seminar
E-learning system

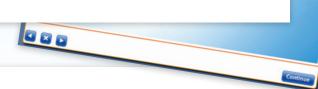**An introduction to offences** e-learning package written in Seminar Author underpins extensive training programme at Thames Valley Police

THAMES VALLEY POLICE

With budget cuts and staff reductions forcing radical changes in police training, the new e-learning course, *An introduction to offences*, is now a critical component in a blended learning programme at Thames Valley Police.

Thames Valley Police has a total "police family" of 9,000, including uniformed officers, operational and support staff, PCSOs (Police Community Support Officers), special constables and volunteers. Don Oldcorn, Training Design Manager at Thames Valley Police, has had to find creative ways of making sure that the family's training needs are met across the force.

A particularly pressing need is to train staff and officers on legal and general practice. There is a lot of legislation to cover and e-learning was selected as the most appropriate delivery method. *An introduction to offences* is the starting point for an extensive blended training programme on core knowledge needed by all staff.

Thames Valley Police has been using e-learning for many years, developing most of the content in-house with a number of software tools. For this particular project, the Seminar Author rapid e-learning authoring tool was selected. Don explains why:

"We selected Seminar because it is easy to use and the most stable of the tools we have in that it works best with the NCALT MLE*, the national police e-learning platform: it is simple to load Seminar modules onto the MLE, and they work without any problems."

An introduction to offences forms the cornerstone of all the other modules and courses which are essential for the police, including Burglary, Criminal Damage, Theft and Violent Crime. An introduction is used as the foundation and refers back to underpinning knowledge. Don goes on:

"Previously the courses had been for specific staff groups and training needs; An introduction to offences is non-specific and teaches the basics, using scenarios to illustrate where you would use each legal point. It is a 'one size fits all' generic package. And it isn't targeted at a specialist group. The package has been developed for the whole police family."

One of the key business objectives for this e-learning course was to support the change in the way Thames Valley Police recorded crimes, part of a drive to improve operational

efficiency. This meant training the 521 PCSOs in Offences. *Introduction to offences* is particularly vital in supporting this change, as part of a blended learning package. The first session ran from the middle of August 2011, and continued until all 521 PCSOs had been trained.

Early indications were good: of the 2,500 expected completions for this course, the PCSOs recorded 1,400 completions in only three weeks; this means that an average of 54% of the audience, who needed to understand this basic aspect of the law, achieved this goal within a very short space of time during the holiday leave period.

An introduction to offences sets the style for all the other e-learning at Thames Valley Police. A lot of work was put into developing a standard package: template, formatting, consistency etc. They identified what aspects of the legislation were needed and used the same formatting to present the law in the same way, whatever the application.

E-learning started small in 2003 with a single blended package. It is now a key part of the staff and officer training at Thames Valley Police. But, given that training resources and budgets are limited, it is harder than ever for Thames Valley Police to find the time and money to develop courseware. And Don Oldcorn had the foresight, before the government austerity measures kicked in, to see that e-learning would become crucial in helping them meet their training objectives.

"We had identified a clear business need some time ago. I knew that now was the time to build this 'bank' of e-learning based training resource, while we still could, in preparation for leaner times ahead when cutbacks would really pinch hard."

Given the ease of use of Seminar Author, and as the development team has become more knowledgeable and experienced, their utilisation of the software has developed. Thames Valley Police are very happy with Seminar and know how to get the best out of it. Don has always been enthusiastic:

"As time goes by, we are getting quicker and quicker and it takes less time to develop the packages – particularly now that we have Seminar themes. Our authors can turn out modules faster than ever and of course the students are also more familiar with the format; all modules are laid out in the same way. The modules are all fairly short – around 30 minutes."

Thames Valley Police are planning to develop further packages, such as modules on pocket notebook rules. Many staff in Thames Valley Police carry notebooks for evidential purposes and there are strict rules regarding how to record evidence in these notebooks. It has to be done in a certain way. Making it an e-learning programme means they can cut the existing classroom session by 90 minutes.

Another planned module is driver documents. The Police need to know what a genuine licence should look like, to make sure it isn't forged, and they need to know details about entitlements and the fixed penalty points system as well as the vehicle classification system, road traffic legislation and many more subjects. Don sums up:

"As projects come in, e-learning makes it far easier to rapidly develop content to a consistent format and then mix and match the content. It enables us to keep abreast of complex and varied training requirements and to 'do more with less'. And all of our training team can use it!"

* National Centre for Applied Learning Technologies
  Managed Learning Environment