



First time users, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council show the way in adopting e-learning for their e-induction programme

1. Context

There are numerous examples of how e-learning is being applied to learning & development across all private & public sectors, often from those who've learnt over time how to apply technology to deliver real business benefits, but what of those who have no track record of e-learning and are looking to start? This case study provides an invaluable insight into how one such organisation, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC), went through the process of defining the need, selecting a partner and implementing the solution to great effect.

2. Background and what was the challenge that faced RMBC?

The 2004 Employee Opinion Survey indicated a low awareness of HR policies amongst the workforce (33% were unable to comment on effectiveness of policies). This lack of awareness was leading to capability and conduct problems within RMBC and the standard response to disciplinary matters was usually *'I have never read the policy'*. Additionally new employees to RMBC expressed dissatisfaction with the arrangements for induction; the process was paper based, very time consuming, difficult to keep up to date and inconsistent in delivery. Something needed to change.

RMBC wanted to develop a simple to use, flexible and effective e-induction programme which informed and sign-posted new employees to all the relevant policies and key information they would need, and with approximately 1,200 new starters every year, the aim was to make induction electronic, easy to use, easily updated, informative, interesting and fun.

3. What was the selection process?

A specification was written for the project and five providers tendered for the contract. Derby University (UoD) were appointed as the project partner following the tender process, but what factors did RMBC consider when choosing their partner, especially when this was the first e-learning project?

The criteria used were as follows:

- Level of e-learning expertise/experience
- Compliance with disability accessibility regulations
- Availability of a Content Management System allowing RMBC to update the programme easily
- Clear investment in future learning techniques/requirements
- Costs quoted were within the standing order parameters
- New ideas/approaches were suggested



- Flexibility of the company with regard to changing hardware and content of the e-induction
- Level of support the company offered to RMBC
- Met the requirements of the specification
- The company's quality control processes were clear and well defined
- The company could show solid financial and technical standing
- Long term viability of company
- Points raised by referees which were taken up for references and testimonials
- Clarification and confirmation of terms and conditions

One of the strongest points for RMBC was that UoD could provide new and exciting ideas, from a technological/creative aspect, combined with creativity and innovation which would bring something new and exciting to the project.

While not an exhaustive list, the above provides an excellent checklist for those assessing a potential partner for their first e-learning project.

4. What was the solution?

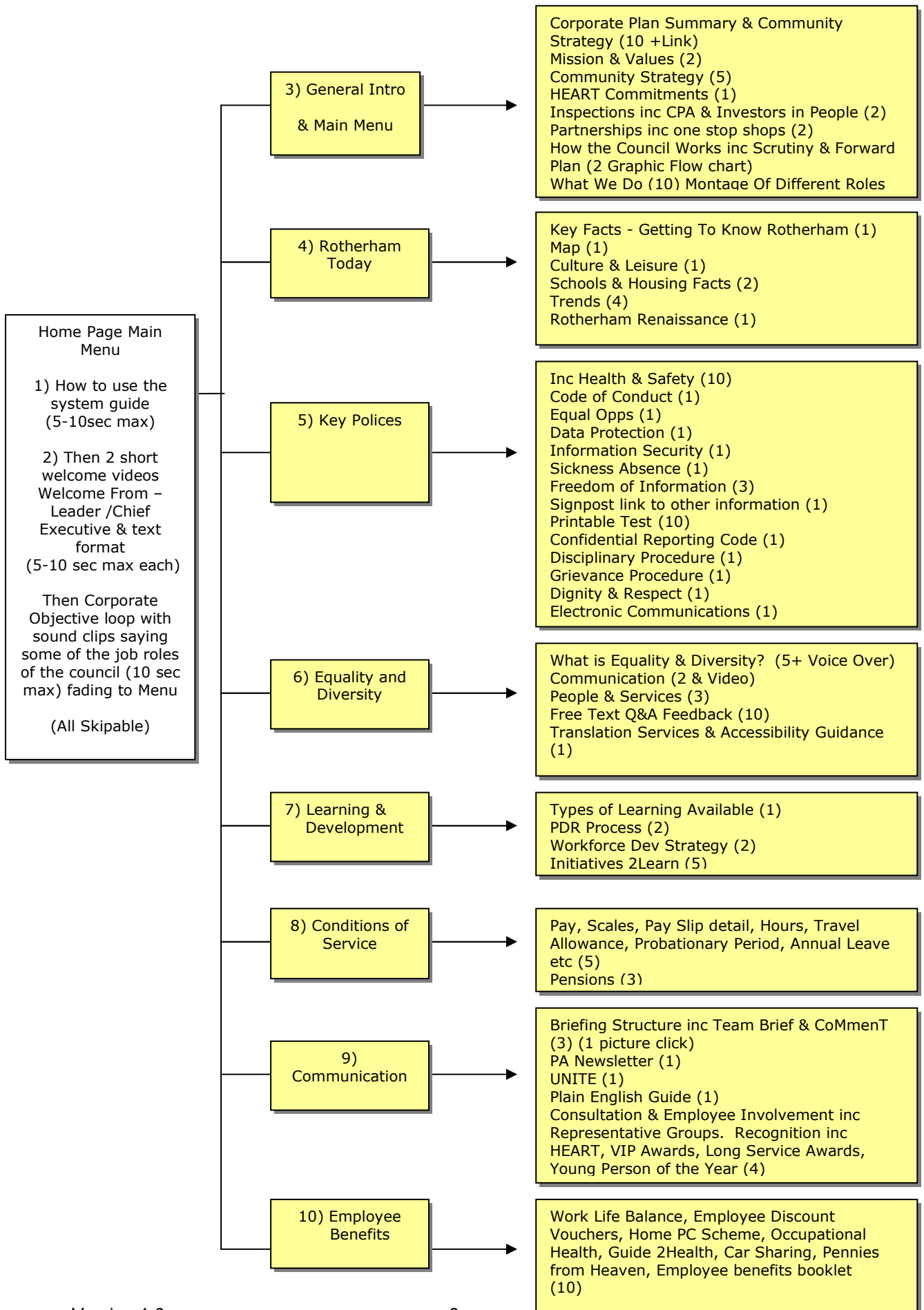
The e-induction solution consists of modules that would be accessed from a simple 'Main Menu' and each topic would have a sub menu so that every information title was only three mouse clicks away. The e-induction contains: Welcome video from the Chief Executive, interactive games, quizzes, multi-choice questions and has a section to cover each of the following:

