

# **IMPROVING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT: OTLA NEWSLETTER**

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## WELCOME

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to this, the second edition of our exciting newsletter [Improving Teaching, Learning and Assessment](#), which is commissioned and funded by the Education and Training Foundation expressly for you. The newsletter is published regularly and aims to share with you a range of stories, ideas and new ways of working, all of which are currently emerging from the Foundation's [Outstanding, Teaching, Learning and Assessment](#) (OTLA) programme. It concentrates on the real experiences of professionals like yourselves and keeps at its heart the transformational power of learning and the unique experience of each individual learner.

We are fortunate in this edition to have many new thought-provoking stories for you, including reports from the OTLA South West project and the benefits of Professional Exchanges. All are designed to support and stimulate you in your quest for excellence.

So, do read and enjoy. And do [send us your own stories](#) for future editions. We want to hear your views or any examples of effective practice you would like to share with us. Please do get in touch and send details with pictures, visuals or quotes if you have them. We want to give you a platform.

Best wishes,

Mary Conway

Editor

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## What are Professional Exchanges?

The *Professional Exchange Network*<sup>1</sup> is one of the Education and Training Foundation's most popular and successful activities to date, its reach having extended to over **2300 people**! It operates nationally and consists of a fast-growing range of **regional hubs** for teachers.

### What is its aim?

As one of the four strands of the Foundation's OTLA programme, the Professional Exchange Network (PEN) seeks to improve teaching, learning and assessment through **practitioner collaboration** and **shared activity**.

### How does it work?

A Professional Exchange is a locally organised group that meets or engages regularly and, most importantly, is led and defined by the **needs of the practitioners**. In each group, practitioners can raise issues or concerns, reflect on their own practice, share, collaborate and develop solutions.

### What happens in practice?

The group members often begin by completing a review of their own skills and knowledge. Then together they identify what they would like to develop further and plan activities accordingly. Some of these activities include:

- small scale action research projects
- specific training sessions for the group
- 'steal and share' sessions allowing practitioners to swap experiences, knowledge and skills
- subject specific groups looking at pedagogy in one area

Suppose your students are not engaging satisfactorily with the maths and English elements of their study programme and you decide to join a local Exchange. At your first Exchange group meeting, you may meet three others who are facing the same issue. Together you can decide to undertake some action research whereby each of you trials one of three different methods of engaging your students. You then work together to evaluate your findings and, at your next Exchange meeting, report back on your progress so far and share your learning and ideas with others.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/supporting/support-practitioners/improvements-in-teacher-learning-and-assessment/>

## How do I join an Exchange?

The Foundation are busy organising our latest set of Exchanges in the following areas:

- Cornwall and Devon
- Cumbria
- East of England
- Essex, Suffolk and South Norfolk
- Greater London
- Midlands
- North East
- North West
- South West
- Sussex and Hampshire
- Third Sector
- Yorkshire and Humber

You can find more information and get involved by visiting the Foundation [website<sup>2</sup>](#).

## NEWS STORY! - PROFESSIONAL EXCHANGE REAPS BENEFITS FOR PROVIDERS AND LEARNERS

Over the past two years, the West Midlands Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (WMCETT) ran a strand of the Foundation's Professional Exchange project across the region.

### Who was involved?



Almost 300 individuals from 102 organisations have attended one or more of 12 face-to-face events, and one webinar. They came from a wide range of settings including colleges, work-based training, adult and

community learning, voluntary organisations and from one secure institution.

### How did the Exchange work?

The WMCETT Professional Exchange worked by asking people **what subject, issues of concern or interest they would like to cover**, and what they could contribute.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/supporting/support-practitioners/improvements-in-teacher-learning-and-assessment/professional-exchange-regional-projects/>

### Remember:

Exchanges provide a great opportunity to meet practitioners from other organisations who share the same challenges and see the same opportunities as you.



300 people from  
102 organisations!

