Zodiac Training: innovative e-assessment system increases efficiency & improves the learning experience

Summary

Zodiac Training (now part of the Ingeus family) has introduced a new e-portfolio and e-assessment system which allows learners to study online. It enables them to upload course evidence, view their progress, contact their training advisor and much more. It gives learners the flexibility to work on their qualification whenever and wherever it suits them. The system also allows everyone to keep in touch with the development process - employers, managers, training advisors, and verifiers can quickly and easily see the progress their staff and learners are making. The new system has significantly reduced the average time it takes a learner to complete a training course.

About Zodiac Training

Zodiac Training Ltd was established in 1996 and is an award winning training organisation with offices throughout the Northeast of England. Zodiac is at the forefront of innovation and training technology and employs over 170 staff.
The challenge

Zodiac wanted to introduce an online NVQ system which would be user-friendly, increase learner benefits and improve efficiency.

The activity

Zodiac collaborated with Northumbria University on a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) programme. KTP is a part government-funded programme to encourage collaboration between businesses and universities. As part of the programme, online learning tools and assessment solutions were extensively researched and Zodiac’s learner, trainer and employer needs were analysed. After identifying the most appropriate e-portfolio and e-assessment system, Zodiac introduced the new system in October 2009. Zodiac’s field staff are also equipped with laptops with an internal SIM card to provide easy access to the system wherever they are.

The outcomes

The new e-portfolio and e-assessment system has allowed Zodiac to be able to offer their learners a more tailored service:

- Learners can upload their evidence in any digital format, from Word documents to video files, at any time.
- Trainers and assessors can review the submissions online and feedback can easily be recorded using the message centre option.
- The system contains an online forum which is a place for learners to communicate with each other, share issues or help each other. It encourages the exchange of best practice.
- The system shows the learner outstanding items, giving the learner a quick overview if anything needs to be completed. Learners can also choose to be notified by email when something requires their attention.

Access to parts of the portfolio can be given to the learner’s employer and external verifiers.

The impact

Learning Assistant has made a significant impact on the company and its learners:

Learners

- It allows learners to work at the pace that suits them. Learners can upload their work at a time that is convenient for them and don’t have to wait until the next visit of their assessor. This has especially made a difference for learners who work in shifts or are continuously on the move.
• It has significantly speeded up the assessment process because assessors can assess coursework as it is completed, without the need to visit the learner's workplace. This has reduced the average time to complete a training course from eight to three months.

Trainers and assessors

• Reduction in paperwork.

• Improved efficiency – no need to make as many visits.

• Increased productivity as they can take on more learners.

Zodiac Training Ltd

• The new system has made it easier to track progress; Learning Assistant records all learners’ progress and management reports on learner progression can be run per qualification, per employer and per assessor. Tracking of completion can also be used to trigger billing and funding.

• Using Learning Assistant has significantly reduced the use of paper as well as the need to travel by field staff which has lowered costs as well as the company’s carbon footprint.

• Efficiency as a whole has improved because learners achieve results more quickly and assessors can manage an increased caseload.

Zodiac’s learners are keen to do their qualification online and actually request to change over to the new system.

Tip: Christopher Green, Marketing Manager at Zodiac Training advises: ‘It has been very important to research what it is that you want to offer your learners and how your learner wants to learn. Also listen to your delivery staff and what they need.’

Useful links

Jisc RSC Northern

Ingeus UK

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships

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