

# **Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment (OTLA) Action Research Project**

## **Bridging the Gap**

**Westminster Adult Education Service – June 2022**

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For further information regarding the Shaping Success Action Research programme and this project go to <https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-8/>.

The programme was delivered on behalf of the Education and Training Foundation by:



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# Bridging the Gap

## Westminster Adult Education Service

### SUMMARY

This project actively engaged learners with diverse needs and disabilities to access components of the Essential Digital Skills (EDS) qualification by simplifying them into bite-sized tasks. Key to the success was the collaboration of EDS tutors with Diversity and Inclusion tutors who together reviewed and redesigned existing materials to better suit the needs of these learners.

### RATIONALE

We have been mindful that the EDS qualification is complicated and challenging for many learners with diverse needs and disabilities: components include navigation elements such as menus, hyperlinks and browser navigation control. There is a vast gap between Entry Level qualifications and the EDS qualification so our project aimed to bridge the gap so that learners with diverse needs and disabilities would be able to progress without feeling disadvantaged or overwhelmed.

Furthermore, we identified a need to support their daily digital literacy, thereby preventing them from being excluded from everyday tasks, e.g. universal credit, accessing medical appointments, etc.

One of the significant tasks was to adapt existing resources to make them more understandable by reducing words and adding images, to ensure that they were inclusive and accessible.

### Other Contextual Information

Our action research was part of the Education and Training Foundation's OTLA 8 programme. It took place in the Diversity and Inclusion department of Westminster Adult Education Service. We started working with the Pre-Entry Level beginners ICT class over a 12-week period. For some learners, they had never used a computer before and were very unfamiliar with typing, using a mouse and any functions that many of us take for granted. 90% of learners did not own a mobile phone. In term 2 we were able to extend the reach of the project to include an additional group of learners, whose digital operating level was more advanced at Entry Levels 1 and 2.

### APPROACH

Our team took the following approach:

We started by trying to encourage learners and carers to engage with computers by sharing a simple PowerPoint and an A4 set of visual images providing step-by-step instructions on how to log on at home. Due to limited uptake of this, it was difficult to provide homework tasks. Also, some learners did not have computers at home.

In the classroom, with one-to-one support, all learners were able to log on to a computer. We discovered that without being able to practise between sessions, much of the learning was forgotten. A further consideration was that without a teacher or support assistant at home, learners did not have the confidence or ability to work outside the classroom. We therefore took the decision

to extend the duration of the course for this group of learners so that they could practise and repeat small tasks to aid their long-term memory development.

In term 2 we worked with Entry Level learners, which led to more success. These learners were able to log on and follow instructions, though still needed support before moving on to EDS content. We also found that these learners were more actively involved because they were more aware that they are taking part in the research project

The research project team devised simple tasks and resources in collaboration with the EDS tutors. Each step was broken down for learners and practised, to ensure sequential learning and to aid long term memory, before moving on.

As learner confidence grew, we were able to increase levels of activity to two tasks over a five-week period. One learner in the first group has now become a digital champion and is supporting other learners. As the project progressed, we recorded our progress on a Padlet, which is shown in the screenshot below.

