JISC

# Case study 10: Creating the culture: a holistic approach to technology-enhanced learning

Gloucestershire College

## What this case study covers

- **Subject and level:** Learners and staff in further education (pre entry to higher education)
- **Topic:** A multi-faceted and supportive approach to combining pedagogical intent, learner expectations and institutional efficiencies
- **Technologies used:** Wide range, but specifically featured are: a bespoke retention- and attainment-monitoring system, Sony® PSP™ games consoles, Nintendo DSi™ consoles, Moodle™, student Wi-Fi system, Facebook™, Promethean Activexpression

## Background

Gloucestershire College has three main sites, in Cheltenham, Gloucester and the Forest of Dean, as well as a number of satellite sites such as the Construction School in Kingsditch and the Tewkesbury Launchpad Centre.

The college serves a population of approximately 5,000 full-time and 10,000 part-time learners and offers a wide range of education and training programmes for further and higher education in the UK, including A levels and GCSEs, vocational qualifications, work-based learning, basic skills courses, higher education, short courses for business, part-time day and evening courses, and English for international learners.

## Vision

Gloucestershire College aims to develop a forward-looking and creative organisational culture with a positive approach to innovation and change that is shared by learners, staff and management. The college wants all staff to feel comfortable and safe in using technology to solve problems relating to both learning experiences and administration. Through a broad range of initiatives, the college has ensured practitioners have access to the expertise, equipment and support they need to trial new ideas, and that the systems and processes reward innovation rather than discourage it.

## Transforming practice

The strategy adopted by Gloucestershire College is multi-dimensional, encompassing a number of initiatives that are illustrated in the following examples.

### Removing barriers and encouraging staff

Each of the three main campuses has a well-equipped and centrally located INSPIRE room linked to a supportive staff development programme, where staff can develop and explore the use of technology. Ease of access, combined with support from advanced practitioners and learning technologists, offers both structured and ad hoc support that is responsive to staff needs and helps to maintain momentum.

### Embedding use of technology in quality systems and processes

A formal process sees the heads of school review the use of information and learning technology (ILT) with the ILT and learning resources manager, from the perspective of both learning and technology. The process explores current and future ambitions and needs by using a series of topic headings. A twice-yearly review cycle with demonstrations of progress ensures that planning moves to practical implementation.

The review cycle sessions are helping to spread effective practice across the college, something that members of the Teaching Improvement Management team have noticed in their lesson observations. What can sometimes seem like a fairly modest idea has the potential to have a much wider impact when shared with others. For example, a member of staff had created a checklist to explain the functionality of each of the icons on the interactive whiteboards that are positioned throughout the college, including some suggestions for how each feature can be used to support teaching and learning. The list was shown at the review cycle meetings and attracted attention from other curriculum managers. Now nearly all college staff are using this to audit their own practice in the use of interactive whiteboards and to improve their skills.

### Supporting business processes: using technology to solve problems

A bespoke solution has been developed to support staff in monitoring retention and progression, a challenge faced by most colleges. The Students At Risk and Students Reaching Individual Performance Excellence (StARs and StRIPEs) programme draws key information from discrete data systems into one web-accessible interface that is simple to use. A traffic light system alerts staff to any learners identified as at risk of leaving the college early and entering the ‘not in education, employment or

training' (NEET) category. The system facilitates earlier identification of learners considered to be at risk and triggers responsive support to enable them to continue their studies and progress to further or higher education and/or employment.

This combination of improved communication and information transfer between lecturers and others involved in supporting learners (student support workers, student managers, attendance officers, heads of school), close monitoring through StARs and StRIPEs and dedicated work from practitioners saw an overall rise in retention and progression statistics of 4% in the first year, with the Motor Vehicle team demonstrating an increase in retention of 28.5% in one academic year.

The system also identifies learners who have performed exceptionally, information which is fed into the commendation awards scheme to ensure these achievements are recognised.

**Supporting staff working on multiple sites**

In another initiative, managers who are constantly on the move between the various sites have been issued with Apple® iPad® devices with inbuilt Wi-Fi and 3G communications to help them remain in touch and to access key college systems such as StARs and StRIPEs. The long battery life, low weight and portability of the devices contribute to their ease of use. Staff can access their calendars, arrange meetings, read emails and download attachments. The video- and audio-recording features also support assessment activities such as gathering witness statements.

**Engaging learners**

Sport, business and travel and tourism courses have been using Sony PSP games consoles to engage learners, improve attendance and achieve higher grades. The technology allows learners to view and create content, to video themselves and peers, and to analyse and improve their performance in ways that are active and relevant to their study needs.

Learners studying motor vehicle skills are using the camera feature on Nintendo DSi mobile devices to record evidence for their portfolios.

Gloucestershire College has invested in 1500 Activexpression electronic voting handsets to facilitate in-class assessment that allows all learners to participate. Barriers to access were removed by purchasing enough sets to accommodate 50 classes of 30, distributing these throughout the college, installing the software on all

classroom and workroom computers and offering a variety of training options for staff. The college has seen an improvement in the use of a variety of engaging assessment strategies in the classroom.

### Making the learner voice count: working with learners

In addition to traditional methods, the college is exploring newer approaches to capturing learner feedback: closed blogs enable learners to send multimedia feedback direct to module leaders, while business studies learners are researching how learners want to use the Moodle Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), as part of an assignment.

The college regularly reviews policies to ensure they reflect current practice. For example, when Facebook was first launched, use of it was not a significant issue. As Facebook grew in popularity, however, learners found it harder to access machines in the resource centres and asked for access to Facebook to be blocked. After discussion with learner representatives, it was agreed that Facebook will still be made available, but the times it is available are restricted. Working in consultation with learners has ensured the change has been implemented smoothly with full understanding on all sides; no complaints have been received to date.

