



Nottinghamshire County Council

At Nottinghamshire County Council, Julian Walters leads a team of 8 IT specialists, 4 of which are GIS experts. This team supports the implementation of a number of GIS packages across the authority and a collection of specific spatial applications. In 2009, Julian recognised the need to support the various GIS users with training to make the most out of their investment in the Esri ArcGIS software. He looked to the e-learning initiative GIS247 as a cost effective way of providing this training.

The initial licence ran for 12 months during which time the users had access to a large number of training courses and technical modules. The training supported a range of different user levels from beginners through to advanced and specialist areas of using the software. The first 12 months of access to specific ArcGIS training via GIS247 has proven to be extremely successful with a positive impact on the use of GIS across the authority.

“The ultimate endorsement of the quality and usefulness of the GIS247 training has been to renew our licence” says Julian Walters. *“It is now viewed as such a strategic investment that we have moved to a central approach to fund our licence.”*



GIS247 spoke to Julian and his colleague Mark Selby who is a GIS System Designer about their experience of using the GIS247 self-paced e-learning approach and the impact that it has had.

You have an “unlimited” licence to GIS247 which means that you can give any number of users access. Did GIS247 allow you to extend training provision to more users than would otherwise have been possible?

JW: “Yes. The unlimited licence meant that we did not have to ‘pick and choose’ who could get the training. If someone wanted training we could just add them to our licence. It was also not just a case of being able to train more people but we were able to provide more training for existing users, letting them develop their skills further.”

How was it possible to extend the training and to what extent?

JW: “We have a limited number of licences for the ArcGIS software. Not everyone who undertook the training needed access to a licence all of the time. When users wanted to do the training exercises they could use a licence when one was available. For example people who job share were able to undertake the training when it suited them and to use the software licence to do the training exercises when a licence was available. This was not restrictive as the on-line training presentations could be viewed by everyone as and when they wanted through their internet connection.”

MS: “We also took advantage of the fact that the training can be undertaken from anywhere. A number of people followed the training while working from home and also when they couldn’t travel into work due to the snow.”

Did GIS247 allow you to provide more extensive training knowledge to users (i.e. extend beyond Beginners level) than would otherwise have been possible?

JW: “Yes. We have adopted 2 key strategies. The first is that GIS247 has allowed us to get GIS knowledge to our customers throughout the authority. It has provided a good foundation to let people become aware of spatial terminologies and techniques. They are now better equipped about what to ask for. It has definitely raised the status of GIS across the authority. The second is that it has enabled self service in getting expertise to our customers. Throughout the authority the use of GIS has stepped up from data display and map production to simple analysis.”



MS: “There are more questions such as ‘How can I compare ...’ being asked and answered. A specific example is one department now being able to look at drift in their pupil and school assignment data and undertake trend analysis themselves.”

Do you guide your users towards certain courses or allow them to choose?

MS: “When we first got our GIS247 licence we didn’t really tell the users which course/s to follow but made general suggestions. We then found out that people were not using the on-line training until we put a bit of pressure on them. Once people started using it they realised it was a valuable resource and made the most of it.”

JW: “Now that we have renewed our licence our approach will be structured and there will be a timetable for the training. Each user’s Employee Development Review will be used to set up a formal approach to GIS training. Each user will have a learning plan with key milestones written in.”

Do you expect to make use of the GIS247 functions that can restrict access to certain courses for specific users to support this?

MS: “We may look at using the administration options that GIS247 provides us with for creating groups of users and restrict/allow access to certain courses and software versions. The admin options are certainly useful for checking whether people have completed sections and courses.”



Mark Selby

How would you describe the ROI (return on investment) of your use of GIS247?

JW: “The return on our investment has been seen in 3 main areas. The first has been that each department is now more capable and can achieve things themselves. This has freed up the time of our GIS specialists. The second is that the cost of plot production to the IT/GIS team has decreased. Users in different departments are able to do the plots themselves but also they are now capable of producing relevant PDF output. The third aspect has been that the general level of expectation from GIS has gone up. It is being seen as a more central technology.”

How would you describe GIS247 in terms of “value for money”?

JW: “Excellent. In the 12 months of our licence we have calculated that our users have received at least 400 hours of training across 44 different courses. If we had sent these users on traditional classroom training we have calculated that it would have cost us £35k. With GIS247 we have achieved this training at 10% of that cost so the value has been incredible.”

Has GIS247 allowed you to continue investing in staff skills despite the difficult economic situation?

