Summary

Riverside Training Ltd have introduced a series of webinars as part of their curriculum to deliver knowledge to apprentices studying for customer service and management qualifications. The webinars cover the Mandatory Knowledge units of the Level 2 and 3 qualifications. A dedicated member of staff supports the delivery of a schedule of monthly sessions, which are repeated twice each month for the learners’ convenience. Group sizes vary from 6-10 delegates. Each webinar is designed to be interactive and delegates receive pre-meeting activities, get involved with discussions and polls during the webinar and have post-webinar activities to complete for their portfolios.

The challenge

Riverside Training Ltd were asked by one of their large national employers to deliver the mandatory knowledge units of customer services to level 2 and 3 apprentices via webinars. The employer had apprentices studying for the qualification in various places throughout the UK and were familiar with web conferencing technology. The introduction of the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) led to a more demanding curriculum with an increase in the theoretical knowledge required to achieve the compulsory online tests. This meant that some candidates studying for level 3 in customer services and management apprenticeships needed additional support to achieve the qualifications.

The aim was to create an informative, collaborative and supportive delivery model that was also cost-effective and did not take apprentices away from their place of work.

The solution

The company identified a member of staff who was confident in using web conferencing facilities to design and deliver a series of 24 webinars. The purpose was to help candidates understand the knowledge components of the two qualifications targeted for the webinar pilot delivery.
12 of the units focus on customer care – these are topic focused and have been designed in consultation with the employer to ensure that corporate policies, strategies and key messages are included. The employer particularly wanted candidates to share experiences within the same company so they appreciated what department they were in and what their contribution was to the overall customer journey.

12 units of the units are targeted towards level 3 management unit titles which has a more academic focus. The content of each session is designed to be stand-alone, the sessions are not sequential, enabling candidates to attend at a time and point in their learning that suits their needs.

The number of candidates participating in the webinars is kept to six to eight people to ensure they are well supported yet still have opportunities to work together, share experiences and learn from each other. Each webinar lasts for an hour.

Candidates are asked to do some preparatory work prior to the webinar such as research current practice and some follow-up activities afterwards, typically to reflect on the learning content, evaluate their performance and record incidences of what they have done differently as a result of the training. The sessions include polls, quizzes and interactive question techniques.

At the end of each webinar candidates are required to complete a feedback survey asking whether they found the session useful and how they found the pace, content and delivery. The sessions are refined according to feedback from both candidates and the tutor delivering the session. This is an ongoing and iterative process.

At the moment, candidates are booked onto the webinars by their assessors according to individual need. Moving forward, the company plan to roll the webinar approach out across all programmes and to build webinar attendance into Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), making attendance mandatory rather than voluntary.

Candidates can join the webinars from their workstations or, in some cases, training suites within the workplace that are made available to candidates. This latter option ensures they have access to the necessary equipment and are in a place where they can contribute effectively.

Each webinar is offered twice in a one-month period on different days and at different times to accommodate varied working patterns. Initially, the cycle of 12 sessions per subject was delivered over a period of six months but the frequency of delivery has been increased to a three-month cycle to improve attendance and completion rates. The company intend to look at ways of further increasing the frequency of delivery and are considering training more staff to deliver webinar sessions to increase capacity.

Riverside Training Ltd tried a number of web conferencing technologies before settling for Citrix GoToWebinar. There were some teething issues to resolve such as ensuring employer firewalls allowed access to the system that were quickly resolved.

There have been requests for the webinars to be recorded to share with candidates who missed sessions. The company feel that this will not give a satisfactory learning experience and so have resisted this. There are concerns that candidates may be signposted to access these rather than take part in the interactive sessions. As a compromise, the tutor releases a 15-minute precis of the learning content that forms the basis of each webinar within an hour of the webinar taking place. These short recordings have been well received and although they
are not seen as a replacement for the live activity, they offer a further opportunity to impart knowledge and act as useful revision tools for webinar attendees. Attendance at the 15-minute sessions is not recorded.

Impact

While it is too soon for any quantitative data to be available the feedback from all parties is positive:

» Employers like the fact that their employees can work together regardless of work location, gain a greater understanding of their role in the company and their contribution to the business. They also appreciate the cost savings of employees being able to access the training without leaving the workplace.

» Learners like the webinar sessions and are asking for the same approach to be applied to other qualifications.

» Assessors and tutors find the growing bank of content helpful.

The company has developed a flexible and cost-effective way of supporting candidates based in different locations to develop and apply underpinning knowledge and prepare for mandatory tests. The webinar delivery model facilitates collaboration between people who would otherwise not have the opportunity to work together, even when they sometimes work for the same company.

The growing use of webinars has also opened up other possibilities that Riverside Training is interested in exploring. For example, use of web conferencing to support candidates between visits through discussion or to record evidence.

Key points

» Monitoring attendance revealed candidates who were regular attenders. Exploring the reasons for non-attenders is also important. For example, do they have access to the necessary technology, headphones and microphones?

» Riverside Training tried several different web conferencing systems to assess their functionality and ease of use. It is also necessary to work with employers’ IT managers to ensure that whatever web conferencing system you use is allowed through corporate firewalls.

» Whether to record the webinars or not is a key issue. There is a danger that this could become an easy access route which does not offer such a robust learning experience. Riverside Training have compromised and are providing short recorded summaries of learning after each webinar but these are not seen as a substitute for the webinars – more as an additional opportunity or as a means of reinforcing learning and supporting revision.
At the moment the webinars are led by one member of staff. The digital skills and confidence of assessors and tutors vary and not all staff are trained as teachers or are comfortable using webinars as a delivery mechanism. Expanding the model significantly will require support and continuous professional development (CPD) for any staff involved in webinar delivery.

More information

Website: http://www.riverside-training.co.uk/

Contact: Philip Broomhead, quality manager, Riverside Training Ltd Philip@riverside-training.co.uk