

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

**English and digital tools in the prison  
classroom**

**Novus – 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:



NATECLA



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# English and digital tools in the prison classroom

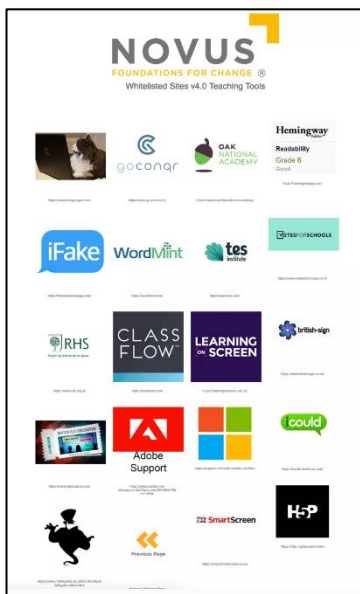
## Novus

### SUMMARY

This project explored how to improve the embedding of digital tools within English sessions across Novus' provision. The project set out to research, design, and deliver a bespoke training offer for teachers of English across prisons in the West Midlands.

### RATIONALE

The Centre for Social Justice (2021:4) released a report which cited prisoners as being frequently amongst the most 'digitally excluded' members of society. Furthermore, the Coates Review (2016) made recommendations regarding a need for increased incorporation of digital skills within the prison curriculum. This project was informed by previous and existing CPD training offers made available by Novus relating to enhancing the learning experience through effective use of digital tools that have been developed since the publication of this report.



When commenting on the Coates Review, Crabbe (2016:6) highlighted that a key theme related to prison staff being 'risk-averse' when it came to using information technology. Additionally, it was discovered that the Virtual Campus (VC), whilst widely available across the majority of prison establishments, was felt to be too difficult to access. It was the aim of this project to further demystify the process of accessing the VC to enable colleagues to make greater use of digital tools accessible via the VC (see left), enhancing the classroom experience for learners.

A lower-than-expected utilisation of digital tools being used to enhance learning, teaching and assessment within English teaching, particularly across the West Midlands was identified by Novus digital leads which led to the project being situated within this region.

This project therefore aimed to investigate the reasons behind the resistance to the use of digital tools within learning and further raise awareness of the digital tools available to colleagues to support their delivery. This was intended to be achieved through the creation of a tailored set of training delivered across the West Midlands region.

### Other Contextual Information

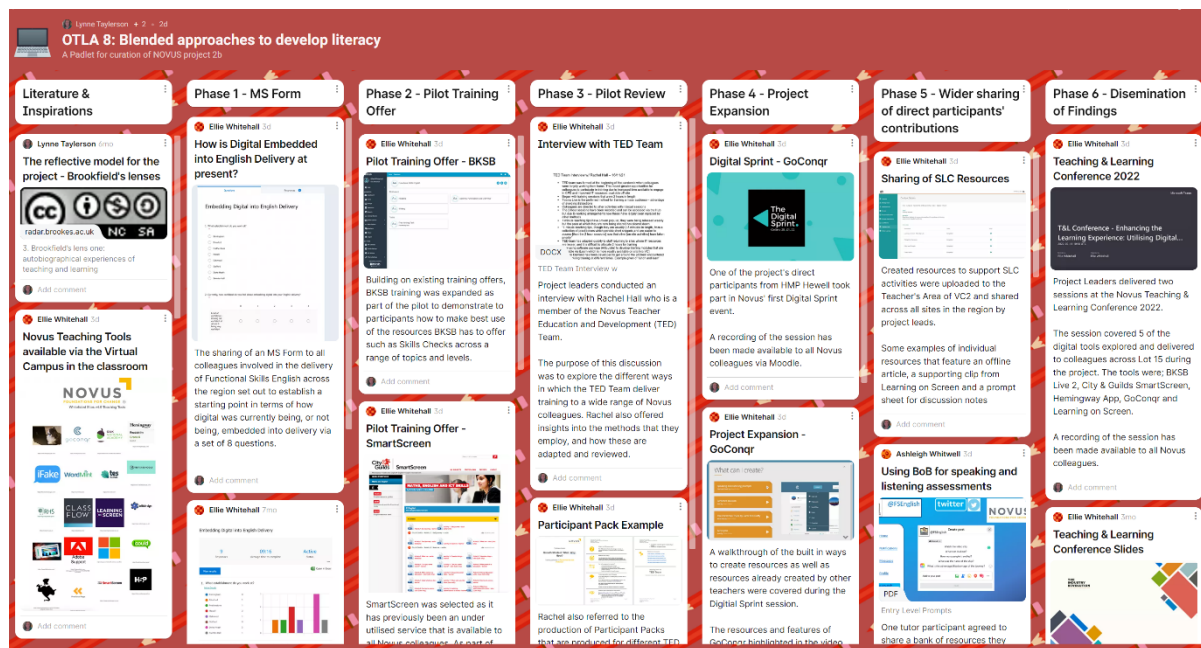
The setting for our project was all prisons situated in the West Midlands region (Lot 15) with a focus on English. The region comprises of: HMP Birmingham, HMPYOI Brinsford, HMP Featherstone, HMP Hewell, HMP Oakwood, HMP Stafford, HMPYOI Stoke Heath and HMPYOI Swinfen Hall. As part of the project, we were able to connect with colleagues to deliver training and provide support to