- Key Facts about Rotherham
- Key Policies
- Equality and Diversity
- Learning & Development
- Conditions of Service
- Communication
- Employee Benefits

RMBC were able to benefit from UoD's unique software solution "intelligent Shell System" which allows for rapid authoring and maintenance of dynamic web-based e-learning content quickly and easily, and their Content Management System uses a WYSIWYG interface using windows tools. There is also an Integrated Learning Management System (ILMS) for user log-in and the RMBC team can track and monitor an individual's progress.

Once UoD had been selected, RMBC defined how they wanted the programme to be planned and developed and this is reflected in the outline structure below:

Interface - Menu structure



5. How was the project implemented?

A Project Team was put in place, consisting of three HR Officers who were allocated roles based on their strengths. Each team member quality assured their relevant sections throughout the project and minor adjustments were implemented prior to a six week pilot with employees and Managers. Regular review meetings were held between UoD & RMBC to ensure the project was running to plan and to take the opportunity to discuss any variances.

Although work started in 2005 there have been many changes over the past 18 months, with much of the content being re-assessed, extending the timeline, until the final product was launched in March 2007.

The project was planned jointly with UoD and set up in 5 stages:

1. Graphic design
2. Import information into templates
3. Quality assurance and modifications
4. Integration and QA testing (pilot)
5. Modifications realised from pilot/Training for administrators completed to a competent level

On line evaluation was undertaken using SNAP software for the 6 week pilot, and below is an extract of the questions and percentage of employees who 'Agree/Strongly Agree'.

The link to the e-induction was easy to use	96.9%
It was easy to set myself up as a user	89.3%
In general the e-induction was easy to use	96.9%
In general the layout of the e-induction was good	87.5%
The presentation (look and feel) of the e-induction was good	90.7%
Generally, I understood the information contained within the e-induction	93.8%
The information was pitched at the right level for a new starter to RMBC	81.2% 8 out of 10 people
I enjoyed using the e-induction	81.3% 8 out of 10 people

The project was subsequently launched in March 2007 by:

- Article in RMBC internal newsletter
- Manager Briefing
- Manager Guide
- Linking to 'YourSelf' (Self Serve HR system)
- Presentations to key stakeholders

6. Benefits & Results

As part of the implementation process, RMBC commissioned ORC International to develop an on-line new joiner's survey in order to gather data on an employees overall experience of being new to the organisation. The feedback allowed for continuous improvement to recruitment and induction. Some of the key findings from the first survey were:



- *The people I met during the recruitment process were professional – 100%*
- *Overall I think the recruitment process was professionally conducted – 93%*
- *I was made to feel welcome – 98%*
- *My basic physical and safety needs were addressed – 96%*
- *I felt comfortable asking for help if I didn't know how to do something – 93%*
- *In general I understood the information contained within the induction – 92%*
- *I found the e-induction useful – 76%*
- *My induction gave me the knowledge and information I needed to do my job effectively – 84%*

The overall satisfaction score for the e-induction programme was 79%.

Currently around 4,000 employees (approx 60% of employees including all managers) have access to the Council's Intranet site out of a possible 7,000 (non-schools) employees. Managers are responsible for ensuring that their employee is able to log on to the e-Induction programme.

A number of support mechanisms were put in place, these included:

New Joiner support	Manager support
ICT helpdesk support	Developed and issued a Manager Guide
One-to-one support	Developed a Manager Induction Checklist
Access to PCs outside the office e.g. at local libraries and in the learning and resource centre	Developed a process and guidance for the new Joiners survey
Provided accessibility through 'YourSelf' (the Self Serve HR System)	Detailed Monthly Management information

A final 'sign-of' meeting was conducted with UoD, so based on their experiences, what would RMBC recommend to other first-time users when considering an e-learning project?

1. It is essential to establish clear, well defined and formalised communication channels at the outset of the project to avoid misunderstanding.
2. Be clear around the software requirements within the specification to avoid unexpected extra costs.
3. Ensure that responsibilities are clearly defined for the provision of information, graphics, photos etc.

Since the e-induction project has been in place, there has been clearer accountability with regard to RMBC policies, with new employees having read, understood and accepted the policies.

It's worked for RMBC and it can clearly work for others!!