Link into Your Professional Network Project Report

Supporting learner progression into employment through the maximisation of technology and professional networking

Executive summary

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Introduction

Last Academic year the Link into your Professional Network Project was conceived to upskill the education and training workforce and students to develop strong professional networks using LinkedIn. The ultimate aim being to improve students' line of sight to work and their chances of securing meaningful careers.

The project was a collaboration between Abingdon and Witney and Aylesbury Colleges and the employer engagement specialist social enterprise, Working Knowledge.

The project concentrated on the use of LinkedIn with the aim of: Helping teachers to build confidence in their own technical and professional networking skills; Showing teachers how to use and become proficient with LinkedIn and how to transfer those skills to students. It was delivered via blended learning with online sessions with employers alongside in classroom delivery by teachers.

Following the sessions, staff and students were encouraged to visit LinkedIn on a regular basis (as much time as they can spare a day) to continue developing their LinkedIn profiles and to engage with LinkedIn groups.

This report will show you how the project progressed, challenges we faced, the outcomes of it and how we will utilise its successes going forward.

Top 10 reasons students need a LinkedIn profile

Why LinkedIn? Key stats PDF

WORKING KNOWLEDGE

Commissioned and funded by
The Education & Training Foundation

Abingdon & Witney College

AYLESBURY COLLEGE

learningfutures
inspiring learning through technology

Online learning course – Moodle

To deliver the blended learning the colleges developed an online learning course, this course walks the learners through the stages of creating, growing and utilising a LinkedIn profile and utilises statistics, videos, lesson plans and quizzes alongside the informative content. This course is being further developed for wider released in Academic year 2015/16.

In the video below Pamela Forchione, Head of Learning Technology and Resources at Aylesbury College discusses the creation of the Moodle course.

Moodle Screen Shots
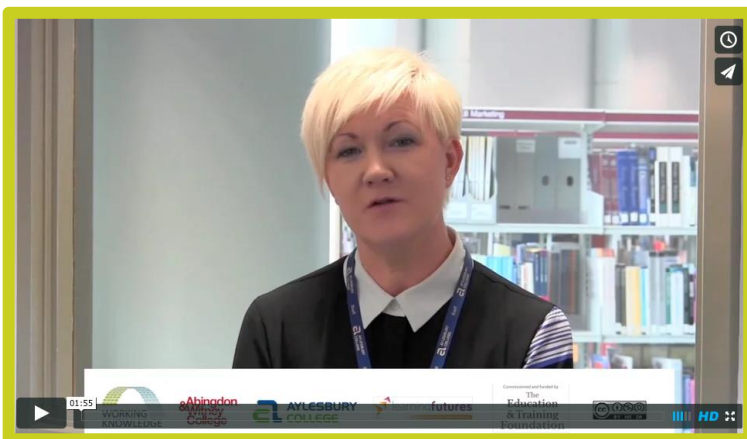
Pre-programme questionnaire

Click on the images below to see the results of the student and staff pre-project surveys.

Student Survey

Staff Survey

Onboarding

In order to embed the programme into the curriculum, Working Knowledge delivered an 'Onboarding day' for the learners and staff involved in the project. This was an interactive, high-energy day that involved relevant employers, engaged by Working Knowledge, coming into the colleges to network with the learners and staff, whilst the project and LinkedIn were introduced.

Alongside the 'Onboarding' workshop session, other classroom sessions have been developed and tested, including using Skype for Business to include input and

coaching from business volunteers. The workshops comprise presentations, handouts, videos and exercises that help people to open their minds to the possibilities of using LinkedIn.
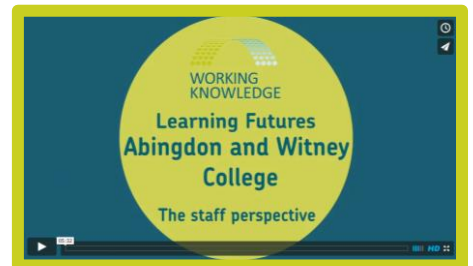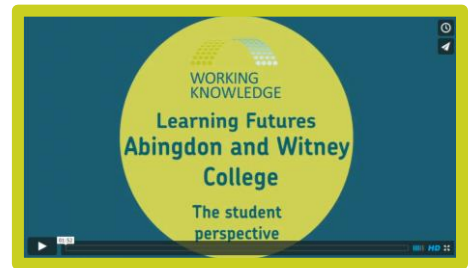
Offboarding

During the project, it became apparent that a few members of teaching staff and students were not as engaged with the project as their peers. Following discussion, this appeared to be because they could not see immediate benefit and were struggling to gain focused, constructive feedback on their LinkedIn profiles.