them with their embedding of digital tools into their delivery.

Leaders for the project were both based at prison establishments within this region and have a combined 11 years' experience teaching within this context. Project leaders worked as joint Virtual Campus Digital Champions within the West Midlands and were committed to supporting colleagues to utilise digital skills to enhance the overall learning experience.

## APPROACH

Note that examples of digital assets and comments from participants in the project phases below can be found [on the project Padlet](#) (shown below, also see Appendix 3).



### Phase 1:

Embedding Digital into English Delivery

1. What establishment do you work at?

- Birmingham
- Brinsford
- Featherstone
- Hewell
- Oakwood
- Stafford
- Stoke Heath
- Swinfen Hall

2. Currently, how confident do you feel about embedding digital into your English delivery?

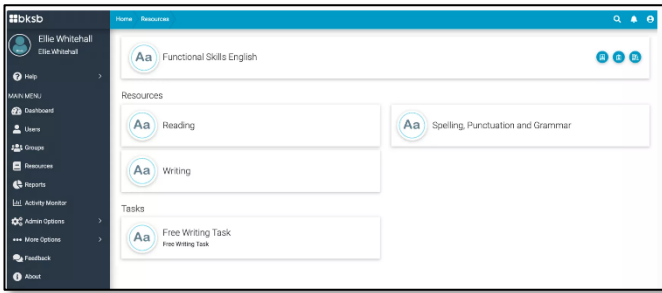
0 1 2 3 4

Level of confidence - 0 being not confident at all and 5 being very confident

A MS Form-based questionnaire was shared with all colleagues involved in the delivery of Functional Skills English across all prisons within the West Midlands region. A total of 9 responses were received from six of the eight prisons across the Lot.

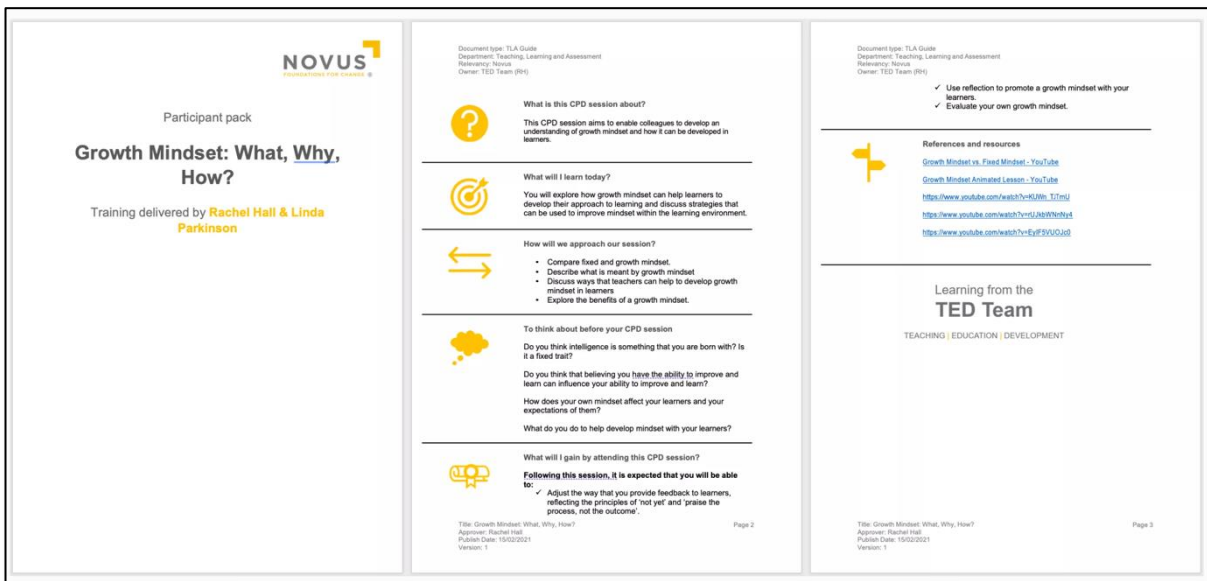
The purpose of this MS Form was to establish a starting point in terms of embedding digital into their delivery across the region.

