



## Case study 6: Springboard TV: enhancing employability

College of West Anglia

### What this case study covers

- **Subject and level:** Further education media studies students on further education level 2 and 3 courses
- **Topic:** Enhancing learners' employability using an internet TV channel to provide a realistic working environment and showcase learners' work
- **Technologies used:** Internet TV channel and website, social media (blogs, Facebook™, Flickr®, Twitter®, wiki, YouTube™), independent server to support Apple® Mac® computers, internal video-hosting service, content management system, editing suite including workflow software

### Background

The College of West Anglia is a large general further education college that provides education and training for approximately 11,000 learners in Norfolk, parts of Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire. The college has three main sites located in King's Lynn, Wisbech and Cambridge (Milton) and local learning centres in Downham Market and Wisbech and a specialist residential centre for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in King's Lynn. It also offers provision in workplaces across Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire.

The College of West Anglia offers A' level and vocational courses, apprenticeships in a wide variety of subjects and an increasing range of higher education courses including degrees, foundation degrees and HNDs. The College was awarded Beacon College status in 2008.

### Vision

The college set out to enhance the employability of learners on media studies courses by setting up Springboard TV, a fully operational media production company and online television channel that showcases learners' work to employers and higher education. First and second year BTEC and Diploma learners work collaboratively on real projects commissioned by local businesses and community organisations.

Most of the curriculum for these courses is now delivered through the production company, a radical change that involved taking a fresh look at the requirements of the media industry and mapping these against vocational qualification specifications. The result is an innovative and engaging delivery model that motivates learners and replicates the professional working environment.

The station broadcasts streamed and on-demand video content, via the internet, across the college's curriculum areas, with the aim of inspiring and engaging young people with a mix of local news, independent films, documentaries, interviews, special interest programmes and music videos.

## **Transforming practice**

Interest from a community organisation in developing an internet TV station, combined with an awareness of declining recruitment and low satisfaction ratings, prompted the college to re-evaluate the delivery model for media studies. A holistic project, funded by Becta and JISC, addressing curriculum, cultural and resource implications, enabled the college to launch Springboard TV just eight months after inception, providing benefits for learners, staff and the wider community.

## **Creating a real-life TV production and broadcast experience**

Previously, learners struggled with project timescales and failed to comprehend the urgency of commercial deadlines. The production company emulates the commercial world with real clients, real projects and real deadlines, creating a level of challenge that has inspired and motivated learners to achieve. Learners are expected to maintain professional standards in their work with Springboard TV, and theory is embedded in practical sessions, adding contextual relevance and fostering deeper and more active learning.

## **Using technology as an enabler**

The college regards technology as a tool and an enabler. Springboard TV provided the catalyst to update practice and fully embed appropriate technologies in the new delivery model. Industry-standard equipment is essential to the success of the initiative, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter are used for communication and promotion purposes. Learners are encouraged to blog about their experiences and to reflectively critique their own and each other's work.

The curricular and IT teams work together to remove obstacles to the introduction of non-standard equipment, to update policies and address training needs.

### **Developing the learner journey**

Exploring the key attributes that learners require in order to develop successful careers in the media industry was an essential phase of the curriculum design.

A set of design principles for the new curriculum model was developed:

- Learners across the three course levels are taught in mixed groups for the practical skills elements. This emulates real-life working practices, providing a spiral curriculum where learners consolidate and extend their skills by undertaking different roles for each project, moving from basic to advanced roles over time. Level 3 learners have an opportunity to take on some of the more complex roles such as director, producer, writer or editor. The practical skills groups have equal numbers of learners from each level to ensure a balanced approach.
- Teaching staff take on the role of production director.
- Assignments with any one production director last six weeks; learners then rotate to a different production director to work on the next project. This ensures learners benefit from a variety of delivery styles and the full range of expertise available within the team.
- Each production cycle includes an initial brief, pre-production planning, production and post-production, followed by assessment, evaluation and public review.

### **Changing cultures**

Successfully implementing this significant culture change necessitated the involvement of all stakeholders and an effective communication strategy. It was important that staff 'owned' the challenge and worked in partnership with learners, senior managers and support teams to develop the new approaches. Lecturers were given remission from teaching schedules to plan and up-skill through a series of three 'Tune it in' conferences that brought together the media team and the new project team to focus on topics such as how best to develop expert learners in film and TV media. These conferences were supplemented with regular 'golden hour' development sessions, individual support throughout the project lifecycle, and 'gearing up' sessions where staff were trained to use the new equipment.

The participation of learners was actively sought. Learner focus groups were held and surveys conducted; learners designed the logo and brand for the channel and named the production company. A more collaborative and sharing culture was developed that encouraged feedback from all stakeholders as a means of improving the quality of the final product.

### **A key communication tool**

The channel has been adopted as a cross-college communication tool and is central to the college's marketing strategy.

Springboard TV produces training resources and films and has supported a diverse array of events such as conferences, awards ceremonies, fashion shows, and the recording of role play and sports practice for later analysis, as well as filmed portfolio evidence for other curriculum areas across the college. The pedagogical approaches are transferable. For example, a theoretical or philosophical topic can be explored through a filmed debate, providing a resource for further reflection, analysis or revision.

There is a strong demand for the services of Springboard TV among local employers and community organisations. Clients include the Tourist Board, local authority, rescue services, a commercial production company and many smaller businesses.

In addition to acting as a major communication channel across the college, Springboard TV creates authentic learning experiences that enable learners to accrue high-quality portfolio evidence to support their future careers and study ambitions.