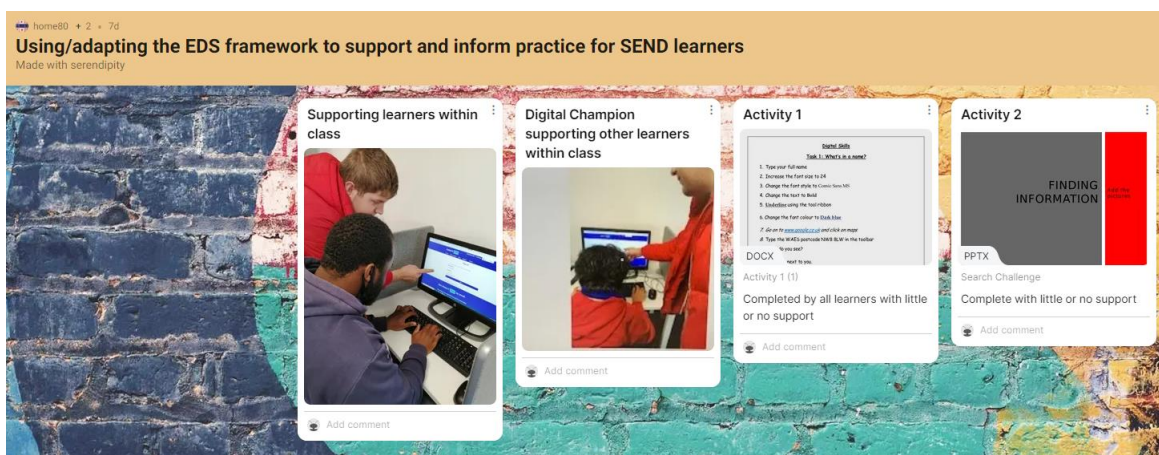


Figure 1.1 Screenshot of research project Padlet, used to document project progress.

## OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

### Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Having realised that we needed to try our approach with a different group of learners, we found that the resources were extremely effective. Our 'what's in a name?' resource (Appendix 4.2) enabled learners to show how they could change the font, embolden text, underline, change colour and this led to a visible sense of achievement with the learners. The second resource was a research task that involved learners using the cut and paste function to add images and text to a PowerPoint template. This task invited learners to choose images themselves and also encouraged them to find out more about iconic people, such as Nelson Mandela. The third resource was an internet quiz comprising 15 questions in which learners were required to research and/or upload images. Their engagement, motivation and increased confidence were evident as they competed against each other to complete the task within an hour. It was clear to see that they had all progressed during the project and it was so encouraging to see how much they enjoyed taking part.

With each of the tasks described above, breaking them down into step by step verbal instructions was important. Not only did this lead to success with the tasks themselves, it also increased confidence and learners were able to take pride in what they had achieved. We learnt that the best

results came from modelling the task rather than giving written instructions.

Below we share some feedback from learners in relation to task 1:

“I was able to do the task easily as it was explained to me” (Learner, LA).

“I found the task easy” (Learner, SH).

“Because I was in the ICT Beginners class I was able to do the task and I was able to work by myself” (Learner, HS).

Feedback from task 3 was very positive and they collectively asked if they could do something similar again. (Learners in Foundation Skills L2).

## Professional Development

Professional Standard	How our project outcomes demonstrate this standard
<p><b>2. Evaluate and challenge your practice, values and beliefs.</b></p>	<p>Our project provided time and space for us to come together to challenge our assumptions that learners with diverse needs cannot attain EDS qualifications. By engaging in research activities with the learner, we found that they are able to perform tasks and produce assignments, as it is tailor made for them. We started from a position of learners being novices at using the computer and moved onto learners who can complete basic digital skill tasks.</p>
<p><b>3. Inspire, motivate and raise aspirations of learners through your enthusiasm and knowledge.</b></p>	<p>Our research project demonstrates this standard through the following quotes from learners:</p> <p>“I have enjoyed being the class, I learnt in login and wait, I did a PowerPoint presentation, I have done some quizzes, I did some typing, and I sent my work to you via Teams and id CHECKS and telling time. Also researched Black history, we did famous Sportsmen”.</p> <p>“We learnt about emojis and put things in the chat”.</p>
<p><b>5. Value and promote social and cultural diversity, equality of opportunity and inclusion.</b></p>	<p>We were able to provide a learning experience where all of our learners thrived together in a mixed ability setting. Their uniqueness provided a richness and depth to learning outcomes.</p>
<p><b>13. Motivate and inspire learners to promote achievement and develop their skills to enable progression.</b></p>	<p>HS has been asked if he wants to move into another a more advanced group where he will be studying Digital Skills Entry Level 1; he has agreed.</p>

## Organisational Development

We collaborated with the digital skills department to better understand the EDS curriculum and the current challenges faced in its delivery to mainstream learners. We identified ESOL specific challenges and used this knowledge to inform how best we would break down the EDS tasks to meet the needs of our learners with diverse needs and disabilities. The experiences broadened our horizon on the complexity of the EDS qualifications and the difficulties our learners face in terms of employment as well as daily life if they remain disengaged with the digital world. In addition to this, digital poverty was an underlying issue that is present for learners with no requirement for additional support. This in turn emphasised the ever-increasing gap between those who are fully conversant with the digital world and those who are not.