JW: “Yes definitely. It has allowed us to invest further than we would normally be able to do both in terms of increasing the depth of staff knowledge and the number of staff who could receive training. There is the potential for all our staff to go through all courses to greatly enhance their expertise and give GIS foundations beyond licenced users.”



Julian Walters

Has the increased ability of any of your users to use GIS as a result of the training from GIS247 had a direct benefit to your business?

JW: “Yes! There has been a reduction in the number of requests for plots and assistance from the GIS team. This is allowing the GIS specialists more time to concentrate on the more complex tasks and on strategic development issues. Each department is now developing its own group of experts which can drive their work more effectively with GIS. They also understand the requirements of their own department better and are achieving effective results.”



Have any of your users improved their ability with GIS to the extent that they are now involved in more detailed GIS work than they were before?

MS: “Yes, definitely. Due to development of the capability of individuals they are now moving away from the basic mapping type uses of GIS to undertaking more analysis. We hope to progress this even further during our next 12 month licence to GIS247.”

What arguments/advantages did you state in order to secure the funds required to renew your GIS247 licence?

JW: “Apart from the flexibility it offers we cited the difference between the cost of classroom training and the e-learning approach. Also the difference of practicalities of attending an intensive 3 day course and that your learning diminishes over time. With GIS247 the training can be paused by the users and they can focus and more goes in. The ability to spread out the training and get it when it is relevant to the work you are doing is also a key factor. The ability to work at your own pace is a real strength of the on-line training.”

What do you think of the quality of the training provision available from GIS247?

MS: “It is extremely high quality. Everything worked as it was meant to both in using the site and also in the training.”

JW: “Everything worked really well which is a real mark of quality. I have had some experience of e-learning before and this is by far the best.”

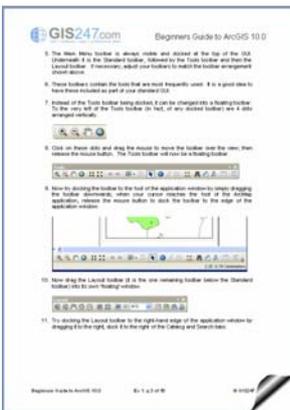
How did your users find the Presentations?

MS: “The presentations are clear and thorough and it is great to be able to watch them as often as you wish.”

How did your users find the Exercises?

MS: “The exercises are split into just the right size steps so if you went wrong it was straightforward to redo a step. There are built in checks in the exercises without it being obvious so you do have to think for yourself. There is a good balance. You feel yourself learning as you go through the steps.”

JW: “The courses have more content than other courses I have followed. You are presented with all the different ways of doing something and the different shortcut options. There are lots of useful tips of how to do things.”



All GIS247 courses are accredited by the AGI and GIS Certification Institute and award CPD/GISP points. Are these accreditations of interest?

MS: “Yes the accreditations are of interest for a number of reasons. For individuals the gaining of CPD points is a useful motivator for their CV and professional status. The accreditations are also a type of confirmation of the quality of the course contents. However it has been the GIS247 Assessment process that has been of most value and interest.”

Why has the GIS247 Assessments been of most interest?

JW: “The value of the GIS247 assessment process is that if you pass and gain a certificate it is a certificate of proven achievement and not just attendance. Our users have gained a lot of pride from not only completing a course but passing the course assessment with individuals achieving passes and distinctions.”



Julian Walters & Mark Selby with their GIS247 Assessment Certificates.



Do you feel that the GIS247 courses have allowed you to develop your GIS skills further than might otherwise have been possible with the “normal” amount of GIS training that would have been made available to you?

MS: “Without the e-learning approach our provision of training would have been minimal. It is straightforward to budget for as it is just a single licence fee and then we can get as much training as we want.”

JW: “We have been able to increase the skills of our GIS specialist at no extra cost as well as open up training to other users. For example Rosie Gilbert has done exceptionally well in the training and is making a real difference to the use of GIS in her department. Without access to GIS247, even though her department has an ArcGIS licence, Rosie would probably have not received any training at all.”



From left to right: *Debbie Soloman Business Development & Training Manager at GIS247, Mark Selby GIS System Designer at Nottinghamshire County Council, Rosie Gilbert Strategic Place Planning and School Admissions Team and Mick Burrows Chief Executive of Nottinghamshire County Council.*

Rosie being presented her award as Nottinghamshire County Council’s GIS Student of the Year.