Supporting excellence in initial teacher education in further education and skills

Case study for projects

ABOUT YOUR PROJECT

1. Project title   21st Century Teaching and Learning – The Right Blend!

2. Project summary (max 50 words)
This may be the same as in the original submission, but please amend in light of changes you may have made during the duration of the project.

Working closely with a respected HEI, RA CPD have developed a brand-new blended-learning model to deliver a Level 5 Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) to soldiers in The Royal Artillery. The model of delivery utilises learning technology and a newly-developed Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

3. Your ITE provision (approx 200-300 words)
Describe the ITE provision you are offering from September 2012, including as a result of the project: number of students (predicted or estimated if not confirmed), accreditation, delivery methods and target audience

From September 2012, RA CPD will be delivering the new Level 5 DTLLS (a bridging unit + year 2 content) programme as a pilot to a cohort of 11 'expert learners' who already hold a Level 4 CTLLS. Through this pilot programme, we aim to discover the right blend of delivery methods to suit a cohort of serving military instructors. In addition, we will continue to offer our Level 3 PTLLS and Level 3/4 CTLLS programmes to approximately 300 students throughout the academic year. We will also be delivering the new Level 3 Award in English for Literacy and Language Teaching to approximately 15 students.

The Level 5 DTLLS programme will be validated by Canterbury Christ Church University, with Edexcel, our current Awarding Organisation, accrediting our other ITE provision.

We will be using a variety of delivery methods in our newly-developed blended-learning model, including the recently launched VLE (Moodle 2.3). Soldiers of The Royal Artillery can be situated in any one of twelve fixed regimental locations throughout the UK and Germany, as well as other locations once operationally deployed. Our blended-learning model and VLE was developed as a result of the project and will provide our students with a new learning platform that will be available to them 24 hours a day and in any location through a viable internet connection.

Our ITE provision is an integrated part of The Royal Artillery's Instructor Development Programme, but it also provides elective students with an opportunity to gain a civilian teaching qualification that they may use in a second career once they have left the army. Our ITE provision, including DTLLS, is also available to students from across the armed services.

4. Resources used *(you may decide upon the level of detail to be provided here)*
Outline the resources used to run this provision (outlined in 3 above) including: teaching time, resources used, tutoring/mentoring etc.

The resources used in our ITE DTLLS provision (excluding PTLLS/CTLLS) fall into two main categories: those used for the development of the programme and those used for the delivery of the programme:

Development:

Because RA CPD have never delivered the Level 5 DTLLS before, it was necessary to allocate certain resources to the development of the programme and to the blended-learning model we are using to deliver it. These include:

1. Bespoke training of ITE tutors in the use of Moodle 2.3 £12,600
2. Providing ITE tutors with a Level 7 Professional Development Qualification in Developing the Online Learning Experience at Southampton Solent University - £18,550
3. Cover supply (tutors) to allow ITE tutors to attend training and development - £4,574
4. Development of the VLE content for Level 5 DTLLS (including Initial Assessment Unit) - £11,468
5. New equipment (including laptops, wide-screen monitors, appropriate software and applications etc) - £4,637
6. Hosting/maintenance of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) for an academic year - £10,000

Delivery:

1. Update equipment (including laptops, wide-screen monitors, appropriate software and applications etc) - £2,000
2. Tutor contact time (including classroom delivery, lesson observations, tutorials, mentoring and e-moderating) - £20,000
3. Student registration costs (Canterbury Christ Church – DTLLS) - £11,000
4. Hard resources (paper, photocopying/repro, flipchart paper etc) - £1,000
5. Travel/accommodation (observations/tutorials/mentoring) - £3,000

5. Achievement against aims and objectives of project, and lessons learnt

Original aims of the project:

1. To create excellence in teaching and learning with sustainable progression routes for military personnel in the work-based learning (WBL) sector to develop their skills and gain qualifications at levels 5 and 7.
2. To create a blended delivery model for ITE that is sustainable and scalable, and which includes a VLE, self-authoring mobile-learning platform, Social Media, multi-media and face-to-face taught sessions.
3. Develop students' Maths, English and ICT skills.
4. Embed subject specialism and STEM subjects into the ITE model – this aim was developed in accordance with Section 2 (Purpose of the projects) of the LSIS Guidance and Application Form: *'projects that address any of the subject specialisms of literacy, numeracy and the STEM subjects'.*

One of the key principles of our project was the concept of the 'expert learner'. The DfES (2006) defined an 'expert learner' as someone who is *'an active, motivated partner and not a passive, disengaged recipient'.* Our pilot project was designed to test a newly-developed model of delivery for serving service personnel. A carefully selected group of 'expert learners' (selected to reflect the typical challenges faced by military personnel when studying) was chosen to evaluate and feedback on the success and suitability of the model. The pilot programme is continuing and, so, this summary represents our initial findings.

Efficiency, quality improvement, costing and affordability:

There is absolutely no doubt that the introduction of an operational VLE has resulted in significant quality improvements and improved efficiency in our ITE provision. Moodle 2.3 has provided us with an easily accessible platform to manage the whole learning process much more effectively. From initial assessment through to final achievement, the VLE has given us a centralised record of our students' learning journeys. But the development of a VLE comes at a cost. It requires a considerable investment of time and money. Where funding is not available, learning providers will have to decide whether this amount of investment represents an affordable model.

Regardless of whether our ITE provision is validated by a Higher Education Institution or an Awarding Organisation, quality assurance is maintained by the validating organisation to similar standards (i.e. quality visits, sampling of students' work and professional standards etc). What is not immediately apparent is where exactly the significantly increased cost of having a HEI validated programme reflects a proportionally increased benefit to the quality, efficiency or improvement. We conclude that our model (i.e. working with a HEI) provides greater challenges to affordability than working with an AO.