## LEARNING FROM THIS PROJECT

### What worked well:

- Two digital champions have been appointed within the Diversity and Inclusion team (both learners). The digital champions are going into lower level groups to support learners there. This is a very positive outcome of our research project and will be beneficial for all involved, in terms of employability, learner self-esteem etc. This initiative will continue after the project and will potentially lead to a more structured peer to peer support system within the organisation.
- Liaising with the digital team was key to the success of this initiative and closer collaboration will continue after the research project ends.
- We learnt that modelling and visual resources are more effective for learning than written instructions.
- We learnt that breaking down tasks into small steps led to success.
- The third task demonstrated the distance the learners had travelled during the project.

### Even better if:

- We are hopeful that the gap will be bridged so much that learners will be able to progress into a formal EDS class. Some learners are likely to do this in September, but we hope that our project will make it easier for others.
- The first group would benefit from an extension to their course, so they can complete some of the resources and can visibly identify their progress on a termly basis.
- We were inspired by a project being carried out by the project team at Haringey Adult Learning Service which involved peer to peer mentoring. This could be an outcome for us and perhaps we could collaborate with this team to make this happen.

## REFERENCES

Digital Poverty Alliance. (2022). *'Together we can end digital poverty once and for all'*. [online]. Available at: [Digitalpovertyalliance.org](https://digitalpovertyalliance.org) [accessed 30.3.22].

Holmes, H and Burgess, G. (2021) *'Pay the wi-fi or feed the children. Coronavirus has intensified the digital divide'*. University of Cambridge [online]. Available at: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/digitaldivide> [accessed 30.3.22].



# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: The Project Team

Project Role	Name	Job Role	Contact
Project Lead	Jaspal Dhaliwal	Head of Maths, English and Digital and Inclusion	<a href="mailto:jdhaliwal@waes.ac.uk">jdhaliwal@waes.ac.uk</a>
Project Deputy	Maysie Brown	Diversity and Inclusion Co-ordinator	<a href="mailto:mbrown@waes.ac.uk">mbrown@waes.ac.uk</a>
Project Team	Lara Akinwunmi	Diversity and Inclusion Tutor	<a href="mailto:oakinwunmi@waes.ac.uk">oakinwunmi@waes.ac.uk</a>
Project Team	Kirke-Liss Mikk	ESOL - Tutor	<a href="mailto:kmikk@waes.ac.uk">kmikk@waes.ac.uk</a>
Project Team	Theresah Adu-Boateng	Diversity and Inclusion Tutor	<a href="mailto:taduboaeng@waes.ac.uk">taduboaeng@waes.ac.uk</a>
Project Team	Sumaiya Ali	Digital Tutor	<a href="mailto:suali@waes.ac.uk">suali@waes.ac.uk</a>
Project Team	Raymond Harte	Course Leader Digital	<a href="mailto:rharte@waes.ac.uk">rharte@waes.ac.uk</a>
Mentor	Catherine Gray	Mentor	<a href="mailto:c.gray@eastcoast.ac.uk">c.gray@eastcoast.ac.uk</a>
Research Group Lead	Sue Lownsborough	RGL	<a href="mailto:Sue.lownsborough@outlook.com">Sue.lownsborough@outlook.com</a>

## Appendix 2: Learner Case Studies

We tracked three learners across the project, LBK, LH and HS. All three learners undertake courses within the Diversity and Inclusion department.