Each event had an expert facilitator, but participants were encouraged to “volunteer” in advance to lead sections on areas where they were further down the road than others. Everyone then fed into discussions, and shared practice, resources and contacts. The volunteers were sometimes hard to find or persuade, though on occasions, impromptu presentations added to the quality of the experience, while putting pressure on the timetable.

### What subjects were covered?

The participants focused [on a range of subjects](#), including: maths, English, safeguarding, SEND, digital literacies and learning technology innovation, improving quality of teaching and learning, British Values and Prevent, improving learner engagement and behaviour, Ofsted readiness, and assessment, progression and employability.

### What was the outcome?

All 20 of the [Professional Standards](#)<sup>3</sup> were addressed across the events, and each event had a “[top 5 resources](#)” element, often sharing links to new ETF resources. All participants were given access to an online forum, to chat and upload resources.

### What was the impact?



Some people noted the benefit of the Exchange on the day, taking away links to new resources or ideas for teaching techniques they would use.

Others changed management

structures and responsibilities, or started to use more free digital resources without fear: in maths, English, with SEND learners and across the curriculum. The participants in the summer 2017 events are just starting to make their changes.



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“What subject, issues of concern or interest would you like to cover?”

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One council has changed its approach to disseminating information on Prevent and British Values as a direct result of an Exchange.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/supporting/support-practitioners/professional-standards/>

[Watch<sup>4</sup>](#) Sarah Walters, Contracts Manager for Two Counties Training (through Worcestershire County Council) discusses the [multiple benefits of being involved in the West Midlands Professional Exchange](#) and how they adapted ideas from peers and have been supported by Professional Exchange members.



The hardest aspect has been to track substantial numbers of people to measure long-term impact. Some are keen to tell us what they have done; in the first year, those who responded, told us [492 fellow practitioners](#) had benefited from their experience, [5,065 learners](#) and [146 employers](#). However, this was just the report from a fraction of attendees. The full impact is clearly a lot higher, and a testimony to the value of the Professional Exchange.

Julie Chamberlain, WMCETT Project Manager



*“We really wanted to be part of it.”*  
Sarah Walters,  
Contracts Manager,  
Two Counties Training

## NEWS STORY! - OTLA SOUTH WEST PROJECT - FINAL DISSEMINATION DAY!

10th July this year was a cause for celebration in the sector when the OTLA South West project, funded by the Education and Training Foundation and led by Creative Education, showcased no fewer than 20 peer-led projects on its final dissemination day.



The 20 projects were developed across the sector by FE Colleges, Independent Training Providers, Councils and Secure Units and represented the culmination of an intensive six months of successful and innovative partnership and collaboration.

At the dissemination event, each project demonstrated its own unique approach to transforming and improving teaching, learning and assessment. Meanwhile the programme for the day was enhanced by stimulating contributions from key note speakers’ [Dr Gary Jones](#) on ‘[The Potential and Pitfalls of Action Research](#)’ and [Linda Simpson](#) on ‘[The](#)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0wsNrZHbil&feature=youtu.be+%3F%3A>

## Importance of OTLA within the Foundation Offer’.

And there was an exciting moment when awards were given to the three most outstanding projects:



‘Tech talk’ by South Devon College

‘Nothing is taught unless it is learnt’ by Wiltshire College

‘Digital pedagogy’ by Hartpury College

## How can we find out more about the OTLA South West projects?

The OTLA South West projects focused on identified sector challenges, ranging from resilience to remote digital teaching and learning and, between them, produced a wealth of reports, strategies and resources that demonstrated real impact and transferability. The good news is that all these project reports and all accompanying resources will be shared with the whole sector via the Excellence Gateway later this year. Check with the [Improving Teaching](#) Exhibition site.

Meanwhile, here are stories about just a few of the projects:

### Project 1 - Using online learning to modify attitudes towards English GCSEs

*Kingston Maurward and Bournemouth and Poole College*

#### The starting point

Our two colleges (Kingston Maurward and Bournemouth and Poole) agreed on a shared issue. The issue was that learners could not see a value in the content of GCSE English language nor in its associated skills in a wider context.

