

# BAE Systems Virtual University: e-learning in action

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## About BAE Systems

BAE Systems designs, manufactures and supports military aircraft, surface ships, submarines, space systems, radar, avionic, C4ISR, electronic systems, guided weapons and a range of other defense products – many with international partners. The company has a major presence internationally, particularly in Europe and the USA, as well as the Middle East, Australia and Asia Pacific.

## The challenge: cost effective, consistent and global learning to maintain industry leadership

BAE Systems is constantly striving to enhance its existing status as a world-class systems, defense and aerospace industry, and needs to ensure that its extremely high standards are maintained and built upon. The company sought a learning solution that would provide all its employees with the right skills at the right time to drive creativity and business performance. With more than 100,000 employees all over the world, the chosen solution had to be capable of delivering consistent, high-quality learning to many different geographical locations, cost effectively.

In addition, BAE Systems needed to consolidate its existing learning resources to provide employees with a single, easily accessible and centralized resource for learning. The company was using over 50 different learning content providers. Not only was this expensive but it also meant a lot of the content was duplicated and was not effectively targeted to BAE System's needs. Access to the learning was also restricted, due to a CD-ROM lock-down culture at 50 UK-based Learning Resource Centres. BAE Systems therefore required a learning provider that could offer a wide portfolio of courses that would underpin the core learning requirements, and that could be deployed via various methods to ensure learning could be easily accessed by all employees, regardless of location.

BAE Systems also wanted to implement a knowledge management system to enable employees across the organization to effectively share knowledge to help create competitive advantage. Furthermore, the ability to access learning-on-demand was a requirement to ensure rapid and effective skills acquisition.

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## The solution: a virtual university

BAE Systems decided to implement a global virtual university (VU) providing access to learning, know-how and research. The VU was established in 1998 with the objectives of building a self-sustaining culture of learning and continuous improvement right across the company, to enhance performance and to improve the financial results of the company. An e-learning infrastructure underpins the VU since online learning was recognized as the only feasible method of delivering training consistently and cost-effectively to employees across a vast geographical region.

The VU provides employees with 350 online courses from Thomson NETg's Integrated Learning Solution. These courses cover professional skills such as leadership and communication, as well as IT professional and IT desktop training. All of BAE Systems' employees worldwide can access the VU, including staff at some of the companies with whom the company has established joint venture partnerships.

With so much information available on the VU, content management and governance is of primary importance. BAE Systems is working with a company called GateWest New Media to deliver the VU's content management system and web infrastructure. GateWest's content management solution, Echo, has been implemented to effectively manage the learning assets residing on many different systems with different owners.

### *Working in partnership to create a tailored solution*

Thomson NETg has worked with BAE Systems to tailor its content management tool, which has been implemented to measure and track usage of e-learning. The tool records all training sessions undertaken including individual modules of learning. This tool has been customized to enable each employee to provide feedback on each piece of training they carry out so that BAE Systems can quickly see which courses are the most or least popular. But even more importantly, the company can determine whether or not the learning intervention met the employee's development requirements effectively. This feedback and the course usage figures are fed back to BAE Systems' Learning Management System, People Portal. Each member of staff has their own personal training and development program and goals on which they are appraised, so this feedback is considered vital.

### *Learning access at home seen as significant employee benefit*

To access the learning, employees simply log onto the VU on the company intranet. Courses are also available in the BAE Systems Learning Resource Centres and via a CD-ROM loan service. BAE Systems is strongly committed to supporting its employees and instilling a true learning culture within the organization and so has made these courses available to employees and their families from home using NETgLearning.com. BAE Systems has named the program "Passport to Learn" with the goal of providing all employees with rapid access to quality learning tools and services. More than 1,000 family members have used the "Passport to Learn" service since its launch two years ago, demonstrating the popularity of this initiative.

### *Managing knowledge for competitive advantage*

The development of the BAE Systems Virtual University has enabled the organization to enhance the transfer of knowledge throughout the organization. The VU team has created a knowledge management (KM) consultant capability to support different parts of the business. The company's KM system is known internally as Vufinder and is powered by an intelligent search engine. Vufinder is an integrated knowledge bank, which provides employees with immediate access to knowledge from a vast array of internal and external sources, as well as alerting them to information and learning such as new courses or best practice. For example, if an employee is about to make a presentation to a customer and wants a reminder of the top ten tips for presenting, he or she would simply type in a query and receive an instant answer providing them with a list of learning resources. This might include access to an FAQ sheet, a list of books to read, or a video to watch.



### *A smooth migration to Windows XP*

BAE Systems is migrating all desktop computers from Windows NT to XP, a move that will impact users of over 80,000 desktop computers. Ensuring each employee can competently use the new applications is vital and so BAE Systems has chosen online courses to provide training in XP to each employee. In addition, the VU ensures that each user is alerted to other sources of key information on XP such as local IT experts, company policies, and wider sources of learning such as e-books.

BAE Systems aims to migrate the whole company to Windows XP by the end of 2005, and every employee will be provided with a clear choice of the training options available which includes at the very least an introductory course. The use of e-learning as the primary development method across the organization means more costly classroom-based training can be avoided. This marks the first time that e-learning will touch the whole organization.

### **Results: high usage of learning helps to maintain competitiveness and ensures BAE Systems is an employer of choice**

The BAE Systems Virtual University is a center of excellence for all the company's training and development needs. Such timely access to learning helps the organization to achieve its business goals and maintain competitiveness. Around 28,000 employees visit the VU regularly and there is an average of 12,000 web site hits a day. Over 27,500 courses were undertaken in 2003 (via the intranet, NETgLearning.com, the Learning Resource Centres and a home CD-ROM loan service), and more than 1,000 family members have used the Passport to Learn service since its launch two years ago.

The company is also benefiting from significant cost savings. In comparison to traditional instructor-led training, the use of e-learning is helping to achieve a 67 percent cost reduction per training intervention due to reduced travel, accommodation, room and tutor costs. Furthermore, with the integration of all its learning resources, BAE Systems is saving over £1.5 million per year.

**Keywords:**

Distance learning,  
Knowledge management,  
Learning methods