

LSIS Leadership in Technology (LIT) grant based intervention

Final Report

Creating efficiencies in satellite mentoring and on site tutoring of 13-19's with alternative education provider

Introduction:

The Bridge Education Centre supports over 100 13-19 year olds by offering a range of City and Guilds accredited courses at its main site, as well as mentoring 20 harder to reach young people usually off-site. The LIT project is aimed at supporting both these areas of work.

Supporting the Bridge's Projects off-site

We currently have five mentors and twenty mentees. This is an expanding provision. The majority of these mentees are taught at least initially, if not for the duration of their individual programmes in any number of satellite sites. These could include, youth centres, libraries, work experience placements or the young person's home. Our mentors offer individual programmes of support such as Functional Skills qualifications, job searching, writing CVs, or maybe practicing a driving theory test with online software. Prior to the LIT grant based intervention, the Bridge didn't have enough laptops for all staff to use or any system in place for storing information centrally or accessing it remotely.

Our mentoring course has been recognised as a great success with up to 70% of the mentees moving on to further training or employment. The mentors are aware however that their time could be used efficiently and young people could benefit from greater IT access. The aim of the project would be to improve the efficiency of the mentors and the success chances of our young people by making ICT available to mentors and their mentees on a regular basis.

The objectives to enable us to reach these aims would be to:

- Provide each mentor with laptop fitted with wireless dongle
- Set up a system for storing/sharing teaching/administration resources and train the staff in using these resources both in the main office and remotely
- Provide digital cameras and voice recorders for assessing mentee progress towards qualifications and for building up portfolios of their experiences

The Intended Impact will be to enable the mentors instant access to a full range of resources, where ever they are, through their laptop. This remote office approach will save the mentor the time

and expense required to pick up materials from the Bridge office, save time in producing their own resources when these might have already been produced by others and they are unaware or unable to access it and save time by being able to productively use gaps in the day for working rather than losing time in returning to base.

The laptops would enable mentors to access a wider range of resources with their mentees, these could be on-line, software packages or produced by other mentors and shared from remote sources. The digital cameras and voice recorders should open up additional ways of assessing the young person's portfolio work and experiences. This should improve their chances of achieving a qualification and therefore progressing on.

We would also hope that the improved levels of communication within the staff team would result in more effective working relationships with our stakeholders. This in turn could lead to more referrals.

Supporting the Bridge's Projects on-site

The Bridge has 100 trainees on accredited land based courses at the Bridge main site. These are in groups of up to 12. Many of the courses involve the production of a portfolio of evidence of the trainees progress. We currently have four lap tops which represents one between two/three trainees in a group, a slow unreliable printer and shared cameras.

We aim to have enough laptops, cameras, voice recorders and printers to enable more effective documentation of trainee progress and more efficient use of staff time.

The objectives to enable us to reach these aims would be to:

- Increase the number of available lap tops to enable one-to-one use by groups of trainees.
- Tutors to each have their own digital cameras
- A voice recorder to be available
- All lap tops to be wirelessly linked to a more efficient printer
- To have a training session to creatively explore ways of using this kit to more effectively assess trainee achievement, and make the assessment process more efficient for the trainers

The intended impact would be to enable a larger number of trainees access to resources, through a laptop each during classroom sessions. This would facilitate trainees been able to produce written work but could also include internet research to support this and accessing on-line packages such as City and Guilds tests. We currently have to rotate the young people through tests, two at a time rather than a whole group. Tutors accessing resources produced by other tutors and shared remotely would save preparation time. The digital cameras and voice recorders should open up additional ways of assessing the young person's portfolio work and experiences. This should improve their chances of achieving a qualification and therefore progressing on post 16.

Methodology: The process used

For both projects, the starting point was to informally talk to the staff about creative ways of improving the effectiveness of what they were doing. This was firstly taken from the position of meeting the needs of the young people, which the staff had a good grasp of, to secondly looking at operational efficiencies which it transpired we had less knowledge of the solutions to. We decided to approach this area by looking at what a typical day was for a mentor/tutor and where time was spent. This gave us a starting point for brainstorming how these tasks could be more efficiently achieved. This resulted in a list of resources required and the training needs that we were aware would be beneficial, as well as a list of problems to take to a mentor for them to help us find solutions to.

