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

Supporting vocational trainers in prisons to embed EDS in their courses

Novus – June 2022

This resource was produced as part of the Education and Training Foundation's OTLA programme, which was funded by the Department for Education. To learn more about the OTLA programme please visit: https://et-foundation.co.uk/supporting/professional-development/practitioner-led-development-and-research/otla/.

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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Novus

SUMMARY

This project investigated the barriers preventing vocational trainers from embedding digital skills in their course delivery. By creating a bespoke training package with vocationally contextualised resources, these barriers have been reduced and colleagues are better prepared and more confident to support their own learners with the development of digital skills and awareness.

RATIONALE

Many of the vocational workshops and teaching spaces in prisons have limited access to technology resources and equipment due to their location within the prison establishment. For example, workshop spaces are not connected to the education computer network or Virtual Campus. As a result, trainers tend not to adopt digital approaches in their delivery.

This results in a number of barriers to learning: some tutors lack current, up-to-date knowledge of the digital world; some tutors lack confidence and experience in embedding digital learning; learners do not develop their digital skills while studying vocational courses. This is not an isolated issue and is something experienced by vocational trainers across the FE sector (Cattaneo, Antonietti and Rauseo, 2022; Prisoner's Education Trust, 2021; Prisoner Learning Alliance, 2020).

However, embedding digital skills does not solely rely on the availability of digital technology (Sailer, Murböck and Fischer, 2021; Sailer et.al., 2021). Therefore, this project aimed to better understand the wider barriers preventing vocational trainers from embedding digital skills into their delivery to inform the design of a bespoke training package and creation of resources to be used by vocational teams across the West Midlands region.

Other Contextual Information

Our action research activities were carried out with the vocational teams across the West Midlands prison group, with a specific focus on working with vocational trainers from HMP Hewell and HMPYOI Stoke Heath. We worked with three subject specialists, each from a different area of vocational study: catering and hospitality, construction and industrial cleaning. The training package and resources were disseminated across the whole of the West Midlands region, totalling eight different vocational teams.

The resources we chose to create were inspired by the ETF's 'Digital Skills Starters and Enders' cards (ETF, 2018). These are already used widely across the prison education estate and are a simple, quick way of embedding digital skills into lessons without the use of a computer.
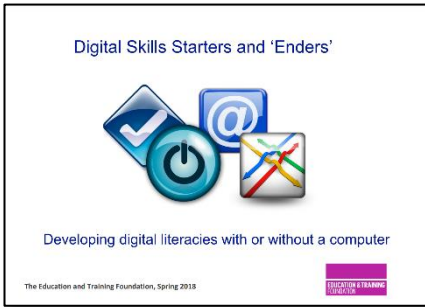
We have adapted this format to focus specifically on vocational subject scenarios, for example, a chef creating a recipe database in a working kitchen or a builder creating a social media presence for their business.

[A Padlet board](#) was used to gather and collate evidence throughout the project, including examples of the resources created and tutor and learner feedback. More details of this can be viewed in Appendix 3. Please view this alongside the report for additional context.
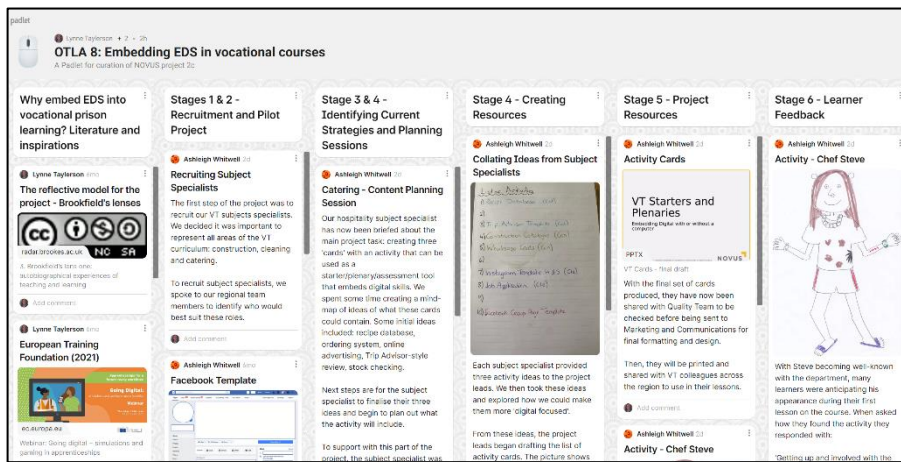

APPROACH

Phase 1 – Recruiting Subject Specialists

Subject specialists in each area of vocational study were identified by the regional manager. All three specialists were briefed on the project aim during a face-to-face meeting with one of the project leaders.