In a pre-course survey, most learners claimed their English level was already good enough for them to function in their lives, and though 89% of respondents felt that gaining a GCSE Grade C was beneficial, only 78% felt that the GCSE content was of any use or relevance.

#### The thinking

We decided that, by giving only positive messages about the value of the qualification as a certificate, much like a driving licence, we could improve learners’ attitudes to English and therefore their outcomes.

#### The action

We designed a set of interactive resources that focused on the benefits of GCSE English and on the importance of the skills it developed.



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At the start of their courses, 78% of learners found English GCSE was irrelevant and of no use.

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Vocational tutors delivered material focusing on the benefits of GCSE English.

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We ensured that the vocational tutors delivered the material without influence from the English department. The vocational tutors were encouraged to give positive messages at all times about the value and impact on learners' careers of a good grade in English.

### The results

Learners' attitudes have noticeably improved in the English classroom and results too have improved. A secondary benefit is that vocational tutors have become more engaged with GCSE and more confident in embedding English. In addition, vocational tutors at BPC have expressed interest in delivering to wider groups.

Kay Davies (Kingston Maurward College) [Kay.davies@kmc.ac.uk](mailto:Kay.davies@kmc.ac.uk)

Barney Selman (Bournemouth and Poole College) [selmanb@bpc.ac.uk](mailto:selmanb@bpc.ac.uk)



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"Learners attitudes have noticeably improved."

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## Project 2 - Tech talk – embedding literacy support into vocational programmes

*South Devon College*

### The starting point

The Tech Talk project involved three partners working together. These were [South Devon College](#), [City College Plymouth](#) and [Petroc](#) who were all keen to embed literacy support into their vocational programmes.

### The thinking

They decided to produce and deliver a range of vocationally specific vocabulary lessons. These lessons would be designed to engage learners in developing their literacy skills, as well as improving their confidence with spelling, and would be delivered [by English teachers during vocational lessons](#).

### The action

Twenty-five lessons were delivered over four months, with partners free to choose vocational areas and activities. Meanwhile vocational glossaries and activities were hosted on South Devon College's Community Moodle known as ComMoodle.



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Partners were keen to embed literacy support into vocational programmes.

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Vocational-specific vocabulary lessons were introduced.

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## The results

Evaluation forms were completed by 167 learners.

- 81% of learners enjoyed their vocabulary lessons
- 74% evidenced improved confidence in spelling

A core element of the project was building working relationships between English and vocational staff.

- 96% rated the support from the English tutor positively.

100% of vocational tutors stated that their learners were positively engaged and listed benefits that included:

- building learner confidence
- discovering new activities
- making links between core programmes and English.

Each of the 25 vocational tutors involved said they would now deliver the lesson themselves to future cohorts.

The project has been declared a great success, with all partners reporting significant benefits to learners and tutors who took part. Each partner will continue to deliver the vocabulary lessons and enhance the initial project aims. Resources will be refined and delivery will be expanded to cover additional vocational subjects. Vocational tutors will independently deliver embedded English support.

## Key learning points

- Collaboration between English and vocational tutors is key to the success of lessons.
- English specialists need to adapt lessons to meet learner needs.
- Clear and consistent communication is essential.

Helen Brown, Programme Coordinator for English & Maths, South Devon College

[helen.brown@southdevon.ac.uk](mailto:helen.brown@southdevon.ac.uk)



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81% of learners enjoyed the lessons.

100% of tutors stated learners were positively engaged.

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Collaboration between English and vocational tutors is key to the success of lessons.



## Project 3 - 'Nothing is taught unless it is learnt'

Wiltshire College

### The starting point

The Creative Education Transforming Teaching, Learning and Assessment project provided a great opportunity for [Wiltshire College](#) and the [Defence School of Electronic and Mechanical Engineering \(DSEME\)](#) to work collaboratively together in support of the continued drive to enhance professional practice. Both training providers were in very different positions regarding their practice so it was essential that the project addressed the needs of both organisations while also producing findings that would benefit other training providers.