Discussions with our critical friend (Tim Kelly) prior to meeting our mentor highlighted that our chosen mentor might not have the expertise in an educational context to find the most appropriate solutions to the problems we wanted to address. It was decided to use a mentor from WM JISC RSC for advice on kit and IT related approaches to what we wanted to achieve. An IT support company we have previously used would then support us in purchasing and installing the kit. Our second session with the WM JISC RSC mentor involved meeting a group of staff who would be benefitting from the project, looking at a range of solutions to the problems discussed in the first meeting and identifying the best way forward for us. The kit was then purchased and installed. The third session with the WM JISC RSC mentor involved training the staff in the use of PB Works, the chosen system for sharing/accessing resources. At the same time we took the initial steps in setting up a website.

A final training session took place with the IT support company to ensure all staff could use the new kit on site which was followed by training in accessing information remotely.

Results:

The off-site projects

Each member of staff has a laptop with dongle, camera and access to a voice recorder. Although the mentors at various times have all used most of this equipment and are familiar with how it can support their mentees, they now have their own. This has resulted in less time spent picking up and returning kit from the main site or transporting mentees there to use it.

The mentors present for the training session are already sharing resources via PB Works and have arranged training for those unable to be present. The system appears at this early stage to be easy to use and popular with the staff who are using it. The project is in its infancy, we are still in the process of up-loading resources. Time will tell if this new way of working will result in time and therefore money being saved.

The third objective of using the new kit to find creative ways of assessing mentee progress towards qualifications and for building up portfolios of their experiences is again at an early stage of assessment. However, an encouraging thing to see is that mentors are sharing their approaches and results via PB Works. The effects this might in time have on the young people's progress will always be a qualitative assessment and to some extent anecdotal. The early indicators however are that the combination of ready access to the kit and improved communication between mentors is enthusing the staff, leave me feeling encouraged that the impact will be cumulative and significant over time.

The on-site projects

In the limited time since purchasing and installing the laptops, there have been no teaching opportunities when laptops have been required. All the staff have however previously struggled to use laptops shared one between two or three. The increased number of available laptops to enable one-to-one use by trainees will have an obvious impact. Trainees should be able to more efficiently produce coursework, access tests on-line and carry out research. This will have a great impact as the trainees have a limited time with us and I am sure will result in a higher standard of portfolio work produced across the board. Although we currently have a 100% pass rate with trainees who have completed our courses, a higher grade of pass (where this is applicable) and an overall better standard of presentation should impress the sending schools.

Tutors have previously used digital cameras to evidence trainees achievements. A greater number of cameras as well as more efficient/easier to use printers linked to laptops should however speed up the admin time for trainers.

Voice recorders have not previously been used to assess understanding. We have trialled this with a few trainees in the last few weeks. Some are more comfortable with this, some less. For those who are, however it represents another tool for assessing knowledge that would perhaps not otherwise be picked up via written means.

Again at this early stage it would appear that PB Works is being used by staff not just to access information but to share ideas on good practice. This I trust in time will result in more creative ways of using the new hardware to enable the young people to achieve more and for the staff to work more efficiently.

The website should improve the marketing of the Bridge, which is especially significant at this time as we are currently applying for a number of grants. As the site develops however and we begin to direct people to it, it should serve as a way of communicating good news and developments with our stakeholders.

Actual or planned savings:

- Reduced travelling time of mentors between satellite sites and the main site, to pick up resources/borrow IT kit.
One journey per week with time and fuel could cost £15. Over a year, £700. For five mentors £3,500.
- Preparation of resources. Mentors bill per hour, so sharing of materials should save time/money.
One hour a week for each of the five mentors, £3,000.
- Reduction in tutor preparation time if shared resources are used.
Perhaps one hour per week for 6 tutors, 270 hours.
- Reduction in time spent outside the class if tutors are able to print out resources/coursework as they are required from the trainees laptops.
Perhaps one hour per week for 6 tutors, 270 hours.

- Increased number of referrals resulting from improved marketing and communication with stakeholders.
Each foundation learning trainee is worth £2-4,000 per year.
Each school trainee is worth £1-2,000 per year.
- The online storage/retrieval system used should be relatively problem free. Using the network to try to achieve this seemed to cause a number of problems. These costing the Bridge in IT support time each time they were called out. If IT was halved over the year it could save £2-300.

Lessons:

The project over ran its deadline. This was due to a lack of appreciation for the time involved in managing it. Although the potential improvements in efficiency were clear to see from the outset, the day to day deadlines involved in the running of the business diverted the general manager's time from moving it forward at sufficient pace in the initial stages. Where possible, I would suggest involving others in the management of the project.

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