

# Using the virtual learning environment (VLE) for a blended approach to functional skills

Supported provider: Wessex Training and Assessment



## Summary

Wessex Training and Assessment has delivered Apprenticeships for some time and has started to support learners in their preparation for functional skills. As is the case for most assessors, assessors find themselves having to deliver sessions on English, maths and IT whilst delivering the main programme of Childcare. Functional skills ICT is included in the framework for Childcare and this is quite a challenge. Learners have limited time in the workplace to be released from duty, as ratios of childcare staff to children are essential. Learners often have to meet with assessors on their day off.

## Introduction

### What we wanted to achieve

In order to address some of the difficulties in offering enough support for learners in all areas of their provision, Wessex Training and Assessment decided to invest a considerable amount of time in developing their virtual learning environment (VLE) to offer resources and activities to learners. With support from JISC South West, who helped with the technical side, we put together a website from which learners could access all the resources, workbooks and materials for childcare (at all levels) and access suitable resources for functional skills. Our intended outcome was to have a comprehensive package that would support learners, allowing them to learn at a time that would suit them but with support from their assessor. We did however want some way of checking the progress learners were making, so it was important to develop a management system to keep track of learners.

## Implementation

### Planning our approach

Our key stakeholders were as follows.

#### Key stakeholders

- Chris Sutton, Functional Skills Co-ordinator, Wessex Training & Assessment
- Jayne Headon-Meldrum, Quality Control Manager, Wessex Training & Assessment
- Martin Thomson of t4Learning.
- JISC South West.

We scoped and developed activity in the following ways.

### Teams/groups established to take forward the activity

A meeting with assessors took place to explore:

- how to help apprentice learners achieve their award and to study at their own pace; and
- how assessors could keep track of how apprentices are studying, what they are studying and if they are achieving.

It was decided at these meetings that Chris Sutton, Jayne Headon-Meldrum and Martin Thomson would develop the VLE site so that learners:

- could access and complete assignments;
- assessors could monitor the site to review whether learners were accessing and using the site; and
- develop suitable resources and materials, enabling learners to access them in their own time.

### Roles and responsibilities

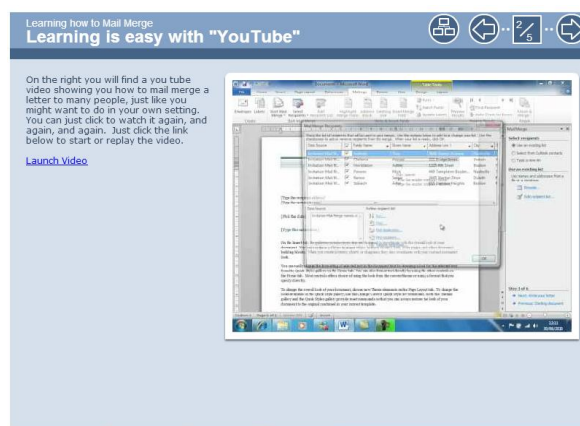
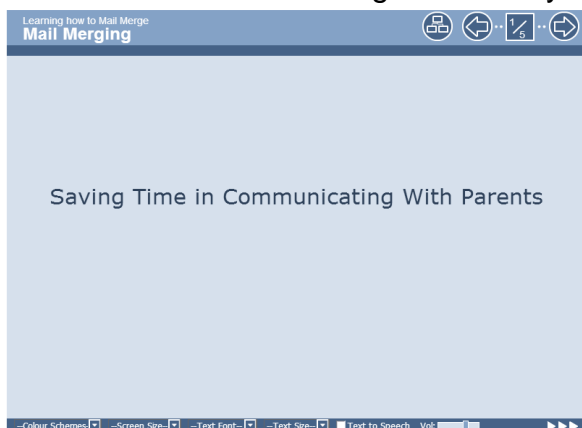
Chris Sutton developed the ideas and suggestions for the site and updated the VLE site accordingly. The VLE site became the **Wessex Xtras** site for learners. Regular meetings were arranged between Chris Sutton, Jayne Headon-Meldrum and Martin Thomson to put these plans into action, ensuring the site was developed to give the outcome that we wanted.

### Actions and timescales

- A six month action plan was developed to have the site updated and ready for all learners to access.
- A further three month action plan was developed to implement the learning assignments for the learners to access and practice.
- Functional skills were major part of this development; ensuring learners could practice and be ready for their tests.
- A process of assessor support was established and implemented through Wessex Xtras.
- The assessor would be able to give learners practice sessions, help with the information on the site and help prepare learners for functional skills tests.
- Once learners have completed the practice sessions the assessor will automatically be notified of their practice session and score by email.
- This would help the assessor determine the next steps for that individual learner.

