

Online Training – is this the way forward?

In these austere times, it is increasingly difficult for SENCOs to attend training courses 'off-site.' E-learning may offer a solution to this problem.

To find the cost of cover as well as the fee for attending a course within reducing budgets, along with the time needed to travel to a venue are all issues that are making venue based courses less attractive for busy professionals. Companies in the world of business who face similar issues have been looking to the internet for the answer. The world of electronic learning, online conferences and webinars has boomed over the last few years.

In some areas the education world has tended to be behind the curve in relation to technological solutions but some providers of training for education professionals are beginning to meet this need. Communicate-ed, Real Training and Dyslexia Action are three educational training providers who offer online courses in the area of Special Educational Needs.

Advantages of web-based learning

With the internet now so accessible in our schools, colleges and homes, there are some obvious advantages to learning over the web:

- Training can be accessed at the delegate's convenience in the workplace or home
- Learning can take place in one block of time, or can be broken into shorter sessions if required
- There is no need to travel, saving time and transport costs

Communicate-ed has been piloting online training since November 2010 by offering each of their courses on Access Arrangements as an online option. These courses explain the regulations concerning Access Arrangements for GCSE and other general qualifications, and how they can be put in place in schools and colleges. Few SENCOs have the time to read the regulations from cover to cover, and these practical courses aim to present the latest regulations in a way that is accessible for the busy SENCO or specialist teacher.

In response to feedback from delegates Communicate-ed chose the route of replicating the delegate's experience when attending a venue based course at a hotel or conference centre. When accessing training, delegates see PowerPoint slides on the screen, along with video and audio of the presenter. Delegates are provided with a personal login which lasts for 10 days so that they can access the course at their own convenience.

Andrea White, Inclusion Manager at Cornelius Vermuyden School and Arts College in Canvey Island, Essex accessed two online courses and commented:

"I appreciated being able to learn and then complete activities in the comfort of my own home/work place (which ever suited me). Although a day out of school is nice, sometimes as a busy SENCO you're not sure what you are returning to and you end up playing catch-up, which at certain points of the year is difficult. I would particularly recommend online training to other teachers if it is an area of training in which you are refreshing your memory. You are able to spend more time on the topics where you feel you have a "gap" in your knowledge and at the same time you can skim over the areas where you feel confident. As a busy SENCO it enables you to manage your time with regards to your learning more effectively".

Gemma Brown, SENCO at Cartmel Priory School in Grange Over Sands in Cumbria accessed one online course and is booked in for another. She commented:

“This was a fantastic course and a brilliant idea to have online. It has really clarified a lot for me and I found it more useful than the ones that are miles away. There was time to digest the information and go back if I needed to check anything or misheard something”.

Other delegates have commented:

“Full concentration is guaranteed when you are able to organise your own learning environment”.

“I was nervous about doing training online, but this was so well organised, and surprisingly similar to the experience of attending a live course that I will be encouraging my colleagues to consider online training”.

“I certainly found the online system worked really well for me”.

“I am not very IT proficient so I thought I would need help from the college technician. But it was easy, and I knew I could email if I did get stuck”.

There is no need to be especially technical

Amy Martin, who administers online courses offered by Communicate-ed said:

“Delegates don’t need to be especially technical to access our online courses. The experience of ‘attending’ an online course is virtually the same as attending the same course in a venue, except that you can do the course whenever it suits you. If you can print an email attachment, copy and paste a password and have access to a good internet connection, you will find it easy to access a course.

Each course has ‘Action Points’ where delegates are encouraged to carry out short activities which reinforce or extend what has been covered in the presentation. These activities are explained by the presenter and course materials for the action points are emailed for the delegate to print out.

We believe that online training meets the needs of busy professionals who need to keep up to date with training but find it hard and expensive to take time out of school or college to access live courses. We take bookings in the usual way”.

Please go to <http://online.communicate-ed.org.uk/introduction> to view a 5 minute presentation giving you a flavour of how the online training works.