Replies assisted project leads in assessing where tutors felt they were able to embed digital well already. They also enabled project leads to react to responses relating to specified barriers which could be addressed within the training offer as well as gather previously unconsidered ideas surrounding which digital tools to incorporate into the training package.

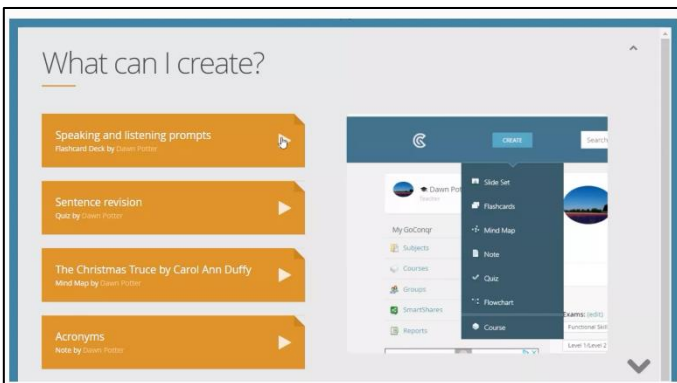


**Phase 2:** A pilot was conducted using the two prison establishments at which project leads are based. The pilot training programme made use of BKSB Live 2 and [City & Guilds SmartScreen](#) (see left) to introduce the digital tools that could be employed within the prison classroom.

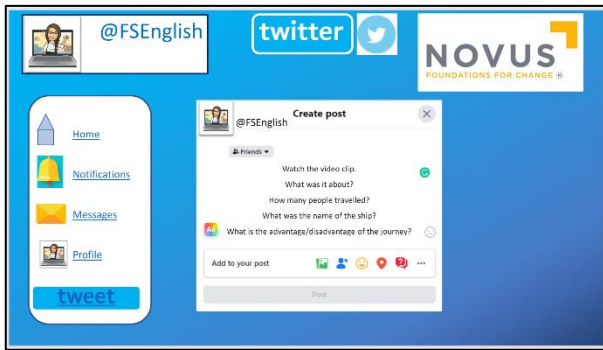
**Phase 3:** A review of the pilot training offer provided was conducted using quotes from focus groups and one-to-one discussions which took place immediately following delivery of pilot training package.



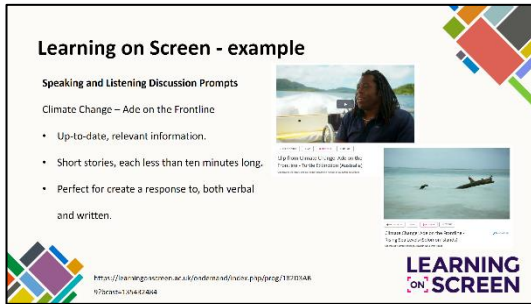
Consultation also occurred with a member of the Teacher Education Development (TED) Team within Novus. Novus's TED team were formed during 2020 and have developed a wide range of CPD for colleagues across Novus delivered in a variety of ways. Project leads discussed the most effective methods when delivering training or disseminating information to colleagues that can be used to enhance delivery such as [participant packs](#) like the one shown above.