Phase 2 – Pilot Study

Subject specialists were introduced to the pilot study activity: a [Facebook Group Template](#) (pictured here on the left). They were briefed in how the activity should be carried out; learners were invited to fill in the template using information they created for a fictional business linked to their subject area. Subject specialists carried this task out, collecting a number of good examples of how their learners utilised the template and kept a reflective log about the impact of the digital activity on their teaching (see Appendix 3 for further details).
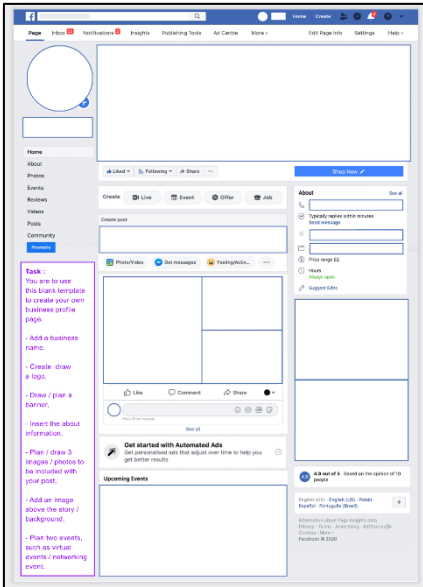
## Phase 3 – Identifying Current Strategies Embedding Digital

Project leaders had planned to sit down with specialists to go through schemes of learning to identifying pre-existing opportunities to embed digital skills. However, this was not necessary with the two specialists as they [already had a bank of ideas](#) for digital activities they could create.
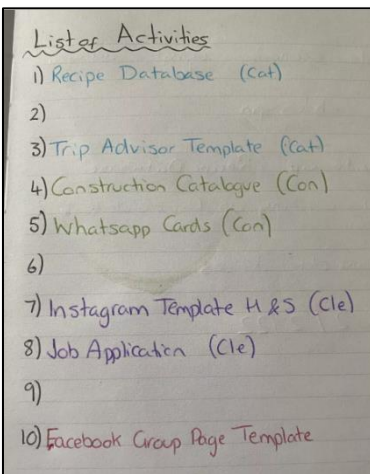
Phase 4 – Planning, Drafting and Creation of Bespoke Resources

Subject specialists were briefed on their task; produce three activity cards that embed digital skills without needing the use of technology.

The project leaders took the final three ideas from each specialist and entered them into the template for the final resource. An online shopping example from a

Construction scenario can be seen here on the right. The full set of cards is on the [Padlet](#).
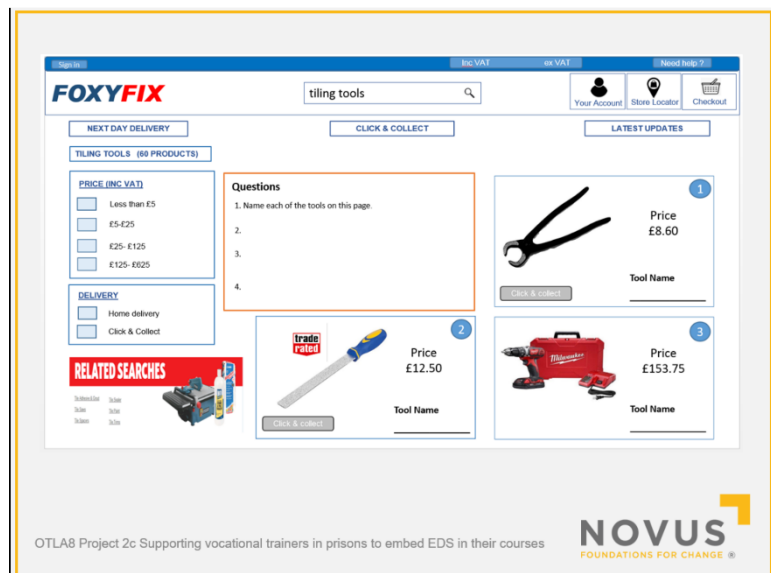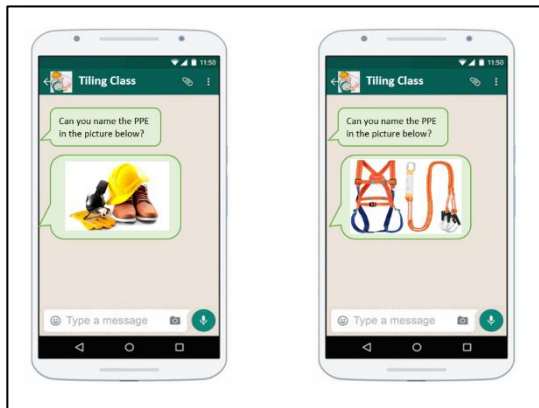
Phase 5 – Dissemination of Resources (with training)

A set of the relevant activity cards was shared with subject specialists with guidance from project leaders on how they might be used.
[A WhatsApp example](#) is shown here. Tutors were encouraged to record their thoughts and learner feedback received when using the resources.

