



The National College for School Leadership - talk2learn for the School Leaders of Today and Tomorrow



LogicaCMG was chosen to develop, implement and support an online environment to replace NCSL's online community learning environment. The new LogicaCMG implemented technology has ensured NCSL's online communities are easier to use and will be able to support the rapid expansion of member numbers.

"LogicaCMG shared our vision for the expansion of our online services. In the next 6 to 12 months, we expect our membership to grow by up to 30,000 and we are confident the new system will be able to cope with this considerable expansion with ease." Aidan Melling, eLearning Manager, NCSL

NCSL Overview

The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) provides vital training and support for the professional development of headteachers, assistant heads and the many other leadership roles in schools. With an expanding membership, and more than 32,000 delegates attending courses this year alone, the organisation plays a key role in ensuring school leaders are prepared for the challenges they face through each stage of their career.

The Business Requirement

NCSL's web site is an important source of information and support for school leaders. Its online discussion forums give members an internet-based environment where they can collaborate on the issues that matter to them, such as how to successfully tackle truancy or improve exam results. The College's original system was based on Think.com which was a free piece of software from Oracle. Although highly effective in the early days of the online community, the software was really designed for use in schools and was not as flexible as NCSL required.

"As membership of NCSL's online communities was increasing rapidly, scalability was also becoming an issue. We needed a more robust system that would offer the level of scalability needed for the college to expand this essential internet-based service." Aidan Melling, eLearning Manager, NCSL.

The organisation was keen to have a more structured support agreement in place with their technology provider and an influence on the product's development path, something which is not as easy to control with open-source technology where no service agreements exist.

The project tender for the new system required the new technology to be implemented quickly and with minimum interruption as down-time needed to be avoided during term time; when the system is used most heavily by school leaders.

“ LogicaCMG secured the tender as they were enthusiastic and offered excellent project-management skills, which ensured a smooth transition to the new system. They were also confident that our tens of thousands of users would not need to be retrained; an important factor in the decision process. ”

Aidan Melling, eLearning Manager, LogicaCMG.

The LogicaCMG Solution

“ It has opened up a new world of contacts and opportunities for professional dialogue. ”

NCSL Member.

The LogicaCMG solution, known as talk2learn, is based on Fronter technology, an innovative online learning environment from Scandinavia. The system sits at the heart of NCSL's web site and links seamlessly with the College's Learning Gateway. This allows school leaders taking courses online to switch from studying to discussing a topic area with a fellow school leader. Users looking at the news section of the main web site can view a news item and then, via talk2learn, engage in a debate on the same item.

In contrast with other discussion forums, talk2learn is unique in that members are able to view the entire content of messages within the forums without having to click through to another screen. Detailed information on individual members, or the schools they represent, can be viewed along with a picture of the member so that discussion is brought to life.

Headteachers, deputy heads, and heads of department can easily find other members in schools with similar characteristics as their own; such as the deputy head of an inner-city school of 500 pupils. Members can share ideas for school improvement or discuss education policy, vote on issues that concern them or read and post blogs. Leading educational thinkers and politicians often take a virtual 'hot seat' on the community and are quizzed by members on the latest government initiative, making the environment a dynamic one, bringing members back again and again.

Around 25% of the Fronter code was rewritten to meet NCSL's very specific requirements for their web community and this was overseen by LogicaCMG. LogicaCMG also took responsibility to ensure talk2learn fully integrated with all of NCSL's e-learning systems. This allows it to sit within a single sign-on environment, where one username and password signs a user in to all the relevant areas of NCSL's online learning community.

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The login details of the 50,000 members who were active at the time of the move to talk2learn were seamlessly transferred over to the new system, with no loss of data, and LogicaCMG continue to host, support and maintain the system efficiently.

“With any project of this size you may encounter the unexpected along the way and LogicaCMG brought in the right number and level of personnel to resolve any issues quickly.” Aidan Melling, eLearning Manager at the National College for School Leadership.

The Benefits

The main benefits have been:

- **Increased activity on the discussion forum** – 95,000 school leaders are now members of talk2learn and 15 to 20% of these are active at any one time. This compares with a rate of around 5 to 10% for most online communities.
- **Scalability** – The system has been designed to cope with thousands more users, future-proofing it for NCSL's continued expansion.
- **Less system issues** – The service level agreement from LogicaCMG ensures any problems are prioritised and resolved quickly, so the site is always available when school leaders need support.
- **Ease of use** – Better options for facilitating discussions ensure members get the answers they need and the option of anonymous posting encourages more productive discussion on sensitive issues.
- **Greater collaboration between schools** – School leaders benefit from collaboration and an online environment encourages the sharing of ideas without a time or travel cost to members.

“LogicaCMG bridged the gap between an innovative, smaller supplier and a major public sector organisation,” says Graham Wood, Service Manager, LogicaCMG. “Our partnership with Fronter created an exciting product in safe packaging.”

“ talk2learn is now a powerful component of NCSL's integrated system for learning. ”

Aidan Melling, eLearning Manager, NCSL.

LogicaCMG is a major international force in IT services. It employs 30,000 people across 36 countries. LogicaCMG's focus is on enabling its customers to build and maintain leadership positions using LogicaCMG's deep industry knowledge and its track record for successful delivery. The company provides business consulting, systems integration and IT and business process outsourcing across diverse markets including telecoms, financial services, energy and utilities, industry, distribution and transport and the public sector. Headquartered in Europe, LogicaCMG is listed on both the London Stock Exchange and Euronext (Amsterdam) (LSE:LOG; Euronext:LOG).

More information is available at www.logiacmg.com