**Phase 4:** The project was expanded to include the Learning on Screen and [Go Congr tools](#) to the training offer and delivery was extended to an additional three sites within the region: HMP Featherstone, HMP Birmingham and HMP Swinfen Hall.



**Phase 5:** Direct participants created further digital learning resources and shared these within the region [via VC](#) - Virtual Campus 2, example shown here. Further feedback was collected from these training sessions delivered to colleagues.



**Phase 6: Dissemination of findings.** Two separate sessions entitled Enhancing the Learning Experience: Utilising Digital Skills in the English Classroom were prepared and delivered at the 2022 Novus day of the LTE Group’s Teaching and Learning Conference. This involved colleagues, not just from the West Midlands but across all Novus sites including Novus Cambria.

## OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

### Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Use of the initial survey acted as a really effective scoping activity to determine where pockets of enthusiastic digital learning existing practice lay and what the barriers were to wider learning technology use in Functional Skills English delivery. Analysis of the feedback surveys allowed a bespoke CPD offer to be planned and facilitated across the West Midlands region initially using BKS Live 2 and City and Guilds SmartScreen. Feedback added to the evidence on what further support tutors want and where their interests lie.

The CPD provided allowed the project team to effectively model a range of different learning technology tools and contextualised English learning resources including Learning on Screen and Go Conqr. The tutors attending found the training beneficial:

The training allowed me to familiarise myself with learning resources which are available on the Virtual Campus.”

“I found the training very beneficial”

“A screen archive called BoB allowed us to make short educational clips. I have found this extremely useful for SLC activities”

“I intend to use BoB for SLC activities and I have started to make resources focused on the topics covered in the short clips”

“I am now developing resources which incorporate video clips for learners to respond to.

Tutors were able to familiarise themselves with learning resources available on the Virtual Campus that they were previously unaware of and use these in their practice.

Tutors noted that extending use of learning technology, for example the use of short video clips as discussion stimuli and accessing screen archives, has widened their resource repertoire and resulted in learners being far more engaged than they were in the past.

## Professional Development

Professional Standard	How our project outcomes demonstrate this standard
<b>4. Be creative and innovative in selecting and adapting strategies to help learners to learn</b>	This project took the approach of teachers as learners. Participants needed to embrace digital as a way of offering innovation to them as teachers. It was the intention of the project that these would then be passed on in creative ways to their learners, supporting them in their access to and development of different concepts.
<b>6. Build positive and collaborative relationships with colleagues and learners</b>	This project enabled us to not only strengthen the collaborative relationship between project leads as Digital Champions for the region, but also build collaborative partnerships with colleagues at establishments beyond those at which project leads are based. This collaborative working between colleagues has resulted in the



	sharing of a diverse range of speaking, listening and communication resources to be used with learners across the region which make effective use of the digital tools available.
<b>15. Promote the benefits of technology and support learners in its use</b>	Our project shared with colleagues who, perhaps previously, held sceptical views relating to the use of digital tools in their delivery and shared more widely across the West Midlands region how these same tools could be used effectively to enhance their delivery of Functional Skills English qualifications.

## Organisational Development

This project supported the development of colleagues' working practices by further empowering them to incorporate the digital tools available into their delivery. Participating in the projects enabled the project leads to establish a starting point for the confidence levels of colleagues and work towards increasing these as the project progressed.

The training provided empowered tutors to familiarise themselves with the learning resources available on the Virtual Campus such as the screen archive Box of Broadcasts (BoB) and empowered them to extend their practice by making educational video clips which have resulted in prison learners being far more involved in group discussions.

As a consequence of the project, there are five digital tools that have been identified as proposed routeways into further embedding digital into English delivery consistently following the development of a bespoke training offer: City and Guilds SmartScreen, BKSB (in particular their Skills Check activities), Hemingway App, GoConqr and Learning on Screen.

The project team were also able to extend their professional network and raise their profile by presenting and disseminating the findings and outcomes of this research. A video showcased at the Teaching and Learning Conference demonstrated how the range of digital tools leveraged by the project could be embedded within English delivery. This resource is now available to all colleagues via the Novus Personal Growth and Development webpage.

