Supporting excellence in initial teacher education in further education and skills

Case study for projects

ABOUT YOUR PROJECT

1. Project title
West Midlands TLC: New FE/HE Partnerships - Digital Communities for Excellence of Teaching and Learning in ITE

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.
This project will establish a new regional cooperative model of blended ITE that supports flexible access to a wide range of stakeholders within the LL sector. The project will train teacher educators to develop innovative, personalised and accessible new programmes that deliver effective training for English, Maths and STEM teachers.

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

Our project built on existing provision but while using the project to develop and improve this, also led to the development of a new blended qualification and the extensive revision of an existing programme. The vast majority of the students recruited into our courses this year were able to access the innovative provision enabled by the project. Our in-service provision from September 2012 has recruited around 300 students (both Cert Ed (Level; 4-5) and PGCE (H) (Level 6-7) provision. This comprises six modules at 20 credits each over two years. The central Professional Practice modules in year one and year two has a blended journal element – in which students use Pebblepad or similar VLE to share a reflective journal on their development with their tutor. These courses are targeted at teachers already employed in FE colleges who have been required (to date) to gain an initial teacher education qualification.

Our pre-service PGCE provision at Level 6-7 from September 2012 has recruited around 80 students. The course comprises six modules: three at level 6 and three at Level 7. The course is delivered through seminars, lectures and like the in-service there is a central strand of tutorial support and interaction. Students develop a blended portfolio including a spinal reflective journal in which students engage in a professional dialogue with their personal tutor. This course is targeted at a wide range of individuals. We recruit recent graduates but also people who seek a change in career. In addition, the project had a direct impact on the practices of 30 teacher educators, introducing them to or extending their use of blended approaches.

In terms of meeting the training needs of English, Maths and STEM teachers, we have noticed that while recruitment for English, Technology, Engineering and Science teachers has remained steady, there has been a lower level of recruitment for Numeracy teachers. The blended approach we have developed is effective and attractive to teachers across the subject range.

A new blended Introduction to Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (ITLLS) is underway reaching circa 40 students. This course was newly developed through the project in response to partner colleges requesting a course centred on the values and approaches of the established in-service courses. The PTLLS continues to be a popular course, so development of this course facilitated a smoother transition and progression for those students wishing to continue (and with the required entry criteria). The target audience for this qualification are those people who are interested in trying out the FE sector and the teaching role before undertaking full certification.

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.

Where possible please provide a cost for these resources.

The project was founded on the principle of establishing a Community of Practice of teacher educators in FE across the West Midlands. To this end, much of the project money was ear-marked to facilitate paying for FE teacher educators' time to attend the workshops on blending and the sharing of blended practice. There is also an assumption that the sharing of developments of this kind can only take place effectively if extra-institutional relationships are support by members of the partnership. The relationships need to have a transformative rather transactional basis.

- Set up of e-space / webfolio as a central resource for the partnership = £425

- Establishment of Operational Group and Steering Group = uncosted

- Whole day workshop to draw up benchmarks of current blended practice – deploy survey on 'Readiness to Blend'. Identify pressing developmental needs across Partnership. FE participation costed at £325 per day. We had representation from 10 FE institutions 16 teacher educators = c. £6000

- Development of a database of mentors. Plan is to develop a Google – type map with mentors tagged by subject specialism. This is to take place Autumn 2012 = c. £1000

- Summer school days - 2: teacher educators brought together to share existing good practice and to form themed developmental groups to map out appropriate ways forward (costed at £100 per head for FE staff) = c. £5000

The cost of setting up this type of blended partnership approach from an established basis = in the region of £10 000 in terms of buy-out time to familiarise participants with the approach. But real investment is greater as founding and sustaining long term professional relationships of trust across institutional boundaries requires investment of significant staff time.

5. Achievement against aims and objectives of project, and lessons learnt *(approx 400 words)*
The main purpose of these projects was to set up new sustainable models of delivery of ITE (DTLLS and equivalents) which will:

- support providers to develop new and sustainable models of delivery to the highest quality standards;
- create efficient models of delivery, while maintaining fitness for purpose, with a focus on creating excellence in teaching and learning;
- develop ITE provision which is attractive, and affordable, to new trainees and employers and stimulate new partnerships and increased co-operation between subject associations, employers and providers.

