



An Excellence Gateway case study

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Blackburn College: LSIS Improve Teaching and Learning through Technology

Summary

In a bid to change the culture of teaching to be more inclusive, Blackburn College redesigned its ILT training programme to teach and promote the use of assistive technology in mainstream lessons.



Blackburn
College

Initially the aim of this project was to develop and deliver learning technology workshops tailored to five different curriculum centres after the college secured £10,000 of LSIS funding for its project. However, an initial staff survey found that there was a gap in the use and understanding of assistive technology and this became an important element of this project alongside the other training.

About Blackburn College

Blackburn College has been providing education for over 120 years and is one of the largest colleges with a University Centre in the country.

It currently has over 15,000 students of all ages, backgrounds, abilities and interests, studying on courses from Entry Level through to Masters Degrees. Courses are designed to create the skilled, qualified people needed to help this lively, harmonious region of Pennine Lancashire to thrive and develop further.

The challenge

- When identifying staff needs and their interest in technology a survey found that staff did not know about the existing assistive technology software available at the college or how to use it;

- Students who have learning difficulties are looked after by the learning support team once they identify themselves as having a disability. As a result, not all staff were aware of the need or were taking the responsibility to make the mainstream classroom inclusive;
- Staff didn't understand the benefits of using assistive technology and how easily they can develop inclusive teaching practice;
- Students with minor learning difficulties who didn't want to identify themselves as having a disability were missing out on benefiting from assistive technology resources as they weren't being used in mainstream teaching;
- Some of the staff didn't use computers e.g. construction and health and beauty staff, so it was a steep learning curve to understand the technology available.



Image 1: Blackburn College

The activity

Information, Learning Technology (ILT) champions, staff nominated by centre heads and general staff who expressed an interest were surveyed about technology.

As a result of findings five full day workshops were run which were tailored to the five centres and assistive technology was taught as a separate theme to everyone.

Xiaoxia Wang, E-learning Coordinator said “Our aim is to build upon work already begun by embedding e-learning activities within curriculum design providing learners with improved access & diverse delivery methods in order to increase motivation, engagement and inclusion.”

Identified staff were trained in technologies such as mobile devices, audio/video, social networking, good practice and case studies along with a separate assistive technology session.

JISC RSC Northwest provided two hour sessions over 3 days on assistive technology (Mystudybar). Staff also learnt about software available at the college e.g. ‘Read and Write Gold’ and ‘Mindmap’.

The outcomes

A total of 82 staff took part in the project and 74 were trained and made aware of specific technologies for their centre. All staff were shown a range of assistive technologies available with the aim of promoting an inclusive practice across the college.

Staff who attended the training had to write an action plan of how they would cascade the technology into their centre and what technologies they would use in their teaching.

- 96.8% of staff surveyed said they would use the assistive technology and software that they were shown;
- The most popular software was 'Photostory', 'Read and Write Gold' and 'Audacity';
- 80% of respondents said they would use multimedia files for teaching and learning.

Staff were given USB sticks with the assistive technology apps and programmes on it for easy use.

As a result of the project findings training on assistive technology is now offered on a monthly basis to all staff through the Learning Resource team.

The impact

Students were interviewed to get feedback on how using technology in the classroom and online impacted their learning experiences. The feedback was very positive: students said they loved the VLE course pages with multi-media content especially the music and film clips;

Trained staff realised how easy it was to use assistive technology and this has influenced the way they developed their teaching activity and learning resources. As Jane Cooke, E-learning Manager noted; "Embedding assistive technology in the e-learning workshops achieved a real success in increasing staff awareness of using technology to improve accessibility and inclusivity in teaching and learning."

Hospitality Lecturer Iain Steele says of the training; "We collaborated with the learning support team during the project to promote assistive technology software available to use across the college. In the future this collaboration could be extended to providing CPD training sessions... It inspired me to get involved in setting up my L3 professional Cookery Moodle site which although has been top loaded and a lot of work, has been so fun to do. It is to me the 'taste sensation, the garlic bread of learning experience for students...It is without a doubt the way forward for learners, their parents and employers."

The lessons learned

Liz Butterworth, Project Officer, explains that the process of adopting a data dashboard forces you to look at key issues like:

- Fitness of purpose of systems and processes;
- Minimising duplication of data;
- How best to link databases;
- Recognition of key fields on each database;
- Quality of data held on each database.

To replicate this example of creating a data dashboard a learning provider would need:

- Some resource to buy in a commercial dashboard;
- Staff with technical skills to be able to write the code that extracts the data from the original system;
- Knowledge of the original systems data;
- Buy-in from senior management;
- A clear set of KPIs for their organisation.

Useful links

- [Blackburn College](#)
- [Moodle at Blackburn College](#) - Enrolment key will be released upon request

Links to related case studies

- [Loughborough College: Managing your data using a commercial dashboard](#)
- [Gateway College: Opening up learner data across an organisation](#)

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