



Office for  
**National Statistics**  
Swyddfa  
Ystadegau Gwladol

# **Centralising Learning and Development within the UK Office for National Statistics**

A case study on the challenges faced

# Centralising Learning and Development – Part one

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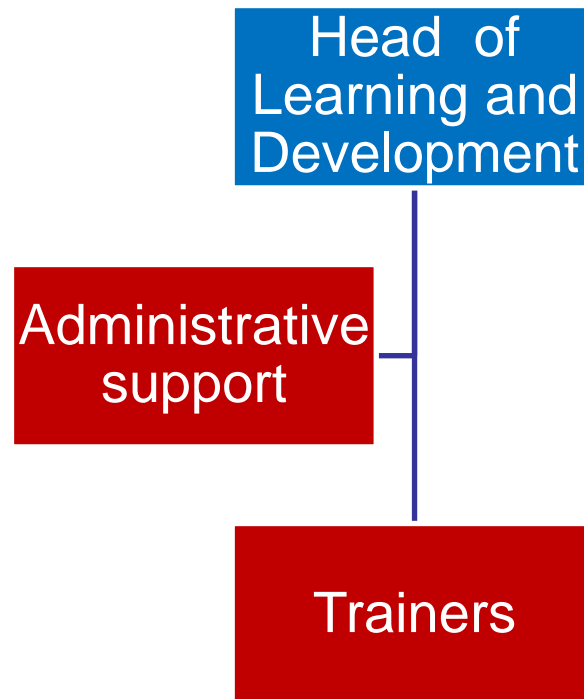
- 2011 – founding of Civil Service Learning
- Impact on ‘trainers’ in the government offices
- Centralising access to learning
- Controlling spend
- Consistency of messages



# Centralising Learning and Development – Part one

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Removing traditional structures



# Centralising Learning and Development – Part two

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- The lasting impact of the economic downturn on learning
- Reviewing the purpose of learning in a post recession era



- Optimising organisational structures

# Centralising Learning and Development – Part two

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Optimising organisational structures



# Centralising Learning and Development – Part two

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- Org Strategy

- A Vision
- A purpose
- A value proposition
- Clear priorities
- Dedicated financial resources

# Centralising Learning and Development – Part two

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- Org Capability

- Alignment with the business
- The right structures
- Excellent processes
- The right technology
- Quality monitoring
- Financial planning and demand management

# Centralising Learning and Development – Part two

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- People Competencies

- Business acumen
- Performance improvement
- Management projects
- Enabling change
- Learning methods and design



# Centralising Learning and Development – Part two

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- Execution Methods

- Quality assurance
- Social and informal learning
- Design
- Programming and prioritisation
- Technical developments
- Facilitation and delivery

# Centralising Learning and Development – Part three

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Large organisations  decentralised learning...

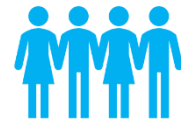
- Subject matter experts ensure knowledge is held in teams
- Control over outputs and results
- Quick to respond and flexible to adapt
- Closeness to target audience to witness impact
- Bespoke learning to build trusted relationships

# Centralising Learning and Development – Part three

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When decentralised structures fail to meet the mark:

- Inconsistencies in design and delivery
- Collaboration is difficult because of silo working
- Parochial attitudes mean learning is for some, not all
- Skills and progression are limited by the environment
- Duplication occurs
- Learners are not exposed to the ‘big picture’
- Local trainers ‘go native’



# Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

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The ONS ‘decision’ – was centralising the right option?

## Objectives

- To understand and organise common skill requirements so that there was an overview of the whole strategic demand
- To control learning and development costs for the benefit of the whole organisation
- To align the learning and development strategy with business goals

# Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

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## Meeting objective one:

To understand and organise common skill requirements so that there was an overview of the whole strategic demand

- Physically drawing teams together facilitates a single approach to professional competence
- It's easier to share resources and prioritise
- L&D staff are easier to cross train
- Centralised L&D career pathways and professional progression
- Consistency in delivery approach
- Encourages specialisms within the team for design and commissioning v design and delivery
- Professionalises the function

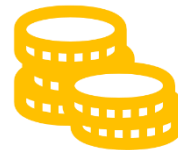
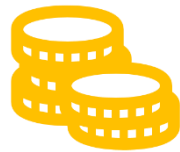
# Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

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## Meeting objective two:

To control learning and development costs for the benefit of the whole organisation

- Controllable budgets for the benefit of the whole organisation
- Reducing duplication for better management of public money
- Ownership of commissioning learning



# Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

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## Meeting objective three:

To align the learning and development strategy with business goals

- Driven by business strategy



# Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

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What did ONS do?

