

Accurate benefit payments benefit those in society who need it most

The Need for accurate benefits payment

For those who receive benefits making sure those benefits are accurate and timely is of the utmost importance. To achieve this you must ensure that those making those payments are fully equipped to do.

The Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV) is the professional body for local taxation, benefits and valuation. They support the professional skills of over 5,000 members in local authorities and private and public sector valuation with a global membership.

The rapidly changing and complex benefits system requires a rigorous and well supported Continuous Professional Development Programme. In April 2002 the Department of Work and Pensions launched set of comprehensive performance standards for delivery of housing and council tax benefits. This supports the delivery of Government targets to ensure that citizens and businesses come first. The Performance Standards are there to:

- > benchmark performance and allow objective comparison over time, and
- > provide a common basis for both central and local government to assess performance

The challenge for many Local Authorities is to:

- > Reduce the time to process claims both initially and when personal circumstances change, to less than 20 days;
- > Increase accuracy to the point where incorrect payment amounts are a thing of the past;
- > Reduce paperwork and form filling by claimants;
- > Speed up recovery of incorrect payments; and
- > Provide a more customer centric, less complex and bureaucratic process.

Training and induction of new staff can range from one-to-one mentoring to face-to-face induction programmes for larger numbers, but many Local Authorities simply do not have the levels of staff to justify running regular induction programmes or to allow for individual training.

To meet this need the IRRV developed the Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit Exercise Kit as a workbook based training system covering the first three months of a trainee's job.

The need for a more flexible lower cost solution

By December 2003 the IRRV was devoting considerable time and resources to producing this workbook to meet the escalating demand. The IRRV looked around for a better way. They entered into a partnership with Mid Sussex District Council, the Local Government Agency and e-learning specialists, [Nelson Croom](#), to develop and launch an interactive induction tool for local taxation and benefits staff.

The aim was:

- > To provide ongoing support to new Benefits staff in the first three months of their employment
- > To make this available to all staff immediately on joining
- > To improve the accuracy with which all claims are processed
- > To reduce the time taken by benefits staff to complete the appropriate processes

What was done, the learning solution

A thorough analysis of need, learners' preferences and circumstances was completed. The business results required by Local Authorities were defined. The product was given a unique brand; the Euclidian Benefits online training system.

Initially the course is personalised by the Smart Candidate Profiling system. This makes it appropriate for staff with any level of experience; those with more study less. Learners in work are busy people with heavy workloads and no learner has to study topics they already understand.

The personalisation extends to delivery style as well learning through an FAQ-based system or from a series of 'real-life' scenarios, which users can then match to their own working requirements or environment.

Meeting future needs

Any training in this subject area must respond immediately to changes in Benefits legislation. [Euclidian Benefits](#) has a real-time online feedback system which is constantly monitored and any changes can be made quickly and easily, so the information is never out of date. In this way all users provide a quality check on changing content to meet the constant changes in legislation (and interpretation of legislation).

The Euclidian suite of products now includes advanced benefits training, revenues training in both Council Tax and Business Rates as well as a number of Training Needs Analysis tools.



The results, what users said

To date 4724 individual learners have registered for Euclidian Benefits Basics. Here is a selection of feedback received:

“Very good it was very clear to understand and I liked the fact that you could go back and forward to check things that maybe didn’t sink in the first time.”

“Excellent website for going at your own pace and making things clear in my head!”

“A lot of information to take in but, the system was set out well to understand the information.”

“I enjoyed the HB/CTB part of the program most of all. The Resource Centre was also very useful to me. I am very happy that I completed the entire program, for it was a unique experience for me to take an on-line course.”

“Thank you for such a useful training tool!”

“I have tested Euclidian Benefits Basics on both new starters and experienced staff and it has been received very well. The new starters had a good grounding and also a good point of reference and the experienced staff were either reminded of something they had forgotten or learnt something new. I have also introduced all our Contact Centre team, reception staff and Council tax department so that they have a rudimentary knowledge of Housing Benefits and how it relates to them directly and indirectly. Hence the high number of logins requested! So thank you it is a very good training device!”

Training and Policy Officer
Maidstone Borough Council

“I am really pleased to say the training on Euclidian has gone really well and has been well received by all participants. Ideally I would like everyone connected with Benefits at BwDBC to complete the basic course. It is a good grounding for new staff and acts as a good refresher for more experienced staff”.

Training Officer
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

“I found the online training enjoyable user friendly and very informative”

Elaine Brown, North Lincolnshire District Council



The trade press ([Opportunities Magazine](#)) describe the learning as, “functional, accurate, flexible, effective and easy to use.”

Business results

The initial project was funded by the Department of Work and Pensions who considered this to be a good example of a successful government training project.

Euclidian is now being used, not only to train new starters but also as a resource for more experienced officers. Training departments are now using the new Self-assessments to assess the training requirements of their authorities.

“All our benefit officers have undertaken the self assessment and this has enabled us to identify areas (topics) where training is needed across the whole team... We have found the monitoring and reporting side of Euclidian invaluable, and as the license fee gives the council unlimited user access, we consider it to be very cost effective.”

Judith Johnson, Cherwell District Council

“We have found use of the programme extends beyond the excellent start it gives new Benefits officers at the introductions stage”

Nicki Duckworth, Mid Sussex District Council

Good practice ideas

Good Practice Ideas

- A. Ensure material is designed for rapid updating**
- B. Ensure the technology facilitates quick and easy updating**
- C. Build in content feedback from users so changes needed can be rapidly identified**
- D. Professional Institutions provide a route to developing staff amongst smaller employers**
- E. In a project like this, where usage isn't mandated, an integrated marketing campaign is essential to 'sell' the concept to the potential markets .**
- F. It is essential to have the tracking tools give you an accurate picture of exactly how people are using and responding to the resources – not just asking their opinion**
- G. Be flexible to respond to what you find out about peoples usage.**
- H. As usage increases, requirements might change. Flexibility not just in content but also in technological developments is essential to ensure that products are constantly reinvented and enhanced**