Please comment on how well you believe your project has addressed these overall aims and objectives by answering the questions below. Any supporting evidence will be welcome here.

- What lessons have we learnt in terms of efficiency, quality improvement, costing and affordability?
- How can we implement the outcomes from this project in other similar provision?
- In what ways has technology been used to support the delivery? What advice would you give in terms of where it should be used and in what ways? (Answer only if applicable.)
- What should be avoided? What doesn't work?

The Importance of Developing a Transformative Model of Partnership
At the heart of what we have achieved there is a model of Partnership Working: we have established a network and communicative relationships that cross HE / FE boundaries between the different institutions in the Partnership. This has facilitated the on-going sharing of resources across ITE teams, ensuring sustainability. We are excited by the collaborative spirit and collegiality that has been engendered between members of the partnership. We recognise and celebrate that this cuts across the grain of the market competition that obtains in FE and HE in FE. We believe that this partnership approach requires investment at the outset. Furthermore, it needs to be viewed as founded on long term relationships that are transformative rather than merely transactional.

The positive impact on quality
This network also facilitated the establishment of structures that are capable of raising quality to new levels. We believe that students are the main beneficiaries in this collaboration. As the courses are all founded on the principal of reflective practice – and the professional dialogue established between tutor and student is a key feature of this, the use of blogging greatly extends the flexibility and the overall potential of this approach to achieve effective development. Feedback from students support this: *Comments made in my professional blog have been invaluable* – in-service student from a partner college already using blended approach.

Different Starting points
One important aspect of the partnership was a recognition that colleges had different starting points in terms of the IT base and their ability and readiness to blend. Developments then were likely to be site specific and diverse rather than uniform. This requires a responsive and heuristic approach on the part of developers.

New Role: the iTeacher
An important role emerged: that of a teacher / IT expert – the iTeacher. This person was needed to

deal with issues around, for example, firewalls and accessibility of VLE platforms. This person needed to have the language and knowledge to relate the teaching requirements to the technical support staff while also understanding and addressing their concerns. In the case of our project, we were fortunate to have an iTeacher in one of the colleges and he was used to travel around to others colleges to help iron out problems around delivery and accessibility.

Blended Approaches and Increased Efficiency

Increased efficiency is possible using our blended approaches but this is not a simple matter of reducing teaching time. Instead it calls for a new way of measuring use of staff time outside of the classroom. The question is: How do our colleges give working hours credit for teachers who are working in a Blended way? The *as well as* model has to move towards *instead of*. This means that standard classroom time is increasingly replaced by blended contact – a mixture of face to face and online interaction. To ensure that this does not jeopardise cohesion and quality, a stronger spinal role for tutorial modules is necessary. This is what we are trialling in our re-worked pre service (PGCE) course. This also feeds into the Ofsted agenda of focusing on learning outside of the classroom. Our contention is that in reflective practice, students learn *through reflection*. To support this, in one way or another, all assessments on the course are to some extent an extension of critical reflective activity. Blended approaches ensure that these extend outside classroom boundaries and outside timetabled hours. Traditional approaches to costing staff work / time are likely to be ineffective here. The project has been about building confidence and capacity and understanding in blended learning. The use of VLEs is in the new inspection framework and we believe that the emerging models are cost effective and maintain the highest standards of teaching and learning. Evidence for this we believe will emerge in the coming year from student feedback and from student outcomes. We already have evidence to support the use of blended approaches from previous versions of, for example, the pre-service course (see above). We recognise however, that in some colleges, managers have to be convinced of the cost effectiveness of blended approaches. This will require a step change for some – and a new way of looking at learning. The simple formulae expressing the conjunction of teachers, rooms and students are no longer adequate.

