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– Millie Yates, Ace Centre teacher in charge of WebEx service

## Wigan’s alternative and complementary education (ACE) team ensures 100% attendee rates for ailing pupils with a virtual classroom from WebEx



**INDUSTRY**  
Public Sector

**WEBEX APPLICATIONS**  
WebEx Training Center

**SUMMARY**  
As part of Wigan’s Children and Young People’s Service Pupil Referral Service, the ACE Centre team are responsible for the education of children who are unable to attend school as a result of ill health.

### ABOUT ACE CENTRE

**Line of Business**  
Public Sector

**Headquarters**  
Hindley, Wigan, United Kingdom

**Number of Employees**  
15

**WebEx Customer since 2004**

The Alternative and Complementary Education (ACE) Team is part of Wigan’s Children and Young People’s Services, Pupil Referral Service. The team is made up of four main components: the ACE Education Project, Children & Young People with Medical Needs, KS4 Out of School Learning Opportunities and the Social Work Team.

The Children & Young People with Medical Needs team is responsible for the education of children who are unable to attend school as a result of physical or emotional problems. Under government rules, if a child is unable to attend school for more than 15 school days, they are entitled to receive individual classes from teachers. In Wigan, the ACE Centre team is responsible for providing children with individually planned lessons, whilst they are unable to attend school, to ease their transition back into the classroom.

### The Challenge

The government states that all pupils should receive a minimum of five hours a week. However, the team has always been committed to exceeding these targets. Traditionally, the ACE Centre relied upon home visits to provide lessons to these children. Young people up to Year 10 are normally allocated six hours contact with a teacher each week, while Year 11 students receive a minimum of seven hours each week.

Millie Yates, the ACE teacher in charge of the service explains, “We wanted to find a way to maximise our teaching resources to enable us to expand the curriculum we were teaching to the

children. When you’re in a classroom, you’re able to teach a number of pupils, all at the same time. What we wanted to do was to replicate the classroom experience to not only increase teaching hours, but also encourage the children to interact with their peers.”

### The Solution

The team decided to investigate in an eLearning tool to create a ‘virtual’ classroom. Following an extensive trial of various software tools, it chose to invest in WebEx Training Center. This solution enables pupils and teachers to share documents and software applications to create an online classroom environment. Pupils can communicate through internet phones and even virtually raise their hands to ask and answer questions. An emotion indicator lets them advise the teacher of their body language and a virtual break-out room gives teachers a place to provide pupils with personal attention.

The ACE Team has its own branded website on the WebEx network from which the classes are taught. The ACE teachers teach in the ‘virtual’ classroom by connecting to online lessons via the centre’s broadband connection. To join the online lesson, teachers and pupils simply click on the ACE Centre’s URL link and enter their user name and password. Using a PowerPoint presentation and the whiteboard as a blackboard and textbook, pupils are taught lessons in Maths and English. The teacher presents the lesson and pupils are invited to contribute by annotating the notes and drawing shapes. To keep the lessons fun,

teachers sometimes use the webcams to hold the children's attention. Yates explains that a teacher for maths commented, "I was teaching a Maths lesson recently and I felt that a couple of the children we're losing attention. To liven things up, I used the webcam to film rolling a dice. It worked really well and the children soon perked up." At the end of each lesson, the teacher transfers a homework assignment, which pupils can email back in time for the next lesson.

## The Benefits

Thanks to the WebEx online classroom, each pupil receives an extra four hours of lessons a week. This has enabled the ACE team to increase teaching time by 35%, without having to hire additional teachers. One other benefit is the cost savings of virtual teaching. Yates explains, "By teaching in an online classroom, our teachers are able to do more in less time. Not only have we been able to expand the curriculum we offer, we've also enriched the learning experience for the children."

Yates continues: "It's not just a teaching aid, it's also a social inclusion vehicle. In many cases, a pupil that would not have the confidence to raise their hand in a classroom will feel empowered to do so in the virtual classroom." According to Yates, a proportion of the older children are 'school-phobic', which means they find it difficult to mix with their peers. These children particularly benefit from the anonymity of the online classroom. Yates adds, "In the online environment, these children feel secure enough to express their ideas and interact with the other children. If it wasn't for the online classroom, they wouldn't have any contact with children their own age. To them it's a bit of normality, they feel like they're just like everyone else."

It's not just the teachers who are reaping the benefits of the online classroom. Yates explains that all feedback from the pupils has been extremely positive. In particular, the emotion indicator has proved popular, "The kids love the smiley faces. If they're enjoying the lesson or if they're getting bored, the faces are a great way for them to communicate with us. They also love annotating the lessons, after each lesson."

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– Millie Yates, Ace Centre teacher in charge of WebEx service

## The Future

Following the success of its online scheme, the ACE team has trialled online lessons to schools across Wigan. It is currently piloting links between local primary schools to allow the ACE pupils to link up with their school. Yates says, "Using the online classroom, we can link-up pupils with their primary schools across to ensure they remain connected to their classmates. It will not only ease their transition back to school, but hopefully stimulate and challenge their classmates, who can expand their IT knowledge."

Yates concludes, "The WebEx tool has transformed the opportunities available to children who are being educated out of school. It also has potential to boost learning opportunities for pupils in school. We can't talk highly enough about WebEx, it really is helping us change the lives of our students."

## HIGHLIGHTS

- WebEx has enabled the ACE team to increase teaching time by 35%, without having to hire additional teachers
- WebEx is not just a teaching aid, it is also a social inclusion vehicle allowing pupils to interact with other pupils despite not being able to attend school
- Following the success of its online scheme, the ACE team plans to roll out online lessons to schools across Wigan to ensure its pupils remain connected to their classmates and expand learning opportunities in schools