Abingdon and Witney College applied to Learning Futures for additional funding to run an 'Offboarding' day to enable staff and students to work practically with employers to review profiles and gain valuable feedback on how they could be improved. This additional intervention meant that teaching staff could take time out of their busy teaching schedules to refocus on the benefits that establishing a strong LinkedIn profile could bring and reengage with the project. An interesting dynamic was that those students who were more conversant with social media and had developed stronger skills in using LinkedIn were able to effectively teach the teachers in how to make the most out of their profiles. This student led approach also helped to engage those more reluctant staff.

The 'Offboarding' day also enabled the project team to assess the distance travelled by the staff and students throughout the project and was an effective approach to take during the project. A key learning point from this additional intervention, however, was the need to ensure that more time is taken at the beginning of this process to ensure that all staff and students are onboard with the 'why?' and 'so what?' questions prior to the start of the programme.

Offboarding Powerpoint Lesson Plan

4 Stages

The 4 stages of building a 'Personal Career Network' that were devised for our programme are as follows (please click bullet points to view resources);

Profile: Each student creates a brilliant professional profile
- **Profile Template**
- **Key Questions for Business Volunteers**
- **Stage 1 checklist**

Grow: Grow a critical mass of connections to 150-250
- **Key questions for Business Volunteers**
- **Stage 2 checklist**

Behave: Converse with relevant people, interact to 'sell' or 'ask'
- **Key questions for Business Volunteers**
- **Stage 3 checklist**

Re(Search): Identify career path by searching and researching industries
- **5 key questions for Business Volunteers**

- **Stage 4 checklist**
- **Learner Certificate**

Post-programme questionnaire

Click on the images below to see the results of the student and staff post-project surveys.

Student Survey

Staff Survey

Challenges

Any project has challenges, especially where technology and social networks are involved. Below are the main challenges encountered and how they were overcome:

Technology: For the remote learning sessions Working Knowledge engaged a variety of employers to speak to the learners via webcam for 20 minutes. However, some corporate firewalls blocked the programme meaning for one session only 1 of the 5 employers were able to get through. Going forward this can be remedied by using a different programme, for example Skype for Business.

Employer engagement: Working Knowledge were set the task of engaging employers by industry area to ensure they were relevant to the curriculum area of the learners. This made it harder to engage as some industries, for example science, are less prevalent and active on LinkedIn.

Conversely, there were positive aspects to the employer engagement for the project. Because some of the employers only had to be available for remote 20 minute sessions via webcam, location was not an issue so we were able

to engage nationwide, going forward this also gives us scope to engage people from overseas to give an even broader range of employer experiences to the learners. The length of the session was also beneficial as it meant they could do this whilst at work.

Staff objections: We found during the project that if the staff weren't on board their students weren't on board. The staff needed to 'buy in' to the project in order to pass on this enthusiasm to their learners and get them excited and motivated. Aylesbury had a mixture of teaching and non-teaching staff involved in the project which they felt worked well as, without having a tutor group to focus on, the non-teaching staff could see the bigger, cross college possibilities of the project.

Timetabling: Starting the project towards the end of the year meant delivery hours were during students' exam revision period. The colleges admitted it was difficult getting students to commit to coming to the sessions outside of lesson time so if the programme were to be repeated it would need to be embedded from the beginning of the year so that the students are aware of it as part of their timetable for the year.

Delivery method: blended learning: The lecture style of delivery bored some students especially when they were watching screens with no interactive moments and were simply told to go away and do the work in their own time. We remedied this by having the lessons take place in computer rooms so the learners could do the work 'live'.

Applicability to different college environments, student levels and curriculum areas: Aylesbury College decided to run sessions with all the students at the same time, outside their lesson time to allow them to meet other learners and share success stories, lessons learners while encouraging healthy competition to spur the learners along.