Phase 6 – Collection of Feedback and Conclusions

Feedback was collected from those tutors who trialled the resources via a Microsoft Forms feedback sheet, in-person conversations and written feedback sheets.

An example of one tutor's reflections can be seen here on the right.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Teaching, Learning and Assessment
The sharing and modelling of the use of the ETF's generic digital skills 'Starter and Ender Cards' prompted and inspired the tutors in the project team to work with vocational specialists to produce creative, contextualised designs for digital skills development activities for prison learners without access to a computer. This process began with design of catering and hospitality themed cards and is now developing further with construction and cleaning-based resources.
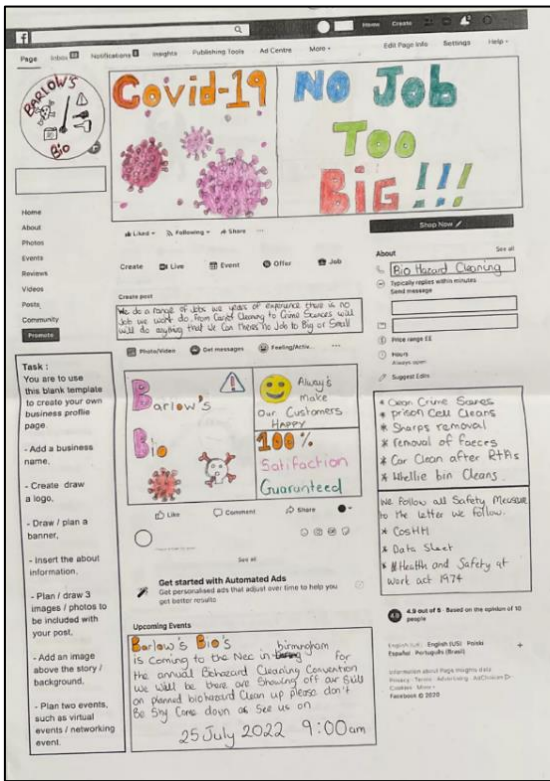
The resources produced empowered learners to develop digital, writing and communication skills as they drafted business Facebook pages like the one shown here, recipe website content and online review site content.

These activities gave learners an authentic experience of digital platforms and services such as Facebook, Trip Advisor, recipe repository websites and online purchasing systems for specialist equipment.

The vocational specialists also had an opportunity to trial their new resources with learners and to begin to refine them based on initial learner feedback.

This aspect of the research activity opened up an opportunity for the production of learner-led, co-designed digital skills development strategies and resources, which can be incorporated into future schemes of work as learners suggest the platforms and digital tasks they would like to explore next.

Following on from one pilot study activity (the creation of a Facebook Group Template), the catering specialist decided that having a blank template for learners to fill in was a very effective tool for the Food Safety course they were delivering. They created a blank 'booklet' for food safety guidance which is now an in-cell stretch and challenge activity that is available for each cohort of learners (see Padlet).

Professional Development

Professional Standard	How our project outcomes demonstrate this standard
4. Be creative and innovative in selecting and adapting strategies to help learners learn.	Due to the lack of technology in vocational spaces, trainers have no choice but to be creative and innovative when designing was to embed digital into their delivery. Collaborating with each other, and digital champions, empowers trainers to share and develop ideas that 'think outside the box'. Traditional methods for embedding digital are not possible in these spaces, so trainers have instead implemented strategies like interactive display boards, interactive phone templates and simulated website pages.
6. Build positive and collaborative relationships with colleagues and learners.	Working with multiple subject specialists meant a really positive team-working mentality was built in right from the start of the project. Specialists worked closely with project leaders throughout, sharing ideas and feedback at each step of the project. Positive relationships were also developed between the tutor and learners, as they supported the project by trying out different activities and providing feedback.

15. Promote the benefits of technology and support learners in its use.	This project aimed to support vocational trainers in identifying simple, yet effective, ways to embed digital without the need of technology, as this is often the main barrier to embedding digital skills in teaching and learning activities. By supporting colleagues to update their own knowledge of how to use digital skills, they were able to see the benefits of sharing this with their learners. As this project focused on digital skills outside of using physical technology, trainers were encouraged to explore contemporary digital content, including social media, showing they are up to date with what is being taught in other FE settings.