All curriculum delivery staff in the Creative Arts faculty now have an appraisal target to plan and develop an opportunity for students' work to be showcased on Springboard TV.

### **Benefits**

- Springboard TV and the revised curriculum offer provide a highly learner-centred approach with a professional work ethos that helps learners develop confidence in their chosen profession. Springboard TV encourages learners to take responsibility for, and ownership of, their own learning. Learners are focused and motivated. They proudly wear their Springboard TV t-shirts and have a strong affiliation with the company.

- The transformation of the media curriculum has enabled the college to address falling recruitment, low learner satisfaction and achievement, poor retention and weak progression to higher education. Recruitment, retention and achievement have significantly improved, with the percentage of learners progressing to university increasing from 37% in 2009 to 77% in 2010.
- Senior managers and staff report that Springboard TV has invigorated the department. The focused support has empowered staff to make a radical curriculum change which has ignited the motivation and passion in students for their chosen careers.
- The initiative has strengthened relations with external organisations, including local businesses and community organisations.
- The TV channel offers learners the opportunity to showcase their work and skills, by effectively providing an online portfolio that is freely accessible over the web.
- Although developing the new delivery model was challenging at times, it has created a team of people who are working together. The team approach draws on the broader skill set of staff and encourages the sharing of expertise. Staff now feel reinvigorated and better supported by colleagues.

The college has seen a significant rise in the number of applicants for the full-time First Diploma and National Diploma media courses from 28 in 2008/2009 to 76 in 2010/2011.

### **Useful to know**

- Senior managers empowered staff to transform the curriculum by creating a culture in which innovation was encouraged through off-site training events and individual support. It was vital that staff felt confident and supported in making the change and a sense of ownership and responsibility for the new curriculum model.
- Learner involvement from the outset is essential; the prototype Springboard TV website was not well received by learners and had to be redeveloped to meet their expectations.
- A project-based approach supported by a steering committee and 'critical friends' helped to maintain focus and momentum as well as to provide an element of stretch and challenge. A formal steering group was created, with a member of the senior management team elected as project director. Other members included the head of faculty, a representative from the learning technology team, a local community representative, and a 'critical friend' who had considerable experience in running and supporting projects that involve development of technology-enhanced learning.

- The engagement of local employers is critical and can take time to develop. (Once local businesses and organisations became aware of the service, demand quickly rose.)
- Flexibility in approach and strong communication and feedback mechanisms are essential when embarking on innovative projects that are, by nature, exploratory with the potential for unexpected outcomes (good and challenging). Build in time for reflection and ensure that all stakeholders know how they can contribute to the development of the project.
- Timing is vital. The curriculum change was planned for the start of the new academic year to prevent disruption and unsettling changes in approach part way through the year, and to enable the media suite to be prepared and new hardware and software to be installed.

## Moving forward

For the Media Studies team, it is unthinkable to go back to the previous delivery model; the benefits to learners, the college and wider community are wholeheartedly positive. Springboard TV is now so embedded in the way the college does things that the college is funding the positions of channel manager and media technician while exploring cost-recovery options to develop the service further.

Springboard TV won the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) Award for Leadership of Innovation in Curriculum Development at the Association of Colleges (AoC) Beacon Awards in 2011. The college has already identified further opportunities to extend the approach to a wider range of curriculum areas.

## Learner perspective

The professional pride and confidence is reflected in learner feedback:

*“All the equipment that we have here is of a professional standard, and all of the practices that we are taught are of a professional standard, so I feel as though I am prepared to go on into the media world and know what I am doing.”*

*Toby Foulkes, Learner, College of West Anglia*

## **Institutional perspective**

The impact of this significant change of approach and the establishment of a creative and collaborative culture has been to improve retention and achievement and offer students vital opportunities to enhance their future employability.

*“Our new internet TV channel has radically changed the teaching and learning on our full-time media course. Students are involved in the creation, production and broadcast of a wide range of programmes, and the format allows feedback from the general public, peers and staff.”*

*Jayne Walpole, Head of Faculty Creative Arts, College of West Anglia*

David Pomfret, Principal and Chief Executive of the College of West Anglia, can see opportunities to develop the initiative further:

*“The college now sees significant opportunities to extend the reach of Springboard TV to, amongst other things, improve communications, develop links with European colleges, support marketing initiatives and extend the reach into a wider range of curriculum areas.”*

## **Reflect and discuss**

By redesigning the curriculum delivery of media studies courses and embedding use of technology as an integral aspect of that redesign, the College of West Anglia has provided opportunities for learners to accrue high-quality portfolio evidence to showcase to future employers, and has used social media to communicate and engage students, staff and the wider community.

- How are closer links between study and employment and between learners and employers facilitated in your institution? What role does, or could, technology play in developing this further?
- Is growth in the types of technology available and the way people interact with technology changing learner expectations? What implications might this have for the future?

## **Key words**

Achievement, blogs, curriculum change, employability, employer engagement, Facebook, Flickr, internet TV, media, peer review, portfolio, recruitment, retention, social media, Twitter, video, vocational, YouTube

## **Links and further reading**

College of West Anglia [www.cwa.ac.uk](http://www.cwa.ac.uk)

JISC, Springboard TV full project report

[www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/curriculumdelivery/kltv.aspx](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/curriculumdelivery/kltv.aspx)

Springboard TV website [www.springboardtv.com](http://www.springboardtv.com)

**See also the video clip: Springboard TV: enhancing employability**

[www.jisc.ac.uk/emergeresource](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/emergeresource)