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The involvement of employers, either in person or on the On/Offboarding days or online in interactive whiteboard sessions, was a key element of the project. Therefore, employer engagement is vital. Our partnership with Working Knowledge solved that element of the project. The collaboration with an employer engagement specialist ensures the successful building and growth of employer networks for staff and learners, which can be utilised to solve the Work Experience and Employability elements of the Study Programme.

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- Jade Brown, Course Leader at Aylesbury College

Safeguarding

During the project, student were given the following advice about staying safe whilst using LinkedIn:

- Think carefully about the details you complete in the Contact Information section on Linked In.
- Protect your privacy, whilst at the same time ensuring that your connections can easily get in touch with you if they need to.
- Please be aware that only direct connections (1st) can view your email, instant messenger, phone and address.
- Twitter handles and websites will be viewable to the public, as well as your unique LinkedIn URL.
- All social networks provide settings to control your privacy. LinkedIn is no exception and there are 7 privacy links that will allow you to control how your profile is visible to others.

Impact

Analysis of survey results

Analysis of the survey results shows that, as a direct result of the 'Link In to your Professional Network' project, the number of staff with more than 100 employer connections has increased by 50% with daily usage of LinkedIn improving by 200%. 100% of the staff involved with the project had a LinkedIn profile by the end of the project which was an increase of 20%. Staff reported that the opportunity to engage and network with relevant employers was one of the most important elements of the project for them alongside witnessing the growth in students' confidence in connecting with potential employers.

The number of student who had connected with relevant employers as part of their course increased by 11% as a direct result of the project whilst, perhaps just as importantly, the number of students who had not met any employers fell by 24% to 0.   The percentage of students with a LinkedIn profile grew by 90% to 100% for those taking part in the project and 40% of student reported that their LinkedIn profile had grown by 20+ connections since taking part in Learning Futures. The percentage of students with more than 10 relevant employer connections increased by 46% to 80% as a direct result of engaging with the project.

These figures clearly demonstrate that, in a very short while, the project has had direct impact on the number and breadth of meaningful connections established by both staff and students. We are expecting the longer term impact of this increase to include stronger, more positive destinations for students and more employer focused curriculum delivery for providers, however, this is beyond the life of the project.

Below is the impact the project has had on the Abingdon and Witney College students, provided by Nikkie Almond, Quality Lead – Futures.

During the research project period, students chosen were a mixture of students from different vocational areas, who had been with us for around six months and others who were nearing the end of their two year programme of study. They had a varying amount of confidence in both their technical ability and also their own self confidence.

They attended the on-boarding session as a whole and then were taught for an hour every two weeks by their course tutor who had undertaken virtual

training sessions in the use of LinkedIn and also had access to online resources to work from.

60 students took part
45 regularly attended
All **60** developed over **50** new LinkedIn connections
6 students developed over **100** new LinkedIn connections
1 student was offered part time work within a month of building their profile.
1 second year student was offered full time employment as a direct result of the project
10 student have secured work experience placements already for Academic Year 2015/16
1 student started writing a blog about how to work with people who have Asperger's on his profile which now has over **40** followers and many positive comments from employers thanking him for this guidance.

Feedback from students
Students' feedback was mainly positive and all saw the relevance of working on this platform of social media and the benefits it would bring. Those who had followed the online resources and also the tutors' guidance were the most successful. They felt that this had opened a range of alternative opportunities to them and it also helped them understand the different job roles available in the industry they were studying for.

Feedback from staff
5 staff within the project had previously developed a profile on LinkedIn however had not used it effectively to engage with relevant employers. All staff found that, following their training programme, their use of LinkedIn had improved and staff involved have engaged with local employers. 3 employers have already attended the college with 4 more set up for later in the year to do guest lectures as a direct result of the LinkedIn project.

Going forward

With the challenges above we found that continued conversation between both Colleges and Working Knowledge ensured that the sessions became more tailored to College and students needs and each session was better than the last. These improvements have been taken into consideration and built into the newly designed programme which both colleges are planning to implement the programme into their Study Programmes for Academic Year 2015/16.

It will be introduced from the start of the year so that it can be fully embedded into the curriculum and the colleges will utilise and build upon the resources already created for the project; Moodle course, lesson plans and PDFs.

Working Knowledge will also be using the course materials to create their new Personal Career Networks programme, which they are able to provide to Colleges nationwide.

In this video Dr James Lott, MD of Working Knowledge summarises their involvement with the project and how the lessons learned are being carried forward into this academic year.