## LEARNING FROM THIS PROJECT

Work on this project has revealed that there is definitely enthusiasm for the extended use of learning technology by English tutors in a prison environment. Numerous challenges and barriers to leveraging technology exist, including ready access to platforms and devices, familiarity with how to obtain platform user accounts and provision of CPD to extend digital skills and pedagogy. An initial scoping activity was valuable to determine where existing good practice sits and where there is enthusiasm for further learning technology development.

Once a clear picture of the existing landscape has been established, learning technology showcases modelling the use of contextualised examples, in the case of this project in English learning, give tutors the exposure, ideas and impetus they need to become more effective and enthusiastic users of digital tools. Once prison tutors experience how popular use of resources, such

as videos for discussion prompts, are with their learners this gives them encouragement to experiment further with learning technology and digital pedagogy.

## REFERENCES

Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) (2021) *Digital Technology in Prisons: Unlocking relationships, learning and skills in UK prisons*. London: CSJ.

Crabbe, M.J.C. (2016) [Education for Offenders in Prison. Journal of Pedagogic Development Volume 6, Issue 3.](#)

Prisoners' Education Trust (2021) <https://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/2021/07/prisons-after-lockdown-creating-a-positive-environment-for-studying/>

TES (2021) <https://www.tes.com/magazine/archived/call-give-every-prisoner-access-digital-learning>

Prisoner Learning Alliance (2020) <https://prisonerlearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Digital-Divide-Lessons-from-prisons-abroad.pdf>

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: The Project Team

Project Role	Name	Job Role	Contact
Project Lead	Ashleigh Whitwell		awhitwell@novus.ac.uk
Project Lead	Ellie Whitehall	Hub Manager	ewhitehall@novus.ac.uk
Mentor	Lynne Taylerson	CCC mentor	lynne@realtimeeducation.co.uk
Research Group Lead	Bob Read	CCC RGL	bobread945@gmail.com

## Appendix 2: Learner Case Studies

Two direct participants from the project have been identified to be used as learner case studies. It is important to note that for this project, leaders took the approach of tutors as learners.


### Case Study 1 – Tutor at HMP Hewell

Digital activities had been part of this tutor's lessons for a while with them identifying the period of time in 2020 when colleagues were not permitted to be on prison sites as the main reason they had been introduced to new digital tools. This was because they were more readily accessible when working from home.

This tutor was keen to incorporate as many of the digital tools available as possible into their delivery upon returning to the classroom and up to the start of this project had been successful in using tools such as GoConqr and offline social media templates to good effect.

Their involvement as a direct participant in the project has caused them to develop more materials that incorporate digital into their English delivery. Using clips created on Learning on Screen to support learners to meet their speaking, listening and communication requirements has been particularly advantageous. Their [feedback was collected using a Q&A](#) format and has now been used as the basis of an article by the Novus Communications team as part of May 2022's Digital Month.

The advice that this tutor would provide to colleagues on taking advantage of the digital tools that have been showcased as part of this project would be to "not be afraid and keep trying new things".



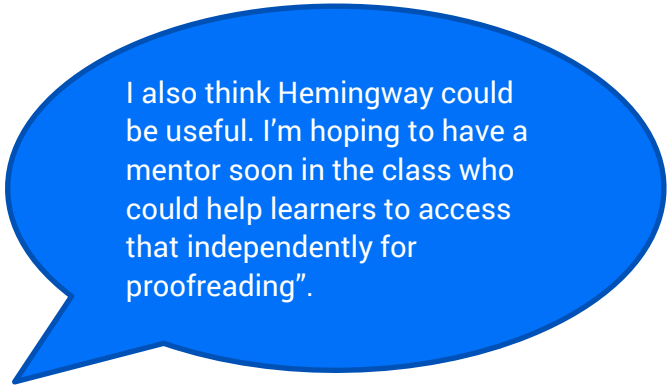
"don't be afraid  
and keep trying  
new things."

### Case Study 2 – Tutor at HMP Stoke Heath

As a consequence of direct participant in this project, this tutor reports to have grown much more confident navigating through the digital tools available in the prison classroom. In particular they commented on how greater access has impacted positively on the ease with which they can now explore the digital tools available, suggesting that 'moving into a classroom with a CleverTouch board has made a big difference for me. I know that I have everything set up and ready to go now and I'm not as worried about having the different activities I've prepared not working when I go to deliver them.'

