

Bridge College

Using technology to support learning



This case study was produced by Bridge College as part of the ELS project with the aim of further promoting the use of technology across the lifelong learning sector. It has been supported by [JISC TechDis](#), a leading advisory service on technologies for inclusion and accessibility.

Bridge College

[Bridge College](#) is an independent specialist day college based in Stockport. It provides for students with severe and complex learning difficulties, physical disabilities, communication disorders and autistic spectrum conditions.

Student profile

The college recruits from special schools within the Greater Manchester area. There are currently 75 students on roll who are all aged nineteen years and over. The college mission is to create a learning environment that is inclusive and where young people make a successful transition into adulthood by making progress in their self-esteem, Skills for Life and independence. Individual learning plans are delivered within two departments. The Department of Foundation Studies provides an entry level course and a Step Up programme for students with autistic spectrum conditions. The Department of Pre-Foundation Studies offers courses for students at pre-entry level and a sensory course for students with complex needs.

Courses

The pre-foundation department offer two courses, sensory for learners with complex needs and pre-entry for those working at Milestones 4-7.

At Foundation level they offer an Entry Level course for young people operating at Milestone 8 and above and the Step-Up course for students with Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC).

Sensory course

The course aims to meet the needs of young people with complex needs who wish to develop their communication and independence/planned dependence skills.

Pre-entry level course

This course aims to meet the needs of young people who wish to develop their skills for independence and progress to a further course in a further education college or to supported employment.

Entry course

This course aims to meet the needs of young people who wish to develop independent living skills and progress to a further course, training or employment.

Step up course

This course aims to meet the needs of young people with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC). In it they practise and develop communication and social skills and develop thinking and problem solving skills.

Using technology to support access needs

This case study explores how Bridge College makes effective use of technology, such as standard Microsoft office installation and makes it a tool to create personalised content for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including those with complex needs. Every learner at Bridge College has a full assessment with the occupational therapy team to ensure their particular access needs are met. This ensures that they are able to be as independent as possible using the computer. Occupational Therapists also take part within sessions throughout the college day.

The college makes significant use of technology in order to support access to learning and is particularly keen, where appropriate to take advantage of low cost high street technology which learners can readily access in their future lives, including software such as PowerPoint and mobile technology such as phones. Access requirements can also include hardware such as switches, touch screens or a trackerball mouse. Some learners may need specialist software such as screen readers or magnification software.

Learners using touch screens particularly like using the large plasma screens.

Using PowerPoint®

Bridge College have made very effective use of the standard office software application Microsoft PowerPoint to support the provision of personalised learning experiences. This can be used to create some powerful interactive personalised resources which are both engaging and motivating for the most complex of learners.

Personalisation

Used creatively PowerPoint can provide an enriching personalised learning experience for learners on each of the 4 vocational pathways at the college. The sensory course can use their particular access method to move the presentation forward and so get rewarded by music, sound or images. The learners in the pre-entry level and Step-up courses are able to create their own interactive quizzes, experiences and resources.

Staff training

All support staff and teaching staff are trained regularly on the use of PowerPoint. Topics start with the basics and then move on to more advanced features such as adding music tracks, sound clips, page turning effects and motion paths, and so on. Training resources are developed in such a way as to enable staff to build on existing skills and are available for staff at all times.

The more advanced training resources include about the use of hidden slides to make quizzes which provide feedback to the learner once the relevant part of the slide has been clicked or selected. They can then either move forward in the quiz or go back to the question if they need to try again. Not only can the content be personalised, but the feedback can also be personalised with individual messages being recorded by staff and families. The embedding of the use of PowerPoint across the curriculum means that staff are comfortable using it and it is easily available.

Use with switches

Learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties prefer to learn in a sensory way. They use touch as their main method of communication so need to be able to interact with the computer and get feedback in the form of images and sounds. They enjoy a customised experience using the computer. Many of them are very motivated by their own interests such as music or a TV programme or their family and a personalised session can increase their engagement and encourage them to vocalise in a way which hadn't been done previously. One female student used the switch to activate music playing, removed her hand from the switch showing she understood the cause and effect process and when re-pressing the switch said 'again'. This is the only time she has used recognised vocalisation in the college, and is a testimony to the motivational power of technology in engaging learners.

Social Stories

A very effective use of PowerPoint is in the production of [social stories](#) by both the staff and students. Learners have created a complete story of their college experiences using images, sound, video and text which they can use to take home or when they leave college. The act of creating their own stories enables much deeper learning and the learners keep ownership of their work and their story. The teaching and therapy staff use these stories to explore issues around behaviour and socialisation within the college.

Setting the scene

The staff on the pre-foundation courses use PowerPoint presentations to set the atmosphere and ambience within sensory sessions. One presentation with pre-set timings provides relaxing images with accompanying water sounds and music to help within an aromatherapy session. This provides an all-round atmosphere which reinforces the sense of relaxation and calm. The staff are then able to concentrate on the learners and not worry about changing images, screens or music.

Summary

Bridge College have taken part of the standard Microsoft office installation and made it a tool to create personalised content for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with complex needs.

The success of this work is undoubtedly as a result of the support that the staff receive from the college to give them the confidence and skills to create totally unique and personalised content. It has meant that there is a richness of experience and creativity within the staff which allows for each learner to have resources which are relevant to them. This allows for a curriculum which is focused on learners' own abilities and interests.