Transferable outcomes to similar provision:

A significant outcome of our new blended-learning model was the success and popularity of our Initial Assessment Unit. This was developed as a course using Moodle 2.3 and was delivered entirely online. The feedback/evaluation from our students was unanimous: an online initial assessment was preferable because it not only represented less pressure for the student but it didn't require a 'costly' tutor to oversee and monitor the assessment process 'in-class'. This is a good example of where efficiency savings can be made in any ITE provision but where quality and

student experience can actually be improved as a result.

The Level 3 Award in English for Literacy and Language Teaching, offered as part of our DTLLS pilot, has proved very popular with our students. It will not only develop their personal literacy skills to level 3 but provide them with a partial subject specialism in literacy. In our view, this strategy should be adopted throughout all ITE provision if teachers of the future are going to seriously develop/support the minimum core subjects in addition to their primary subject areas. With recent criticisms in the media of the poor levels of literacy amongst newly-qualified teachers, one solution might be to make the Level 3 Award in English (or similar) a mandatory requirement for teachers.

Technology-enhanced learning:

The centrepiece of our new blended-learning model was our VLE on Moodle 2.3. For soldiers based in several different locations throughout the UK and Germany, the benefits of using a VLE are obvious. It not only allows students to keep in touch with each other in between workshop sessions but also allows them to keep in touch with the tutors. Our aim was to develop a thriving online community where collaborative and individual activity was encouraged. The research we carried out into developing an online community suggested two important considerations:

1. Students who need to prioritise their studies because of limited time are unlikely to access online materials or contribute to wikis, forums or blogs if they are not directly linked to summative assessment credit.
2. It is pedagogy rather than technology that should dictate the introduction of learning technologies into any programme of teaching and learning. Technology must enhance and improve the quality and efficiency of the teaching and learning.

It is too early to establish fully whether the technology we have introduced into our provision will enhance and improve the overall quality and efficiency of the programme. But, as already identified, the introduction of an online initial assessment unit has shown some very positive results.

What should be avoided? What doesn't work?

1. All of our research suggests that a VLE should not be used simply as a resource repository. This is neither blended-learning nor technology-enhanced learning. A VLE should form an integral part of the delivery with activities that challenge and promote deep learning. In essence, the VLE should model the methods and strategies that we are looking to develop in our trainee teachers.
2. We experienced considerable problems when using certain web browsers to access our VLE. Hyperlinks that were established in one browser failed to work in another. We decided to recommend a specific browser to use in our induction materials.
3. If a blended-learning model is to be used to deliver a programme of learning, it is important that the online elements of the delivery are not undersold as a 'poor relative' to the face-to-face sessions. We found that if 'first contact' is via a VLE, the online content is established as equally important.
4. The introduction of and reliance on technology-enhanced learning can create issues of inclusiveness. Beetham and Sharpe (2007, p.5) state that 'there is no doubt that the use of personal technologies creates new inequalities among learners'. Any technology-enhanced programme should minimise these inequalities as much as possible.

* Beetham, Helen, and Rhona Sharpe, eds. Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007

6. Advice to others
This case study will be made available to other providers via the Excellence Gateway. Please outline any advice you would wish to give to others who may be inspired to develop a similar model by answering the questions below. Where possible please highlight any resources (publicly available) that may be of use to others.

- What difference has this project made to our knowledge of running affordable and excellent ITE programmes as an organisation?

The project has helped us to establish the importance and benefits of technology-enhanced teaching and learning. With the funding we received, we designed a blended model of delivery that meets the needs of our learners (serving soldiers). We developed a brand-new Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) that will provide our students with a 24 hour a day platform that is available wherever they are located.

- What, if any, further developments are you considering as an organisation following on from this project?

We will continue to develop the VLE and our blended model of delivery based on the feedback/evaluation from the first cohort. In this way, each cohort of learners will work with us to continuously improve our ITE provision for future cohorts. Working as 'expert learners', our students will gain experience in evaluating, designing and developing our blended-learning model, experience that they can take forward as practitioners.

- Will this project result in sustainable improvement? If so, how?

The most significant and sustainable improvement for our ITE provision is the VLE. The project helped us to develop it and we will continue to use it as the centrepiece of our technology-enhanced provision. The full potential of our VLE has not yet been realised but, for us, that potential is massive.

- How can the lessons learnt in this project be applied to other provision?

Online initial assessment worked well for our students and should work well for all students taking part in an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme.

Curriculum design should be based on sound pedagogical principles. Methods and resources should be chosen based on their effectiveness for meeting the learning objectives. If technology represents the best method/resource, then it should be used.

The introduction of learning technologies can be expensive and might require continual upgrade (e.g. latest version software/hardware etc). If provision is to be enhanced by technology, it will require significant 'up-front' expenditure.

- What lessons are there about the strategic use of technology for ITE?

Some of the key lessons about the strategic use of technology have been discussed above. As general guidance, if funds and access to technologies are limited, target the use of technology at those areas of your Scheme of Work that would benefit the most.

7. Contact information
Please provide contact information of the author of this case study and state whether you are willing to answer queries from others.

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I am happy to answer queries as appropriate.

8. Resources available for others
Please provide details of the resources that can be made available to other providers as a result of this project. Examples may include teaching and learning resources, handbooks, spreadsheets to calculate costs, flyers and recruitment materials, procedure documents etc. These should be referenced in this report and submitted at the same time.

We have several resources that can be made available to other providers:

1. A research paper written by Ed Wood and Hillary Hughes on Developing the Online Learning Experience.
2. A student evaluation report on our online initial assessment module.
3. Screen shots of certain pages from our online learning materials.
4. A recruitment poster.
5. A case-study on an online activity called 'Create your own timetable'.