Learning on Screen has been the standout resource for this direct participant. Resulting from the project they have learnt how to use the tool confidently and developed resources that utilise clips for learners to respond to. They noted that learners are now "much more involved in group discussions that is more interactive than a written piece. They take in the information at a greater level as they have to listen carefully".

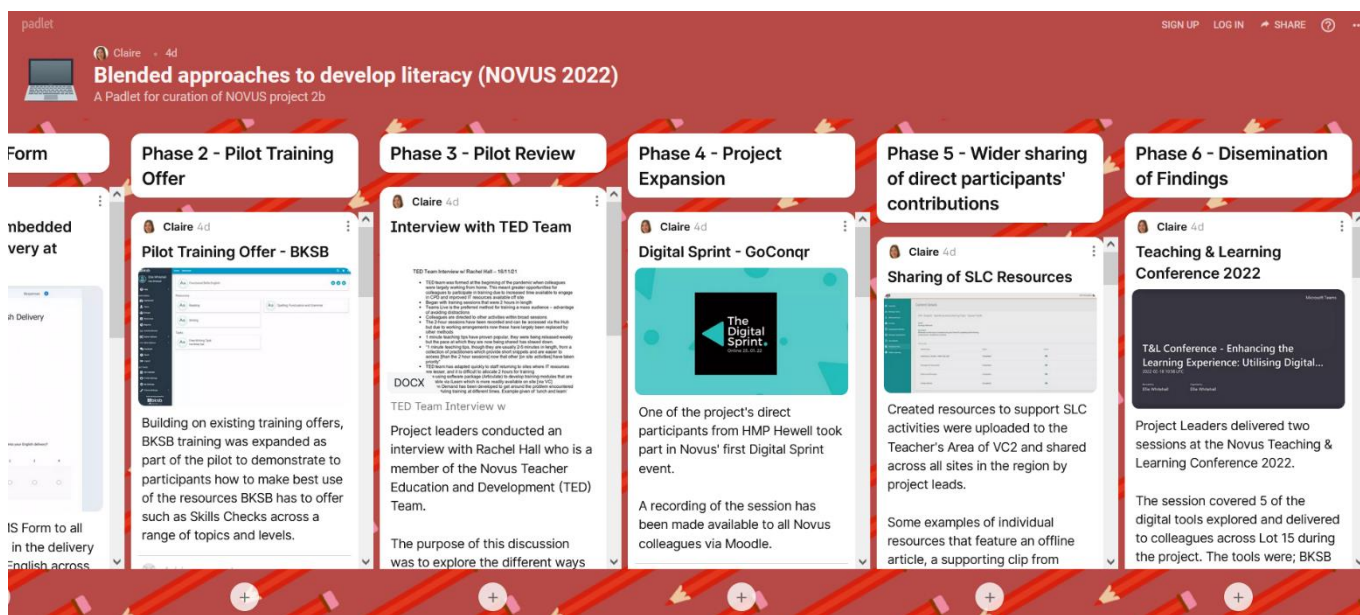
This tutor has also started to look at some of the other digital tools more closely that they will be looking to build into their delivery in the near future. "I've signed up for GoConqr and need to look through more of the resources before creating my own.



## Appendix 3: Project Padlet

As the project progressed, we collected a variety of digital sources and evidence on a Padlet which provides useful further context for this report. The Padlet was structured using the phases outlined in the Approach section above and includes the initial MS Form, details of the pilot training offer and TED review, a list of the digital tools used in the roll out of the offer and resources from the dissemination session at the LTE Group Conference.

The Padlet for this project can be found here: [https://padlet.com/c\\_collins2/OTLA8\\_NOVUS2b](https://padlet.com/c_collins2/OTLA8_NOVUS2b)



## Appendix 4: Participants and Stakeholders

No of teacher learners?	<b>11</b>	No of staff?	<b>52</b>
No of prisoner learners?	<b>40</b>		
No of organisations?	<b>1</b>	No of employers/ stakeholders?	

## Appendix 5: 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>X</b>	<b>High-stakes learner assessment</b> (e.g. A Level results, End Point Assessment, BTECs)	
<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		

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