Created 'The Learning Academy' using:

- A statistical learning team from within Statistical Methodology
- A leadership and management function from within HR
- A workforce essentials team from various sources across the business





# Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

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The challenges:

- A lack of clear vision of team's purpose and priorities
- Roles, responsibilities and processes were unclear
- Some departments retained their L&D units
- Some departments released staff but retained experts
- Some passed L&D requirements to support functions with no L&D understanding

# Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

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## Impact:

- An unclear relationship between The Learning Academy and the business
- Skill ‘grabbing’ meant required expertise was not available
- High expectations on a team with limited experience and resources = disappointment
- ‘storming’ showed no sign of settling down; high sickness rates and attrition



# Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

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## Finding solutions:

- An organisation wide learning needs analysis built from existing strategy documents and business plans
- A directory of learning
- A management pathway programme
- A team review that led to a single customer relationship process and a new support team
- A learning and development strategy aligned to business needs
- An increased corporate L&D budget
- A team performing at an acceptable level



# Centralising Learning and Development – Part five

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## The immediate demand v supply issue:

- Upskilling and developing the multiple professions within ONS and the analytical professions across government
- Building a cadre of capable and competent leaders with a sustainable talent pool
- Supporting the transformation agenda through specific skill and knowledge attainment by focusing on digital capability
- Ensuring compliance with regulation and policy in line with best practice models
- Addressing issues such as long term sickness absences associated with mental health conditions (the largest single cause of sickness absence)
- Building digital and data science capability

# Centralising Learning and Development – Part five

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Is centralised learning the only solution to achieve optimum organisational effectiveness?

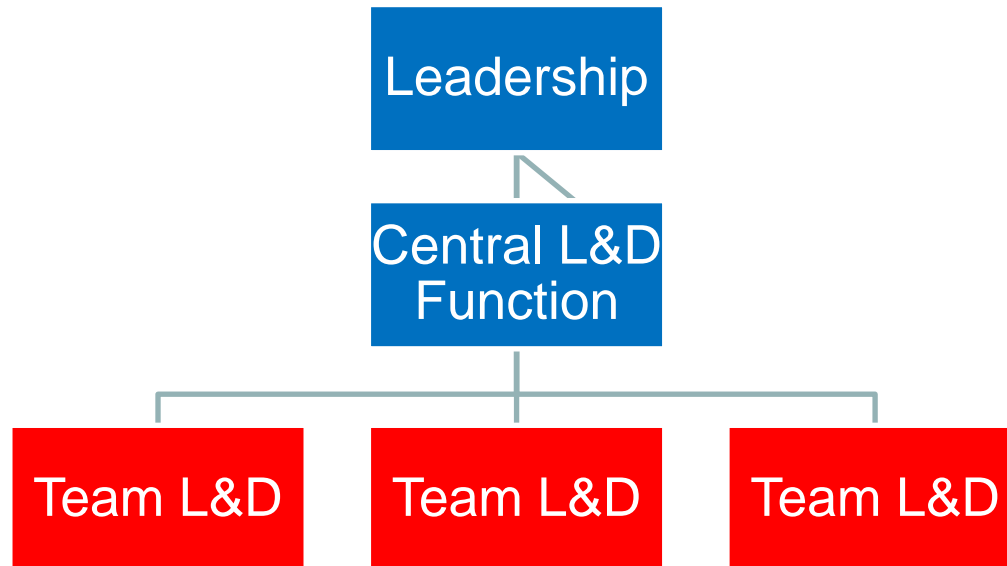
- Departments with their own L&D functions will argue that only they are able to respond quickly and effectively to business demands unlike a centralised team
- The centralised team is only focused on ‘big picture’ issues which don’t relate to their subject matter expertise



# Centralised Learning and Development – Part five

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The federated training organisation model



# Centralised Learning and Development – Part five

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## Strong collaborative relationships:

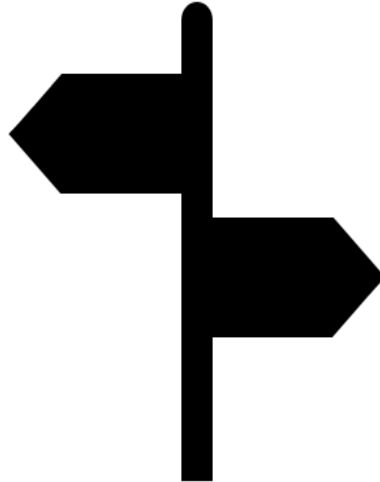
- A clear understanding of roles and responsibilities of all parties
- Robust evaluation procedures that stay within strict, common parameters to ensure consistency of data
- Excellent and frequent communication channels in order to prevent duplication and to share information
- Mutual respect of professional skills and requirements



# Centralised Learning and Development – next steps

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Does the Learning Academy grow to absorb team L&D functions?



Does ONS adopt a federated model and use new systems and processes to unite L&D?



# Centralising Learning and Development - questions

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