Organisational Development

Work on this project has led to improved communication and an increase in collaborative working between the tutor project managers and the vocational specialists who are working directly with learners. Co-working and co-creation with OTLA projects 2a and 2b saw increased creative collaboration between Novus digital champions on digital learning design.

Vocational specialists have expressed an interest in having more communication between vocational teams from different establishments and access to a place to share resources, ideas and questions. Our initial thoughts are that a MS Teams group could be set up and all vocational teams from the West Midlands added to it; project leaders are currently discussing this option.

The project management team have widened their professional network and profile by disseminating research outcomes to peers and now have the opportunity to set up digital skills learning networks by showcasing their successes and encouraging vocational tutors in other specialist areas to create digital learning resources.

LEARNING FROM THIS PROJECT

This project has confirmed that specialist vocational tutors wish to integrate contextualised digital skills development into their sessions but felt that the lack of access to digital devices and networks in classes made this impossible.

What tutors needed was some inspiration in the shape of the sharing and modelling of use of *'for instance'* resources which suggested the types of templates that they might use and the kinds of platform and task they could focus on.
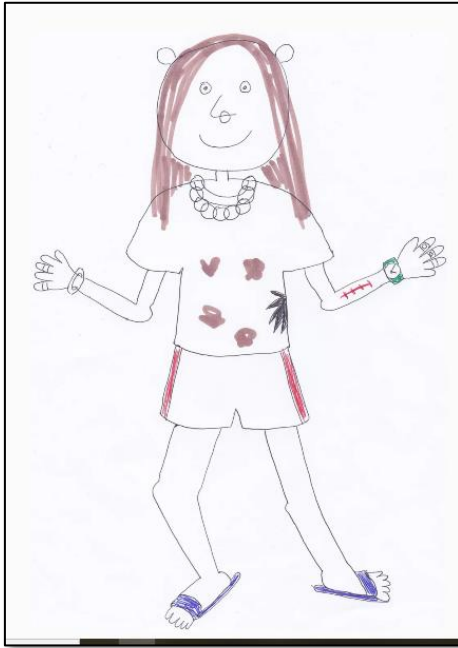
Once engaging resources, such as realistic templates for online tasks using authentic colours and layouts, were modelled by the project team, tutors *'ran with them'* to design engaging paper-based activities. The leveraging of existing popular strategies such as integration of the case study avatar 'Chef Steve' (here shown in a hazard spotting activity) from previous vocational learning activities added familiarity for the learners and encouraged even more engagement.

If digital and English skills development resources are created in one vocational specialism, these can be used as powerful models for other specialist areas, all that is needed are some *'why not try this?'* examples to encourage and empower vocational tutors.

REFERENCES

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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

Also see **Stage 6 – Feedback** sections on Padlet.

Case Study 1 – Catering Tutor

From being involved in this project, the catering tutor admitted that they 'have found a new appreciation for the important of digital skills.' Where previously, they had struggled to understand how to embed digital without having access to a computer, this attitude has changed as they've thought about the context more widely and been given access to an interactive whiteboard.

'Now I've tried and tested the activity…I am confident it is really adding to learner engagement'.

The 'Chef Steve' activity had originally been carried out on a normal whiteboard, but the tutor has now seen how easily the activity can be transferred over to a digital setting. They said the inclusion of the activity in this format 'breaks things up'.

The tutor also commented on the fact that the 'interactive element helps to give something to focus on and help their concentration'. The confidence in the tutor to deliver something that involves digital skills and knowledge has grown massively; it is now an everyday part of their lesson and not something that intimidates them.

The tutor also said that the 'Chef Steve' activity is now a learner favourite and has helped to 'bring some humour' to what can otherwise be a dense subject!

Case Study 2 – Construction Tutor

Since starting with designing the Whatsapp cards, the construction tutor's confidence and interest in digital skills has continued to grow. They stated that they 'now like talking about social media and other digital things in the classroom, as I know what I'm on about'!

They have been really impressed with how the activities have engaged learners, saying that the Whatsapp Cards create a 'bit of competition to see who has been listening the most… who is brave enough to answer first'.

Being involved in this project has encouraged the tutor to confront their own knowledge of digital skills:

'Creating this activity has helped improve my own digital skills and I now feel more confident with giving digital activities a go'.

Appendix 3: Project Padlet

A Padlet wall was used from the outset of the project to help gather and collate reading and digital assets such as scans of resources and feedback. The Padlet can be viewed here:
https://padlet.com/c_collins2/OTLA8_NOVUS2c

Appendix 4: Participants and Stakeholders

No of learners?	38	No of staff?	9
No of organisations?	1	No of employers/ stakeholders?	3

Appendix 5: Research/ Evaluation Approach

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

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