The HE role in HE in FE ITE

For us the HEI involvement is what made the Partnership model possible and effective. HEI involvement facilitates a sectoral rather than an institutional perspective. Colleges that do engage with a Partnership, are enabled to draw on and engage with an HE research base. From this project, we believe that successful teacher education is underpinned by academic thinking and study. This kind of engagement generates a scholarly approach. The move to autonomous learning is a win-win for all parties as student teachers are critical and reflective and empowered to develop their practice, meanwhile colleges benefit from excellence in teaching and learning. For some colleges, the teacher education team sits at the heart of quality improvement in teaching and learning. In these settings, teacher education is being used as a tool for developing the use of IT in subject specialist teaching.

We have also learned that with the continuing instability in the qualification base in FE ITE, it is important to develop bridging routes into whatever courses are on offer as potential students are presenting with a wider range than ever of legacy qualifications.

Blended learning is…

The use of VLEs to enhance the learning experience – to extend opportunities for critical reflection
The use of VLEs to enhance the creation of localised learning communities that make learning social through ICT

Most effective if integrated with face to face teaching
Dependent on a foundation of high trust relationships

Blended learning isn't...
A replacement for traditional face to face interactions between teachers and groups of students
A way of making savings – there needs to be an awareness that savings are only likely to accrue over a longer timescale

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?
- What, if any, further developments are you considering as an organisation following on from this project?
- Will this project result in sustainable improvement? If so, how?
- How can the lessons learnt in this project be applied to other provision?
- What lessons are there about the strategic use of technology for ITE?

A Partnership that aims to drive forward blended approaches to ITE in FE will not work well unless you consider these things:

1. The practical steps to setting up successful partnership arrangements should involve establishing multi-layered relationships which involve contributions from both sides. Shared assessment activities and team teaching are great ways of achieving this.
2. It's important to respond to colleges' different starting points and cultures. A differentiated supportive approach is required.
3. Partnerships are more than financial / accreditation arrangements. HEIs should not view HE in FE provision as an opportunity to franchise courses with minimal involvement and an opportunity to top-slice. As such, the relationships must be considered as (potentially) long term.
4. Values must be explicit and trust and transparency are the starting point for this. There needs to be clear communication on costs and on shared territory and expectations.
5. The value of HE backing for ITE courses emanates from i) the research base; ii) the perspective that allows for policy critique; iii) the perspectives on values and cultures that foster excellence in teaching and learning that emanate from i) and ii). A community of practice will emerge where FE teacher educators are viewed in a collegial way by HE providers and are scaffolded to develop professionally as experts and equal partners in the field.
6. We have learnt not to design our teacher education courses in response to centrally generated qualifications (e.g. PTLLS and CTLLS). We have found it is better to create courses that are underpinned by sound principles and values that can be related to new structures. Our courses are founded on a core of reflective practice – this approach is student- centred and builds on students' existing understanding and experience. The values and principles associated with this approach have a longevity that surpasses the variegated policy initiatives that have rolled out in the last five years.
7. The move to autonomous learning that is implicit in a blended approach is a win-win for colleges and teachers but it requires investment at the outset. In the experience of our partnership,

developing blended approaches is long term, probably three year rather than one. People have different starting points. There is hardware infrastructure but it also demands a change of practice – the way the teaching and learning happens. The role of HEIs in ensuring the scholarliness of courses is key.

8. There is a need for a new role: the iTeacher. Someone who has a pedagogical grounding but also knows the ins and outs of Firewalls and digital communities. We found that some of the biggest steps forward were very practical. A colleague from one college who knew all about firewalls and security was able to go to other colleges and talk to their IT services in appropriate language in order to facilitate involvement.

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.

Dr Rob Smith
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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.

- Plan for ITLLS: (See attached Appendix I)

- Questionnaire for benchmarking: please see this link to our survey monkey survey: http://survey.wlv.ac.uk/survey.asp?s=01025197159064091242

- Terms of Ref for operational and steering group (See Appendix II)

- Action plan for regional mentoring forum (See Appendix III).

- And a screenshot of Webfolio front page: I will send this in the next few days…..