After feedback showed that learners increasingly use personal devices, the college installed a Wi-Fi system and additional power points so that learners can recharge their devices at college.

### Developing digital literacy skills

E-safety is a major consideration for educational institutions working with learners under 18 years of age. At Gloucestershire College, each area has an e-safety representative and every member of staff receives e-safety training irrespective of their role.

In addition to support for specific applications, the Learning Resources Centres runs a reader development programme, hosting sessions led by staff on topics such as how to search for resources, making judgements about resources, using social networks, what it means to have a digital identity and the implications of doing so.

In this way, the college is helping learners to develop digital literacy skills and stay safe online.

### External research and collaboration

Getting involved in external collaborative projects such as the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) led MoLeNET mobile learning initiative and Becta's Technology Exemplar Network programme provided much more than valued funding. The process of collaborative development and shared exploration enabled individual institutions to benefit from economies of scale and learn beyond institutional confines, and it brought new ideas that continue to develop capacity.

## Benefits

The approach at Gloucestershire College is that of distributed leadership with clear direction, communication and support. It is a model that enables everyone to develop practice and has positioned the college well to reap the pedagogical rewards, with staff using technology in a variety of ways to help learners succeed. Use of technology to enhance learning is embedded in the quality-improvement processes, and the rationale for using technology to enhance learning is clearly communicated to all.

Staff and learners are engaged in the change processes and are encouraged to participate fully in the development of interactive and engaging pedagogical approaches. The 'learner voice' is listened to and valued, and learners are supported in developing digital skills that will keep them safe and equip them to work in the digital society in which we live.

Technology is being used intelligently to address issues such as retention, achievement and progression, to support essential business processes and to support the needs of key staff members.

The overall impact is that staff at all levels have ownership in the deployment of ILT and are able to work collaboratively with colleagues and learners to develop new solutions that drive the college forwards.

## Useful to know

- Locating the INSPIRE rooms in highly visible central locations generates curiosity among staff and learners and informs staff that technology is an integral feature in the overall improvement strategy.
- Removing logistical barriers to use and ensuring the technology is readily available in the teaching environment fosters a sense of ownership and confidence.

- Whole-college transformation involves all staff – teaching and non-teaching. A shared vision for technology-enhanced learning enables support services such as the IT Services team and estates managers to contribute and provide high-quality support to all staff.
- Middle managers were identified as key players in creating the culture; they receive regular updates from the ILT team and are supported and encouraged to try out new technologies such as Twitter and iPads.
- Getting involved in external projects such as the LSN-led MoLeNET mobile learning initiative and Becta's Technology Exemplar Network programme provides much more than valued funding. The process of collaborative development and shared exploration enables individual institutions to benefit from economies of scale, learn beyond institutional confines and gain exposure to new ideas.
- Celebrating successes and learning from less successful interventions is instrumental to developing effective practice.

## Moving forward

A holistic combination of strategic direction, a solution-focused approach, a supportive culture and mechanisms for sharing contribute to the college's aim of achieving 'outstanding' status at Ofsted review. The view of James Clay, ILT and Learning Resources Manager, is that embedding technology, rather than the actual practice, is the innovation.

In the longer term, it may be the investment in the culture rather than the technology that will help the whole college to move forward, sustain progress and remain agile and responsive in a world of rapid change.

## Learner perspective

Learners on a variety of courses are clear about the value of using games consoles to support their learning:

> *"It makes you play better: you want to work harder because you are on camera."*
>
> *Sports learner, Gloucestershire College*

> *"You can get involved in all the situations that you would do up in the air."*

*Travel and tourism learner, Gloucestershire College*

Learners were also very responsive to the use of Activexpression, finding it more engaging than previously used assessment processes.

*"This is more fun than doing the test on paper"*

*"They're easy to use and make the lesson more interesting"*

## Institutional perspective

A selection of quotes from staff reveals the impact the many initiatives are having:

*"A number of policies which have been put in place over the last few years have helped improve student retention, but certainly this [StARs and StRIPEs] has been a major contributor in highlighting the issues and communicating that message to staff."*

*Paul Rabbich, Director of Systems, Gloucestershire College*

*"In terms of management, we talk about a vision from the senior management; that is really important, but also you need to get the middle managers on board, the ones who lead the curriculum teams, who lead the staff, because they are actually very influential in terms of changing the culture."*

*James Clay, ILT and Learning Resources Manager, Gloucestershire College*

*"Gloucestershire College has made a large investment in embedding technology into the infrastructure, ensuring easy and quick access to technology in the classroom, workshops and other learning spaces. We as a college have also recognised the importance of ensuring that staff within the college have the confidence and the skills to make use of the technology to enhance and enrich learning. We have created a culture that encourages creativity and innovation, with a focus on meeting the needs of learners."*

*Greg Smith, Principal, Gloucestershire College*

## Reflect and discuss

What strategies and initiatives does or could your institution use to create a culture where innovation in use of technology to enhance learning is encouraged?

## Key words

Achievement, digital literacy, e-safety, ILT, information and learning technology, learner voice, organisational culture, NEET, quality improvement, retention, staff development, VLE, whole-college transformation

## Links and further reading

e-Learning Stuff, Cheese (blog post from James Clay, ILT and Learning Resource Centre Manager) http://elearningstuff.net/2010/02/22/cheese

Excellence Gateway, Gloucestershire College: Improving retention (case study about the StARs and StRIPEs project)
www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=162076

Excellence Gateway, Technology Exemplar Network (description of the Becta programme) www.excellencegateway.org.uk/exemplarnetwork

MoLeNET www.molenet.org.uk

YouTube, PSPs at Gloucestershire College
www.youtube.com/watch?v=TEmpQyIhdmI