**Outstanding teaching, learning and assessment: case study on operational project led by Richmond Adult Community College**

**Introduction**

The lead in this project was Richmond Adult and Community College (RACC) working in partnership with Hillcroft College (Hillcroft) and Sutton College of Learning for Adults (SCOLA). RACC is a further education college, Hillcroft is a special designated institution (SDI) and SCOLA is a directly delivered local authority adult and community learning (ACL) service.

All three colleges routinely work collaboratively. For example, SCOLA hosts the foundation English and maths network meetings for South London ACL providers; RACC and SCOLA attend the South London partnership for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties (LDD); Hillcroft and RACC share continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities and all three colleges participate in joint informal standardisation activities for English and maths.

The learner profiles of the target groups in the partner organisations were:

* RACC’s learners are adult, and study part-time alongside busy work and family lives. Many need their English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) or English qualification in order to find work, or to access training in another subject area, but are not able to attend for many hours a week. Online learning designed by their tutors will be particularly relevant to these learners, because classwork will prepare learners for the online aspect, and assessment and feedback will be built into the digital learning.
* Hillcroft College delivers courses for women aged 19+ on a residential basis. Typically, learners study ESOL or English intensively in college for two to three days per week and online learning will enable them to continue to study and consolidate learning between residential sessions.
* SCOLA delivers English and ESOL courses at college and in outreach centres. Like RACC, these adult learners would benefit from the stretch and challenge of additional online learning.

The key aim of the project was to identify strategies for effectively embedding English into vocational areas of learning, within the context of outstanding practice, with a particular interest in e-learning and digital learning approaches.

The project focused on supporting teachers delivering vocational programmes who were seeking support with embedding English into their programmes. The vocational areas in this project were art and design, ICT, health and social care, business, ESOL and foundation English in RACC; science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), ESOL and foundation English in Hillcroft; and childcare, ESOL and foundation English in SCOLA. Ten project participants embarked on the Ascentis level 3 award in digital learning design.

Each project participant designed a resource for use with their own learners as online learning, which included learning, assessment and feedback. Additionally, each participant designed resources aimed at embedding English within another curriculum area. Participants worked with a teacher from a vocational subject area, and designed a resource which addressed one or more significant competencies in English within the context of the subject and qualification content. Each resource was trialled with a group of learners, and their feedback incorporated to improve the resource.

The project provided an opportunity to share good and excellent practice with established partners and supported the embedding of the Professional Standards into organisational working practice.

**Approach**

The project focused on and used the Professional Standards as a framework for the approach through:

* building on existing positive and collaborative relationships with colleagues and learners to contribute to organisational development and quality improvement;
* maintaining and updating knowledge of educational research (specifically IT and digital) to develop evidence-based practice;
* evaluation of teaching practice with others and assessing its impact on learning, within the context of identifying and sharing an understanding of what is outstanding;
* planning and delivering effective learning programmes for diverse learner groups through the use and promotion of the benefits of technology and supporting learners in its use.

Equality and diversity underpins the work all three colleges and this project embraced equality and diversity through:

* Online learning and developing learners’ IT skills to enable them to learn more independently, in a way that fits into their lives and assists in overcoming the barriers that can exist in traditional learning models.
* Project participants promoting equality and diversity within the content of their resources through promotion of cultural diversity and inclusion.
* Pre-project learner feedback in all three colleges had indicated a need for teachers to develop resources that showed that teachers understood the potential and the barriers to successful learner outcomes. Feedback had specifically identified the need for flexible course delivery, increased use of mobile devices and modem technology and the opportunity to learn ‘at home’ in ways that fitted into their lives.

The findings and impact of the project were evidenced from data collection and analysis. In addition, Ofsted feedback following an inspection in RACC in May 2015 specifically identified the project as an example of good collaborative working practice, particularly in relation to the use of digital learning and embedding of English being effectively used in art and design provision.

**Outcomes and impact**

**Outcomes**

All three colleges achieved the following outcomes:

Drawing together staff to lead and change organisational culture in relation to digital learning and creating a culture of innovation in teaching and learning. This has been shown through classroom observation visits indicating a significant increase in the effective use of digital and e-learning. Ofsted (inspection in RACC in May 2015) noted good practice of embedding English and maths, as developed through the project and in art as part of a specialised area of development in this traditionally difficult subject area.