### Resources/technologies used

Moodle, YouTube, City and Guilds practice tests and JISC resources were all used in the development of the VLE. Scorms were also developed for the VLE site and the site is also RSS linked to relevant childcare news of the day. Learners and assessors can keep up to date with all relevant childcare changes each day.



## Considerations for what would happen at the end of the activity (if time/funding limited)

The process of getting it right for the learner to achieve their functional skills and Apprenticeship award is very important. As everyone learns at different rates and has different strengths, it is important to ensure that the information provided to the learner is directed at their ability. Therefore if time and funding becomes limited we will know that the up to date information we are providing is helping them to the best of our ability as a training provider. Our priority is to support our learners in the best way that we can so time and funding would have to be budgeted for, so that we can continue to provide this service to our learners.

## What we did

### Promotion/engagement of relevant target groups/audiences

We agreed the following activities.

- Assessors will discuss with learners the Wessex Xtras site at induction, and encourage learners to access it in order to research relevant resources and practice their functional skills.
- Tutorials and learning sessions would be arranged for learners who need extra help to practice these resources.
- At assessors meetings we would update learners on how to use the site.
- Assessors to practice the resources themselves so that they are fully aware of how they can help each of their learners.
- Jayne to undertake a trial run of the process to make sure that it is clear and easy to understand and carry out.

### How specific tasks/activities were structured and carried out

Chris researched the functional skills practice tests from the City and Guilds website, enabling us to understand what the learner would have to achieve in their tests. This meant Chris was able to research the relevant material and resources that would help learners with practice towards their test. Different levels were covered and also different types of learning material e.g. YouTube videos to help learners understand how to do an activity. This informed the development of the VLE.

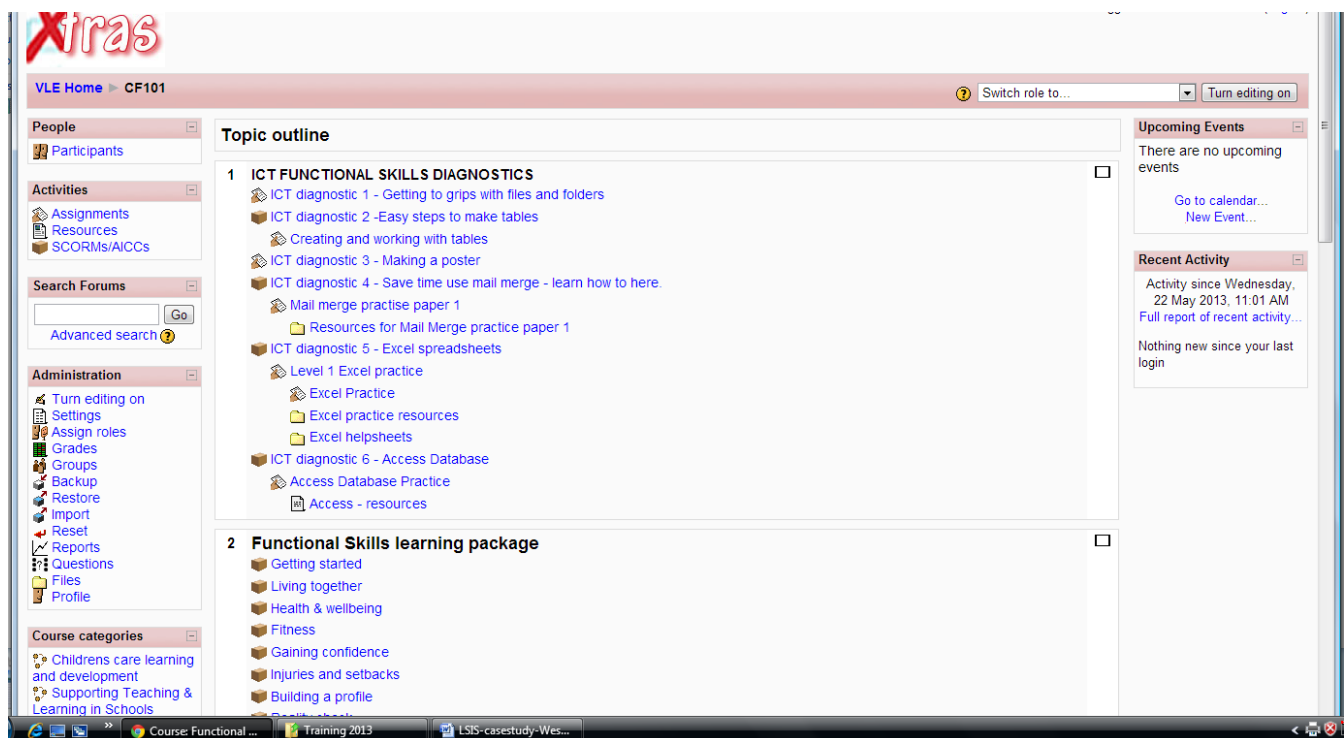
The image is a screenshot of the Wessex Xtras VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) interface. At the top left, the 'Xtras' logo is visible. Below it, the breadcrumb 'VLE Home > CF101' is shown. The main content area is titled 'Topic outline' and contains two sections: '1 ICT FUNCTIONAL SKILLS DIAGNOSTICS' and '2 Functional Skills learning package'. The first section lists various diagnostic activities such as 'Getting to grips with files and folders', 'Easy steps to make tables', 'Making a poster', 'Save time use mail merge', 'Excel spreadsheets', and 'Access Database'. The second section lists learning package topics like 'Getting started', 'Living together', 'Health & wellbeing', 'Fitness', 'Gaining confidence', 'Injuries and setbacks', and 'Building a profile'. On the left side, there is a navigation menu with categories like 'People', 'Activities', 'Search Forums', 'Administration', and 'Course categories'. On the right side, there are panels for 'Upcoming Events' (showing no events) and 'Recent Activity' (showing activity from May 22, 2013). The bottom of the screenshot shows a Windows taskbar with several open applications.

