Keeping specialist GIS skills up-to-date

OSNI

The Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland, part of Land and Property Services, is renowned for its expertise in mapping and geospatial analysis. It invests annually in ArcGIS training from Esri UK & Ireland to help it ensure that its specialists have the advanced, up-to-date skills they need to advise government departments.

The Challenge

- Keep the specialist skills of over 35 ArcGIS users up-to-date

The Benefits

- Convenient and cost-effective virtual training
- Training available to more employees
- Up-to-date skills for delivering specialist services
- Confidence in work for government stakeholders and the general public

The Challenge

Within the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland (OSNI), there is a group of highly skilled geographic information system (GIS) experts known as the Northern Ireland Mapping Agreement (NIMA) Support Team. These specialists provide geospatial advice and services for a wide range of stakeholders in government departments and other public sector bodies.

Since its inception in 2009, the NIMA Support Team has used Esri's ArcGIS suite of solutions to help customers and stakeholders find answers to complex questions on topics ranging from changes in the natural environment to public health concerns and the delivery of government services for citizens. The data and mapping products generated by the team with ArcGIS are used to evidence, support and inform government policies, so it is imperative for the team to be able to optimise their use of the latest technologies and apply the most advanced geospatial techniques and analyses.

The Solution

OSNI leverages a variety of ArcGIS training courses from Esri UK & Ireland annually. New and existing members of the NIMA Support Team take part in at least three courses per year, which helps the organisation to ensure that everyone's skills are at the same level. Recent courses provided by Esri UK & Ireland for OSNI include 'Getting started with Lidar', 'Creating and Editing Data with ArcGIS Pro,' 'Creating Web Applications using Web AppBuilder for ArcGIS' and 'Sharing GIS Content using ArcGIS.'

Previously, OSNI selected classroom-style courses that took place in Belfast, Aylesbury or Dublin or at its own premises. However, to maintain its training programme during the COVID-19 pandemic, the organisation started to take advantage of Esri UK & Ireland's virtual courses. Its experience with this new training format was so positive that the organisation now consistently leverages Esri UK & Ireland's catalogue of virtual courses.

Employees who are taking part in virtual ArcGIS training courses do not have to have ArcGIS software installed on their local devices, as all of the technology needed for the course is delivered via web-based applications. The trainer can see everyone's screens and intervene to provide one-on-one support to anyone who needs it during exercises. "I like the technology that Esri UK & Ireland has employed for its virtual courses," says Rico Santiago, Deputy Head of Business Development, Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland. "Esri UK and Ireland's virtual platform facilitates effective learning from the comfort of our own homes."

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Rico Santiago, Deputy Head of Business Development, Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland

The Learning Services group at Esri UK & Ireland offers a variety of one, two and three-day virtual courses, suitable for newcomers to GIS and experienced users. As well as open courses, which can be attended by anyone, it can deliver dedicated courses, exclusively for employees from one company. All virtual courses can accommodate up to twelve participants, and OSNI generally books dedicated courses, just for OSNI employees, to enable it to train large numbers of people at the same time and focus on OSNI-specific use cases throughout the course.

The Benefits
Convenient and cost-effective virtual training
OSNI has discovered that virtual training is significantly more convenient and cost-effective than traditional classroom style courses and just as effective. "Esri UK & Ireland's virtual courses provide the same high-quality learning, from certified trainers, without the expense of travel," Santiago says. "While I sometimes miss the face-to-face interaction of a traditional in-person course, the virtual platform is able to facilitate real-time feedback and engagement with classmates and trainers and does so while delivering value for money. I feel the pros of remote training outweigh the cons."

Training available to more employees
By booking dedicated virtual courses for up to twelve of its employees at a time, OSNI benefits from cost efficiencies and can make training available to more people, beyond the twenty-seven members of the NIMA Support Team. In 2021, for example, the virtual training programme was extended to ten additional people from other OSNI teams, and thirty seven employees benefited from ArcGIS learning services in total.

Up-to-date skills for delivering specialist services
Providing regular training for members of the NIMA Support Team helps OSNI to uphold the reputation of this specialist group. "Customers and stakeholders come to us for expert GIS services and support," Santiago explains. "Esri UK & Ireland's learning services keep our ArcGIS skills up-to-date and enable us to continue to live up to and exceed our reputation as the geospatial and mapping specialists within the public sector in Northern Ireland."

Confidence in work for government stakeholders
The regular ArcGIS training that OSNI employees receive enables them to support their government stakeholders with confidence. In recent projects, expert GIS users have worked with the Department of Health and The Executive Office to support the COVID-19 response in Northern Ireland. They have also supported a variety of schemes with the Department of Infrastructure, using the latest ArcGIS functionality to address complex issues like flood risk and management, and help deliver departmental objectives. Santiago comments that "Regular training ensures we understand the technologies we are using and gives us added confidence in our work."

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