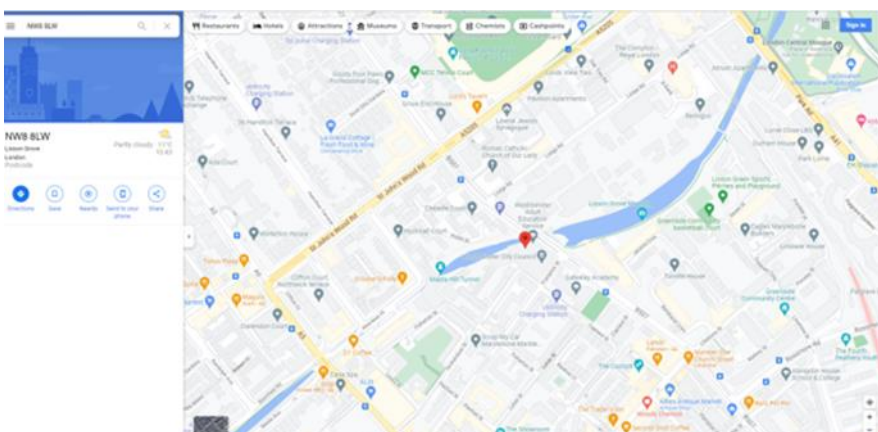
HS was enrolled on the Beginners ICT course and flourished immediately due to his prior knowledge and understanding at user level of basic ICT. He progressed onto Foundation Skills Entry Level 1 course in term 2. This course included a Digital Skills Entry Level 1 qualification. HS has limited responsive language and reduced mobility in one arm.

LH was enrolled on Foundation Skills Entry Level 2 course in term 1 (as a progression from the previous academic year). This course included a Digital Skills Entry Level 2 qualification. She was also enrolled onto Beginners ICT. LH has epilepsy, autism and is a very anxious learner with no previous background in digital skills. During Beginners ICT the tutor quickly identified her strong aptitude to computers and harnessed this talent by allowing her to support her peers, who were struggling in this course.

LBK was enrolled on Foundation Skills Entry Level 2 course in term 1 (as a progression from the previous academic year). LBK has mild learning difficulties, since being part of this project LBK excelled into the post of learner digital champion, supporting learners within his teaching group.

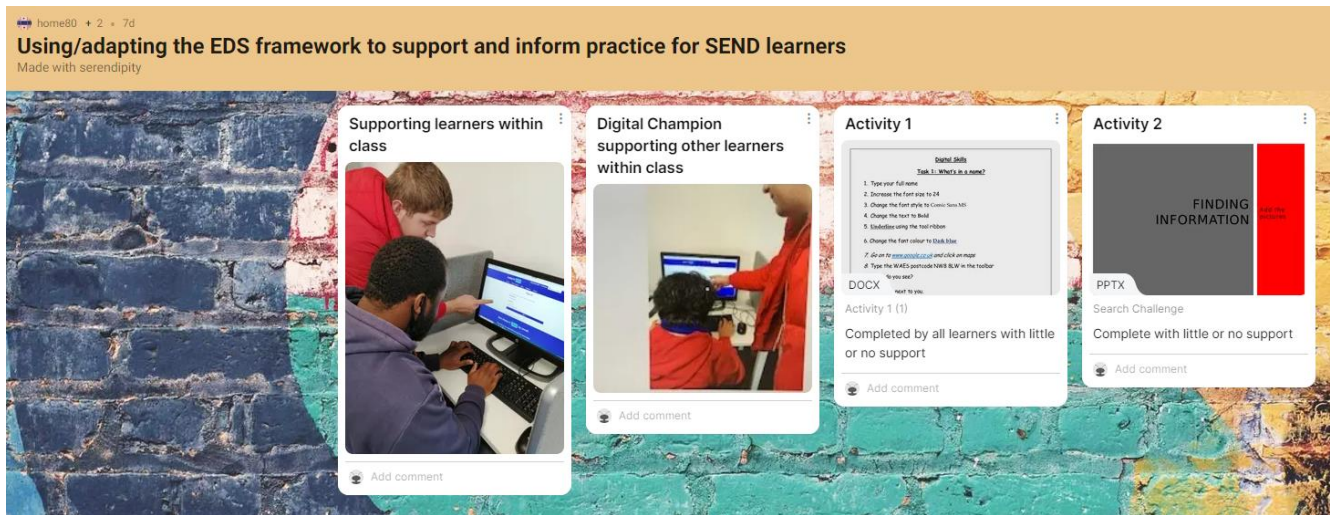
All three learners have benefited from the action research by assisting peers with their digital skills courses. This included helping low level learners complete online research, such as project work undertaken on Nelson Mandela. This involved using search engines to select and find information, copy and paste onto MS Word, editing including, font type, font size, underlining and bolding of text.

