working with them on events.

Then I learned that they had started a training department and were looking for someone who was a good project manager and could understand the topics. I applied and was lucky enough to be given the job. That's when I really started working in training! RICS upskilled me and spent a lot of time helping me becoming an expert trainer.

Opportunity from chaos

Just as everything seemed to be going well, within a year of my appointment at RICS, the financial crash of 2008 happened. Suddenly, the property market went into free-fall and surveyors soon began to lose their jobs. Those who managed to stay in work found themselves doing the work of three people.

Nevertheless, the requirement for training didn't go away; if anything, it became more critical. The industry is highly regulated; chartered surveyors must undergo at least 12 hours of formal Continuing Professional Development (CPD) every year to maintain their chartered status. Many surveyors operated from rural areas and the construction companies had residential marketers across the entire UK - all of which made traditional classroom courses routinely expensive.

With the new emphasis on cost-saving, we had to find a new way of reaching these people that was practical and yet affordable.

Moving to a virtual classroom skillset

I first learned about live online learning from a webinar hosted by the Learning and Performance Institute (LPI). Even though I had hosted my own webinars before, I hadn't fully appreciated the extent to which the technology could be used to deliver learning, and after speaking to the experts at the LPI, I signed up for their course to become a Certified Online Learning Facilitator (COLF)

From the start, the course was a massive eye-opener. While my webinars regularly had 35 people in attendance, COLF showed me that I could bring more value by reducing the attendees to 12 or less.

It was also very practical, covering a whole range of interactive tools and techniques. There was lots of practice, self-study and personalized skills-building.

The COLF course helped me focus and was a huge inspiration to do better, in a more structured way, with more professionalism and better workflow.

In at the deep end - and the award

Almost as soon I had completed the COLF course, news came through that we had won an important government contract to provide training to self-employed contractors working on the home insulation grant scheme. But our initial excitement was short-lived when we realised the scope of the project.

The training was substantial: the energy companies needed to cover the legal and regulatory frameworks of the scheme with a large body of contractors and RISC surveyors across the entire country. The requirement from just one energy company was to roll out training in *20 separate locations within four weeks!* With no content produced and no venues booked, we were looking at a huge cost of delivery. There was simply no way we could have done it using traditional classroom means.

So we proposed a live online solution, using the principles of COLF. It really was in at the deep end! Luckily, the first rollouts began in the summer so we ran our online sessions late in the evening as we knew our surveyors would be out working during the day.

The pilot project and those following it were a huge success. The surveyors, contractors and the government client loved the work we were doing and the efficiency of our virtual classroom approach. It was such a success that we even entered for a Learning Award and were rewarded by winning the Bronze!

A confidence booster

After the success of the government project, I took stock of my career and decided to set up my own business providing live online services to other businesses. I'd amassed a good number of contacts by that point and COLF had really boosted my confidence to be able to deliver agile training at scale.

So I began Syncskills and began working with organisations on their virtual classroom projects. I worked with organisations large and small across a whole range of industries, picking up different learning topics and subjects along the way.

One of the best things about COLF is that it teaches you strong preparation and disaster recovery methods. It is inevitable that technology will fail at some point; someone will be unable to join a session or lose their connection; or you can just become stressed due to any number of reasons. COLF teaches you how to manage these situations by putting a firm foundation in place and giving you the techniques to efficiently deal with attendees who are experiencing problems. This command of the environment, together with the tools and equipment portfolio, is what sets COLF apart from everything else, in my view.

It also allows me to have a much better conversation with my clients and my prospects, giving them the reassurance that their virtual classroom sessions will be run professionally and effectively.

What's next?

I'm now facilitating around 120 online sessions a year, which is right at the limit of my capacity. So I'm building a network of freelancer trainers who can share this load and become expert live online facilitators in their own right. Syncskills offers a highly personalised service to its customers, so having extra resources is critical for us to be able to maintain that standard.

I am enjoying training my team to the same high standards that I was trained to during my LPI COLF course. It is very rewarding to see them become masters of the virtual classroom environment, using its interactive tools and techniques, and delivering engaging sessions that have real learning impact.

When I look back on the past few years, and at how my career has changed, I can safely say that it would have been very different without COLF. Quite literally, COLF has changed my life!"

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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