CambridgeSpark

How Cambridge Spark is Helping Oxfordshire County Council Prepare Its Workforce for a Data-Driven Future

Since January 2024, 62 Oxfordshire County Council employees have enrolled on a Cambridge Spark programme to learn how to leverage data and digital and achieve significant business impact.

£3.5m
debt resolution achieved with enhanced data analysis skills.

50%
less time needed for EV infrastructure project refinement.

260+
hours saved annually in safeguarding.

Client Profile

Oxfordshire County Council is redefining local government innovation through its Data and Digital Skills Academy in partnership with Cambridge Spark. This initiative equips employees with advanced data and digital skills, enabling smarter decision-making, process automation, and improved services across key areas like safeguarding and infrastructure. By embedding data-driven thinking at the core of its operations, the Council is setting a new standard for digital transformation in the public sector.

Navigating data transformation in local government

Local authorities hold a wealth of data. But they are not always best equipped to process and leverage it for maximum effect.

Budget limitations, growing service demands, and outdated processes can all hinder digital transformation efforts. A workforce with varying levels of data literacy, coupled with siloed data, manual workflows, and complex decision making, only compound the problem.

Oxfordshire County Council recognised that internal upskilling was essential. Rather than commit to an annual spend hiring expensive external data experts, it opted to build its internal training capability.

> "Data and digital skills are essential for transforming services, identifying inefficiencies, and addressing challenges proactively. By investing in skills development, we free up resources to focus on deeper, more complex analyses."

Mat Pickering, Head of Data
Oxfordshire County Council

Building a transformative Data and Digital Academy

Working in partnership with Cambridge Spark, in January 2024 Oxfordshire County Council launched its Data and Digital Academy. The apprenticeships provided are designed to support building a data-driven, evidence-based culture among employees by delivering structured one-to-one coaching for each learner and equipping them with skills in Python, PowerBI, and SQL.

Oxfordshire County Council leveraged the Apprenticeship Levy to make the training cost effective by removing part of the need for commercial spend. Employees from 27 different teams took part, gaining new understandings of data analysis, visualisation, automation, and strategic decision-making.

> "By working with Cambridge Spark, we're able to have confidence that our colleagues are receiving training and education that will help us to move the organisation forward and foster the data culture that we need to succeed."

Mat Pickering, Head of Data
Oxfordshire County Council

Measurable improvements in efficiency, delivery, and financials

Sixty-two employees enrolled on courses offered via the Data and Digital Academy, achieving a **92% distinction and merit rate** – a figure far above the national average of 54%.

The newly-skilled workforce had an immediate impact on several key metrics across Oxfordshire County Council.
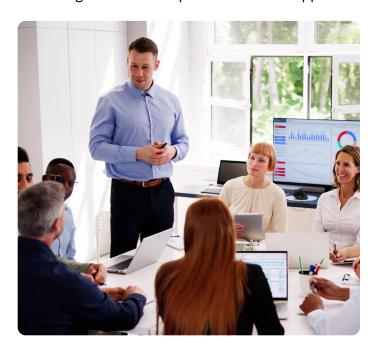
Efficiency was significantly improved, with **more than 260 hours saved annually** in safeguarding operations and EV infrastructure project refinement **time reduced by 50%.**

More than £3.5m of debt resolution was achieved when management facilitated a team-wide improvement by passing on the skills they had learned during the apprenticeships offered via the Data and Digital Academy.

Safeguarding operations have been upgraded, through trend analysis and improved monitoring of risks in care homes.

Decision-making was transformed, with better insights used to fuel smarter resource allocation and policy planning.

Finally, employees trained in data skills are becoming internal champions of the new approach.

> **"Giving employees cutting-edge training... is essential for maintaining a competitive edge and fostering innovation within the organisation."**
>
> Michelle Jones, Apprenticeship Lead
> **Oxfordshire County Council**

A future secured on the foundations of data literacy

Oxfordshire County Council now has ambitious plans to scale its Data and Digital Academy, supporting more employees and providing additional training for those who have previously enrolled.

The council's success is serving as a blueprint for other local authorities across England and Wales. Learners have reported improved confidence in data handling, reporting, and analytics.

The Data and Digital Academy is building organisational confidence to tackle complex challenges with digital solutions – setting up Oxfordshire County Council for enduring, long-term success.