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South Australia police uphold the law with e-learning

Organisation Profile and Objective: South Australia Police

Police officers in South Australia are among the most technologically-savvy in the country, following a dedicated effort by South Australia Police to introduce new computer-based training for their force of almost 4,000 officers and cadets.

Online learning is the perfect solution to overcome difficulties in providing law enforcement training, such as shift work, time spent out on location, and a workforce that is geographically dispersed across remote and rural areas.

It is critical that police officers receive regular training to keep up-to-date with the latest legislation, and other critical skills areas like preserving crime scenes and electronic crime.

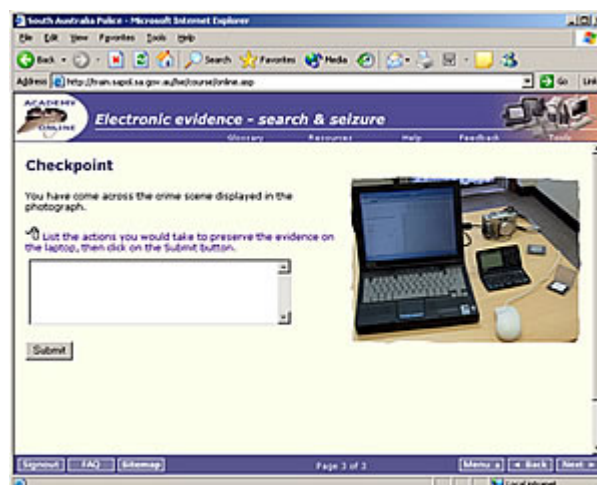
By using a new 'blended learning' approach that combines online training and 'train-the-trainer' sessions for supervisors based in stations throughout the State, South Australia Police was able to offer training that used to take approximately two years to complete in just six weeks.

Their approach to computer based training has been to develop short online training courses for both operational police and cadets. While some of these can be done entirely online, most have a practical requirement which can either be supervised at local stations or at the Academy.

Instead of a trainer travelling to each police station, police officers have immediate access to the training online, which is combined with a practical component that can be supervised by a superintendent at each local station.

Getting there – the Framework connection

South Australia Police entered the e-learning arena in 2002 when they successfully applied for LearnScope funding and support from the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework).



An example of a Q&A checkpoint in the *Electronic evidence - search and seizure* e-learning module used by South Australia Police officers

The Framework is a national strategy collaboratively funded by the Australian Government and all States and Territories to support the vocational education and training system meet the rapidly increasing demand for flexible learning, including e-learning, from industry, enterprise and clients.

LearnScope is a Framework professional development project that focuses on developing skills to apply new technologies to make learning more flexible.

Bronte Moran is South Australia Police's Computer Aided Learning Development Officer and has played a leading role in the introduction of computer-based training for South Australia Police, overseeing the development of online learning material for both cadets and operational police officers.

"What we've done is try to develop good training material that is cost effective and tries to make effective use of the information technology (IT) system that we already have in place," Ms Moran said.

"We've got people working on shifts and officers who are geographically dispersed, so we needed to meet the training needs of all members in a flexible way, and at the same time try to achieve effective learning outcomes while using resources effectively and efficiently."

The end result

Three short online courses identified as priority training areas are now available on the South Australia Police Intranet for cadets and police officers:

- Fingerprints Using Live Scan: teaches how to use the latest device to scan fingerprints
- Electronic Evidence – Search and Seizure: instructs how to detect which pieces of evidence are vital in an electronic crime case
- Think Forensic – First Officer Response: ensures officers know how to react instinctively and preserve a crime scene before the investigators arrive.

In recognition of the innovative work the South Australia police have done in the delivery of online learning, the Electronic Evidence – Search and Seizure module was a finalist in the Australian Institute of Training and Development's 2004 National Awards for Excellence in Learning Design (Technology Assisted).

Ms Moran said that prior to introducing online learning, police officers were required to attend face-to-face training, which was difficult because of the nature of their work.

"Now with the introduction of e-learning, all our officers can use the Intranet to stay informed about new legislation and new online training courses, which they can do mostly online at times that suit them," Ms Moran said.

"The feedback we've had is that the officers really enjoy training this way, which is great for us, for them and for the wider community," Ms Moran said.

While the training courses developed by South Australia Police are not formally recognised by other States and Territories, Ms Moran said there is a growing culture

of sharing training resources that isn't limited by different jurisdiction legislation.

"We collaborate to the extent that we share what we're doing," Bronte said. "For example, I send the material that we develop to other jurisdictions for them to use if they want to."

While the Federal Police and Queensland have been delivering their training online for some time, Bronte says she believes South Australia is ahead of most other States and Territories in the development of online training.

"All the States and Territories have gone down different paths, but we decided to develop our own online learning material so what we have is strongly tailored to skills areas that police officers need. It's not nationally endorsed, but it is really useful for our officers and potentially for officers in other jurisdictions," Bronte said.

"A great benefit of us going down the e-learning path is that all police work revolves around a computer, so our entire police force is competent using a computer. As long as they know how to use a mouse and keyboard they can do their training online."

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