The project involved teachers from both organisations sharing their experience of working in very different learning environments and their ideas about how to add value and impact to the student experience.

### The thinking

It was agreed that all teachers would be asked to try out seven different TLA strategies over a period of five months.

It was essential that these strategies were not too prescriptive so that the teachers could be as creative and innovative as possible and

challenge their normal delivery, regardless of where they were in their teaching practice.

### The action

The seven strategies to be trialled were:

- Formative assessment
- Collaborative learning
- Open space learning (take the tables away)
- Creative PowerPoint
- Use of pictures and imagery – (no words allowed)
- Pre-learning – 'Flipped classroom'
- Skype - replaced with peer observations due to military security issues.

Students and teachers were asked to feed back in a variety of ways before and after each strategy. They looked at each strategy's effect on the learning experience and its impact on the improvement of learning opportunities.



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Teachers from two very different organisations shared their experience and ideas.

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All teachers tried out seven different TLA strategies over 5 months.

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As part of this project, a Learning Technology ‘**Shuffle Day**’ took place in March 2017 at Wiltshire College, Chippenham. This day enabled teachers to show-case innovative and exciting use of technology and provided opportunities for teachers to discuss their experiences planning and delivering some of the strategies listed above to their peers. DSEME staff who were involved in the project participated in the event by both delivering their own training session and as delegates.

Over 400 staff attended and a staggering number of training sessions were delivered (300) including;

- The Effective Use of Virtual Reality
- Coaching using Coaching Eye
- Using Microsoft O365 Apps to support Learning in and out of the classroom
- ‘Using drones in an educational setting.

### The results

The impact of the training at Wiltshire College was immediate. Formal observations taking place the next day saw a huge increase in teachers using new technology effectively and the Learning Technology Team were inundated with requests for further training and support.

Several months on and the impact is still very evident.

### Impact for learners

Learners were exposed to a variety of different learning strategies, especially for the military trainees. They were also empowered to have a voice in how teaching can impact their learning; influencing future delivery. Engagement in this project also enhanced relationships between students / trainees and their teacher / trainer.

Jane Davison [Jane.davison@wiltshire.ac.uk](mailto:Jane.davison@wiltshire.ac.uk)

Charlotte Corfield [Charlotte.corfield@wiltshire.ac.uk](mailto:Charlotte.corfield@wiltshire.ac.uk)



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400 staff attended 300 training sessions.

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There was a huge increase in teachers using new technology and learners were empowered to have a voice in how teaching can impact on their learning.

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**Project 4 - 'Fear destroys the capacity to learn'**  
**Becoming Trauma-Informed: Developing Education Practice in Offender Learning**  
*Weston College*

**The starting point**

The purpose of this project was to investigate the impact of trauma on learning and then support learners and maximise their experiences within Offender Learning. This project was developed by Education professionals from [Weston College](#), working in partnership with [HMP Eastwood Park](#).

**The thinking**

[Acquiring new cognitive information](#) and [retrieving stored information](#) are both essential characteristics of education. Previous traumatic experiences can have a profound effect on learning which may result in learners having difficulties retrieving cognitive content or learning new things. Therefore, it is important that anyone teaching, supporting and / or communicating in a range of settings understands the impact of trauma on the learning experience, as there is a direct correlation between trauma and low academic achievement.

[Trauma-Informed education practice](#) is when learning providers understand the impact of trauma and establish structures and protocols to minimise that impact on the learning experience. This is achieved through acknowledging the effects of trauma on learners through their learning, behaviour and relationships. This project was completed at HMP Eastwood Park where unfortunately many learners have been exposed to trauma.

**The action**

A bespoke training programme was developed and delivered to teachers to improve their understanding of trauma on brain development, learning and behaviour.

Recommendations and new practices which developed a “trauma-informed perspective” were instituted because of the training.

These new practices were added to every interaction to minimise the impact of trauma on the learning process.



