

Reinvigorating Curriculum Design

Case Study



Project title: Developing an interactive session planning tool for 16-18 vocational programmes

The project set out to develop an online session planning tool incorporating interactive activities and blended learning, thereby improving the Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) skills and confidence of staff. Simple drag-and-drop responses built into the session plan template encourage staff to explore and select tried-and-tested, technology-based activities. Learners are encouraged to provide their immediate reaction to, and their suggestions for improving, the activities through online surveys, blogs and text wall media.

Worth reading if you are interested in:

- Improving Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) practice of teaching staff
- Encouraging the development of blended learning approaches
- Using Learner Voice to focus curriculum change

Contact information

Main contact: Mrs Gail Knowles

Email: gail.knowles@leedscitycollege.ac.uk

Participating organisation:

Leeds City College (LCC) , Park Lane, Leeds, LS3 1AA

What the project set out to do and why

The challenge:

- In the light of a recent large merger, identify existing TEL strengths and foster innovation across the newly-formed college.
- Address a perceived weakness that some teaching can be 'dull and uninspiring', 'lack variety' and that 'students are disengaged'.
- Respond to learners' expectations of the power of technology used in teaching and learning.
- Use appropriate technology to support independence and personalisation in learning.

Proposed actions:

- Identify the factors that are conducive to collaboration among teaching staff and students in designing TEL.
- Identify TEL activities and resources that are considered engaging by learners on the pilot courses.
- Develop an interactive session planning tool incorporating “click-on” access to TEL activities and resources.

What the project has achieved so far

The project team identified two courses with retention rates below the college target levels. Teaching staff on these courses were assigned a Learning Innovation Mentor (LIM) who is an expert practitioner in TEL pedagogies to ensure that staff were supported in using appropriate technologies as selected through the Interactive Lesson Planner.

Teaching staff and learners on the courses were surveyed on their experience of using technologies in learning. This enabled the project team to determine the most appropriate technologies for staff to focus on when creating session plans, and coaching support has been provided by the LIMs to raise awareness of the technologies available and improve the TEL skills of teaching staff.

At the same time, the standard, paper-based session plan has been converted to an electronic version, enhanced with “drag-and-drop” features to suggest TEL strategies and resources.

The draft session plan has been trialled by staff in the pilot courses. A 'Text Wall' was set up for learners to give immediate feedback on the use of TEL during the session. Learners have also been able to feed back through forum posts.

A demonstration of the Interactive Lesson Planner was provided to 1500 college staff via an Adobe Connect presentation during the 'Festival of Learning' staff development day.

There are some early indicators of success for the project. The feedback received from staff so far is very encouraging. The course tutors involved in the pilot found the lesson planner to be a very useful tool and are sure that it will become an indispensable aid when it is launched. They particularly like the drag-and-drop aspect and how activities can be reviewed and scored.

In addition, the project has impacted positively (and unexpectedly) on a couple of other issues in the College. A cultural shift in the future of learning at LCC has begun together with a new-found energy to meet the needs of 21st-century students. There has also been an impact on quality, as one outcome of the project is a recommendation to amend the lesson-planning process given that the existing lesson plan is not fit for purpose for teaching in digital age to 21st-century students.

What the project still needs to do

- The College will be resourcing further development of the project through college budgets.
- After the end of the project, there is scope to develop the Interactive Planner in a variety of different directions, such as a vehicle to drive change for the new lesson plans, but that will require the development of appropriate criteria.
- The bank of TEL activities needs adding to and user ratings collecting.
- There is scope to add a desktop link to every PC in the College, putting lesson planning at the forefront of all tutors minds when they log in.

What the project wants to share with other schools, colleges and training providers

The following resource is available as a PowerPoint file accompanying this case study:

- PowerPoint used at the 'Festival of Learning' staff development day introducing the Interactive Lesson Planner.

Key learning points

- Whilst students are digital leaders, most are unfamiliar with using technology for learning, which manifested as a potential barrier to engaging in the project. Further work needs to be done to affect this cultural change (such as removing 'No Mobile Phones' signage from classrooms and libraries).
- The allocation of Learning Improvement Mentors was critical to the success of the project. As TEL champions with effective coaching skills, they overcame barriers quickly and early on in the project.
- Organisations need to be prepared to "go with the flow" when collaborating with staff and students as their feedback was essential in identifying previously unplanned directions – such as focusing the planner at activity level rather than at lesson plan level, which had originally been envisaged.
- Students have had mixed feelings about using texts to give feedback, so methods of data collection need to be reviewed for next time. One problem could be the lack of response for their effort of texting. The survey worked well with staff and students and, by completing this before and after the project, there is the prospect of good comparative data.
- Provide support to staff to embrace change. The LIMs provided coaching support on TEL and staff have been responsive to change. They are excited by new possibilities of using technology in their lessons. Tutors need to see the practical

application of TEL to understand and engage with it.

- Breaking lesson plans down to small bite-sized chunks was key to the success of the Interactive Lesson Planner. Each activity in the planner is more relevant, less onerous and easily portable. Small-step changes enables evolution rather than revolution!