* Promoting reflective practice and appealing to professional values by emphasising continuous professional development through the delivery of 12 CPD sessions.
* The development of mobile technologies to support the embedding of English and for the online delivery of childcare, ESOL, English, art and design courses and study skills in the learning resource centre at RACC and SCOLA and ESOL at Hillcroft.
* RACC hosted the digital learning materials and SCOLA and Hillcroft participants were given access to the materials.
* Resources were developed by all the partners – 10 in SCOLA, 10 in RACC and 3 in Hillcroft.
* Initial trialling of resources was undertaken with learners in Hillcroft /RACC and draft ideas used by one teacher in SCOLA. All three colleges will trial fully developed resources in the academic year 2015-16.
* Clear indication of areas of learning requiring digital and e-learning development were identified through staff surveys and audits in all three colleges. In SCOLA the developments took place in the delivery of the GCSE English course and in the childcare level 2 and 3 courses. In RACC the areas were the learning resource centre, childcare, art & design, business and IT and ESOL. At Hillcroft delivery of English in STEM subjects based on mid-year course evaluation.
* Establishing the response of teaching staff to embedding English in vocational courses as a routine part of session planningwas achieved by mentoring tutors and setting targets in their performance management. In RACC, bespoke training was developed for art and design tutors and identified mentor/ peer support provided through the quality department.
* Data and impact of the project was used to help participants and their line managers embed ‘what works’ into normal working practice in all three partner organisations and to create momentum within the college(s) for further innovation and experimentation in teaching. Ideas and approaches were shared with other professionals and practitioners and the development of student forum and feedback to students (SCOLA). In RACC the art and design team will be sharing their practice with childcare and health and social practitioners. Hillcroft piloted collaborative practice as a model to be shared at staff development days in July 2015 and inform CPD in 2015/16.

**Impact**

All three colleges anticipate the following impact:

* Information and learning technology (ILT) delivery improved across identified programme areas by September 2015 and underpinned by the design of digital learning that is appropriate and fit for purpose rather than doing ILT for the sake of it.
* ILT delivery and use of digital technology will be embedded into other areas of teaching and learning, and will encourage English being embedded in all vocational courses: in RACC, health, business, IT and ESOL; in Hillcroft, all curriculum areas; and in SCOLA, childcare, health and social care.
* All areas of SCOLA across all funding streams are expected to use the VLE to enhance teaching, learning and assessment.
* An improvement in learner outcomes in vocational courses during academic year 2015-2016.

**Lessons learned**

The key findings (benefits and challenges) from the project:

* Cultural change is achievable within a whole organisation approval and commitment. The strength of building on an existing partnership and an enthusiastic and visionary lead played a role in this project and the delivery of the outcomes. One of the providers had already started the shift and change of VLE and how ICT was used in the curriculum, thus providing existing practice to inform project development.
* It is important to keep reminding people that technology is a tool. It does not by itself improve teaching, learning and assessment.
* The project highlighted the huge variation in knowledge, skills and expertise (in teachers and managers) and the range and variety of software packages, mobile devices, ‘apps’ and so on being used. As well as the variety and range, all three colleges realised that they suffered from a lack of a cohesive, whole organisational and cost efficient approach to ensure the effective delivery of digital and e-learning that would maximise learners’ outcomes. Before embarking on any such project, it would be helpful for organisations to undertake a whole organisation audit (skills, knowledge, expertise, equipment etc.) to inform the roll out of any project.
* The need now to focus on learners’ use of ‘apps’ in learning for the future rather than the focus being solely on the use of computers and VLE development.
* The ‘blanket approach’ to embedding English into vocational programmes is not necessarily helpful. Organisations need examples of good practice on how to approach this work in subject specific areas to ensure practices developed are fit for purpose, and to be allowed development time for the staging and rolling out of working practices.
* The importance of teacher reflective practice to encourage innovation, exploration and creativity in the teaching environment. The challenge is where and how that reflection time can be built into working practice so that it is not forgotten or at risk of being marginalised by other day to day and operational pressures.
* Having an understanding of barriers to successful learning that adult learners may experience. Learners involved in this project indicated that barriers to their success frequently include the restrictions imposed by organisations on how learners can access their learning (e.g. weekly attendance, time restrictions, face to face contact) and therefore the importance for organisations to identify flexible delivery options.
* The short time frame (4 months) for implementation of this project meant that it was not possible to accurately assess the longer term impact of the action research. Many of the anticipated outcomes from the project will not be realised until 12 -24 months post end of project. In addition, launching a project mid academic year is not always helpful and can conflict with existing work priorities and staff capacity to fully engage.

**Sustainability and transferability**

Many of the outcomes from the project will be sustained through the following practices:

* The partnership will continue to exist as a community of learning practice for digital and e-learning with the aim that at least 10% of course provision and content is delivered online. This will include sharing online resources and the three college VLEs.
* The staff members who gained digital design skills will be given time away from teaching to support other teaching staff into e-learning within the context of maintaining, or working towards, outstanding teaching, learning and assessment. This will ensure that appropriate content from all subject areas is gradually converted into e-learning.
* Every project participant from the three colleges will be asked to provide a CPD session for other staff, both in person and as an online version, which will highlight some of the opportunities of e-learning, and some of the lessons learnt whilst designing a digital resource.
* The level 3 award in digital learning design will be included in the RACC course offer from September 2015 as a blended learning course, so that other providers and organisations can develop their own staff.
* RACC will also offer a service to other providers and third sector organisations to convert existing content into online learning.

Aspects of the project which could be transferred, developed and made ‘fit for purpose’ across different contexts and organisations include:

* The online learning resources (minimum 14 resources or units of learning) can be accessed by any teachers of similar subjects across further education and skills sector.
* The CPD training programmes (SCOLA and RACC) could be adapted for other organisations onapplication to SCOLA and RACC.

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