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Investigating the effect of trauma on learning.

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Practitioners were given bespoke training on the effects of trauma on the brain.

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## The results

In the future, this project hopes to lead to the development of a framework which will contain possible activities that departments and teams can undertake to become more trauma-sensitive / informed. This will allow other prison education departments to develop action plans as part of their Quality Improvement Plan acknowledging all stages of the learner journey, positively benefitting learners and maximising their engagement and success.

Chris Emmett [Chris.Emmett@weston.ac.uk](mailto:Chris.Emmett@weston.ac.uk)

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This project hopes to lead to the development of a framework that will allow other prison education departments to develop action plans.

## NEWS STORY! - "WE ARE ALL RESEARCHERS!"

### Creating a Research-active Community

"We are all researchers!" was the powerful rallying cry of Professor Jean McNiff during her week of visits to OTLA project groups in the North East and Cumbria earlier this year.

### The background

Jean was sharing with the OTLA North East and Cumbria project participants what it means to be a professional practitioner in our sector and was delighted to address a whole range of support assistants, trainers, assessors, teachers and managers from prisons, training companies, colleges and other workplaces of the region.

### The message

Jean was so impressed by the range and complexity of our challenging work in the sector that she immediately urged us all to commit to our responsibilities as professionals.

Her key points were that we must:

- develop strong voices to produce and share informed research into professional practice
- develop the language of research when validating our work to local and national audiences
- take pride in speaking as equal partners in the established research community
- celebrate what we do
- investigate how we can do it even better.

## The thinking

Jean reminded us how we all do research whenever we investigate better ways to manage our everyday lives. We make plans, we take actions and we review what we do with the aim of making life better. However, Jean suggested that we usually don't think of ourselves as being capable of research, as we have become accustomed to seeing research as being done by other "experts". Jean drew on Schön's image of the practitioners with their knowledgeable



experience of the "swampy low ground" of everyday practice, relying on the academic researchers up in the "hard, high ground" in universities to provide explanations of what the practitioners are doing. And Jean left us in no doubt that this

under-informed research on practice will continue until practitioners say, "I can speak for myself, thank you!"



## What did the participants say?

The response from all the participants on the project teams was extremely appreciative and there were many comments which shared the same message: "It all makes sense now!" Student support workers, teachers, trainers, and managers alike described how the session gave them confidence and a sense of empowerment.

Other comments included:

*"...was excellent and made me feel confident and comfortable to write (about) my experience."*

*"I plan to look at my evidence through my values."*

*"Inspirational!"*

One really telling comment came from a colleague who was retiring at the end of the week after a long career and admitted to having 'gate-crashed' Jean's session: "That was so powerful – I really wish that I could stay on and try some of those ideas...."

## So where do we go next?

At the end of a wonderfully inspiring week, Jean left us with one important reminder:

“*(I can now) take ownership of my views - I know why I do something and can justify my practice.*”

“*...Really inspiring session. I came away feeling empowered and keen to contribute to action research.*”

*We must remember that our wonderful professional practice is often hidden from the public when it should be broadcast and celebrated!*

To do this, we must “sing our praises” – only then will our voices be heard – and we need to address the research community in writing, fully and powerfully capturing the richness and rigour of our research.

### How do I find out more?

To find out more about the action research being undertaken within the Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment North East and Cumbria contact [otla.nec@ccconsultancy.co.uk](mailto:otla.nec@ccconsultancy.co.uk)

Dr. Andy Convery

## CALENDAR

- Opportunities are now open for organisations to become part of the Education and Training Foundation’s Professional Exchange – further details [here](#)<sup>5</sup>
- 20 March 2018: ETF / AoC Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment Technical Skills National Conference (OTLA) – further details [here](#)

In the next edition find out how the supported experiments being led by Intuitions School of Hairdressing & Beauty Therapy, in Harrogate, are helping learners to develop their confidence in maths.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/supporting/support-practitioners/improvements-in-teacher-learning-and-assessment/professional-exchange-regional-projects/>