Figure 1: A snapshot of the Wessex Xtras VLE.

## Response to the activity by the relevant groups (including those involved in delivery)

Learners who are accessing the site are finding it very useful and are coming to their practice tests fully prepared. We can then work on the areas that they are struggling with and help them prepare to pass their tests. Assessors are able to keep track of their learners and monitor their progress.

## Areas where the activity needed to be re-scoped/changed during delivery.

Some of the resources needed to be checked as they were not responding correctly, so with feedback from assessors and learners this was implemented. Also with the practice tests changing on the City and Guilds site, the research information needed to be updated. Assessors also wanted a page that they could access for the marking scheme, so this was implemented. Some learners are not accessing the site as we would like them to, so another promotional drive may be needed to make sure that they are aware of how beneficial accessing Wessex Xtras can be.



## Outcomes and impacts

### What we achieved

The website is now operational and all assessors have been trained to use it. Learners are still in the early stages of using it so we are not yet able to evaluate its effectiveness.

### What we learned

Learners need to see the benefits of using the site. It is important that they realise they can have help on using it initially and that they can contact their assessor if they are unsure about how to find information. We would like to collect and use YouTube clips of learners expressing their opinions of the site and how it has helped them with their studies.

The key learning points have been as follows.

- Learners want to see how they are progressing.
- The importance of assessors being very aware of what their learners are achieving and the support that they need.
- Learners appreciate having help in one place. It suits the learners as they can work through the different resources to help them prepare for their functional skills.
- Many learners do not have access to the Access database and therefore find practicing this a problem at home. Therefore Access sessions have been tutorial based to help learners with the process of databases.

- Getting the learner motivated to actually use the Xtras site can be a problem. Hopefully, as mentioned previously, another promotional drive with the learners to show them how useful it can be to prepare them will have the right impact.

### **What we are taking forward**

We will be making improvements to the site on an ongoing basis. Our next support session with JISC will be to look at how we can upload video clips to the site.

### **How we are sharing it**

We have shared our findings and our final product at the South West LSIS Sharing Good Practice Event in June 2013.

### **What advice we would give to others**

JISC has been particularly supportive with this initiative and we have been able to contact Martin, our adviser, as and when we have needed support. We also realised that it is important to have more than one administrator setting up the learner groups. Training on how to use the system is key to its success. Our assessors have all attended a launch event and know who to contact within the company with any queries.

## **Contact information**

**Date published:** June 2013

**Provider name:** Wessex Training and Assessment

**Sector coverage:** This case study is particularly relevant to all work based learning providers offering Childcare Apprenticeships. However, it would also be of interest to any work based provider who is interested in developing their VLE to support learners with a blended learning approach.

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