Whilst teaching reverted back to face to face sessions, the use of MS Teams was still an integral part of the delivery and there was significant challenge for all learners to log and use Teams as a platform to access resources and communicate effectively with each other. As part of this the three identified learners assisted their peers with using this platform, which included from the very first steps of username and password. With memory recall being a significant challenge for learners operating at the lower ability scale, strategies were implemented to overcome this. E.g., laminating usernames and passwords for each learner so that they had a quick and effective method to access learning.



## Appendix 3: Project Padlet

Below is a screenshot of a Padlet devised by the project lead and the Digital champion, which helps to show what resources we are using and highlights the support the Digital champions are giving the learners. Explore the Padlet here: [https://padlet.com/c\\_collins2/OTLA8\\_WAES](https://padlet.com/c_collins2/OTLA8_WAES)



## Appendix 4: Project Activities and Resources

### Appendix 4.1. Using MS Teams resources devised last year for OTLA 7

You will be asked to login....

Email: yourstudentnumber@waes.ac.uk  
(e.g.123456@waes.ac.uk)

Password: 6-Digit date of birth

### Appendix 4.2. What is in a name? resources devised by EDS team, simplified for learners

**Entry 3 to Essential Digital Skills**

**Task 1: What's in a name?**

1. Type your full name
2. Increase the font size to 24
3. Change the font style to Palatino
4. Change the text to Bold
5. Underline using the tool ribbon
6. Change the font colour to Dark blue
7. Go on to [www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk) and click on maps
8. Type your address in the toolbar.

### Appendix 4.3: Activity 2 – Finding information resources devised by EDS team, simplified for learners

7.2 FINDING INFORMATION  
SEARCHING CHALLENGE B

MELON MANGELA

PHONE

BARRY POTTER

TOWER OF LONDON

Add the correct pictures to the slides

Make sure you add at least 3 pictures per slide


## Appendix 4.4: Activity 3 – Internet activity devised by EDS team


### Internet activity


Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Use the Internet to complete the quiz below. Write your answers on the sheet on page 2.


Print out the pictures at the end of the quiz with your name and the date that you finished it on.


1 Name a film that Marlon Brando was in. 


2 What is the name of the highest mountain in the world? 


3 What year was Prince William born? 


4 Find a picture of a dog. Copy and paste into Word. 


5 How much is a pair of Nike trainers? 


10 What is the name of Tom Cruis wife? 


9 Who won the X Factor in 2009? 


8 What day is Dr Who on TV? 

7 How much to download the song Lego House? 


6 How much is a Pompey football shirt? 

11 Find a picture of a place in Southsea copy and paste into Word 

12 Find the name of a library in Portsmouth. 

13 How much is Lynx shower gel? 

14 Find a picture of a hair brush. Copy and paste into Word. 

15 Find a picture of a fireman. Copy and paste it into Word. 

Page 1 of 1

## Appendix 5: Participants and Stakeholders

No of learners?	<b>25</b>	No of staff?	<b>8</b>
No of organisations?	<b>1</b>	No of employers/ stakeholders?	<b>1</b>

## Appendix 6: Research/ Evaluation Approach

<b>Participant/observer</b> (e.g. practitioner reflective accounts, logs)	<b>X</b>	<b>Interview/survey</b> (e.g. polls, questionnaires, learner interviews)	<b>X</b>
<b>Observation of practice</b> (in person, video, observation notes)	<b>X</b>	<b>Document analysis</b> (e.g. learner work, session plans, annotated resources, policies)	<b>X</b>
<b>Custom test/assessment</b> (of knowledge, skill, attitude, participation) for your 'intervention'		<b>High-stakes learner assessment</b> (e.g. A Level results, End Point Assessment, BTECs)	<b>X</b>
<b>Before/after assessment</b> (e.g. measures of progress or change in attainment, participation)		<b>Comparative trial</b> (e.g. comparing participants' outcomes against a 'control' group)	
<b>Other</b> (specify):	Action Research.		

# Thankyou

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