

REGIONAL FOCUS : UK IMPACT



Regional Focus: UK Impact

The use of technology to enhance learning and improve business processes in the UK Further Education and Skills sectors has changed beyond recognition in the last 10 years. This is due in no small part to the work of the JISC Regional Support Centres (RSCs) in moving both individual learning providers and the sector as a whole forward. This booklet marks the 10th anniversary of the RSCs by taking a brief look at their impact on the sector.

The RSCs were originally established in 2000 to connect Further Education (FE) colleges to the national academic network (known as JANET). Over the last 10 years the remit of the RSCs has expanded into many new sectors and areas of work.

Offering a variety of free services and low cost events, the local RSC is a central point of contact for advice on implementing the use of technology and e-learning in the FE and Skills sectors right across the UK.

The network of 13 RSCs has no commercial or public sector equivalent and plays a vital role in supporting learning providers in their strategic development and implementation of e-learning and information learning technologies. The RSCs are able to give independent and impartial advice on the use of technology and to bring people and organisations together to share best practice in integrating ICT and e-learning into educational and business activities.

The RSC regions are all very different, ranging from urban areas of high density population to dispersed rural communities. Each style of community brings differing challenges. One of the key strengths of the RSCs is their flexibility and ability to be responsive to local and regional requirements. The key distinction between the RSCs and any other support agency is the extent to which they are able to work directly with learning providers giving support tailored to individual needs.

The RSCs maintain close links with the funding bodies in all four home nations to help learning providers in their region meet both organisational and national objectives.

As an example, in Northern Ireland the RSC funding body, Department for Employment and Learning, set a deadline for all colleges to reach ILT embedded status by 2011. The RSC introduced a programme of ILT Health checks to identify where colleges were and provided recommendations on how to move forward. The RSC also provides practical support in carrying out the recommendations e.g. by providing targeted staff development, developing workshops to improve quality of e-learning within teaching and assisting in the writing of College ILT strategy and action plans. Every year the RSC carries out another Health Check to plot the college's movement toward the embedded goal.

'We have used the RSC as a sounding board to find out what's happening in the sector, and discover if the college is moving in the right direction. To have this central resource is very valuable to the region ... We have also been able to try products through the RSC before committing ourselves to spending any money, for example, mobile kit, e-portfolios and assistive technologies.'

**STEVE WILLIS, PRINCIPAL,
STAFFORD COLLEGE.**

'I would like to sincerely thank the staff at RSC-Northern for their positive, flexible and supportive approach which has without a doubt helped my College and those across this region to be much further forward with e-learning than would otherwise have been possible.'

**ANDREW ROBSON, HEAD OF
QUALITY AND INNOVATION,
GATESHEAD COLLEGE.**

At the ALT-C conference 2010, John McLaughlin expressed his 'delight and best wishes to the 13 JISC Regional Support Centres who, from 1st August this year, became part of JISC Advance. We now have the very best of both worlds - a broad and resourceful national service with expertise in many diverse but equally important areas, combined with the regional strengths and local relationships of the RSCs.'

**JOHN MCLAUGHLIN, TEAM LEADER,
ICT & TECHNOLOGY FOR LEARNING,
UNIVERSITIES AND SKILLS GROUP,
DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS,
INNOVATION AND SKILLS.**



Other examples include:

- case studies on the three strands of the English National Improvement Strategy (Improving Teaching and Learning, Improving Responsiveness to Learners and Improving Institutional Effectiveness);
- a series of roadshows on Accessibility and Inclusion, Learner Voice and Personalisation and Organisational Improvement to meet the needs of sub-regions within Wales;
- a project on supporting the 14-19 curriculum, in particular Diploma activities, in the south-east of England;
- a series of Enhanced Training Needs Analysis (ETNA) Reports in Scotland which allow the RSCs to help senior managers assess the return on ICT investment and benchmark their progress in the wider context.

In Wales, the RSC in partnership with CyMAL (Museums Archives and Libraries Wales), the Welsh Assembly Government and nine colleges developed a programme of reader development activities in 2009 in order to reach new audiences, involve librarians working in partnership, promote reading and to offer people the opportunity to share their reading experiences using traditional and online environments. The RSC managed and disseminated the project, and each of the nine colleges tried something different so that a wide range of good practice could be generated and shared. The link between the projects is the promotion of reading as a fun/leisure activity by focusing on readers, opening up reading choices, promoting literacy and helping participants to develop the confidence to try something new. The good practice is being shared through the RSC Wales website.

The RSCs have had a direct impact on policy matters such as demonstrating the potential for open source tools to take some pressure off public funds, while, at the same time, maintaining a quality, inclusive learning experience for the learner. The Scottish Government who now endorses the RSC interest in open source and efficiencies, currently instructs DSA Assessors (concerned with prescribing accessibility equipment to learners with additional needs) to justify why they may prescribe commercial software if an equivalent open source solution is available.

'I know, from listening to representatives from both sectors, and the Department's staff, who equally rely on the RSC to support them to achieve policy objectives, that the RSC continues to step up to the mark and consistently deliver to the highest standard... They have provided sound experience and guidance as well as practical support throughout the last 10 years regardless of the ever changing and fast moving pace of technology.'

CATHERINE BELL, DEPUTY SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING.

'RSC Wales support in getting libraries to think creatively and without boundaries has made a welcome impact on our services. The help was provided above and beyond the normal service which itself is a fantastic resource and one which has become crucial to our ongoing development. The success on a national scale over the last two years is very much down to the huge contribution from RSC Wales and I am both grateful for this and hopeful that they will continue to be very much part of our future.'

JOANNE STEWART, LEARNING RESOURCE CENTRE MANAGER, YALE COLLEGE OF WREXHAM

97%

In the 2009/10 Becta Harnessing Technology Survey 97% of respondents were active users of RSC support.

RSC

Regional Support Centres

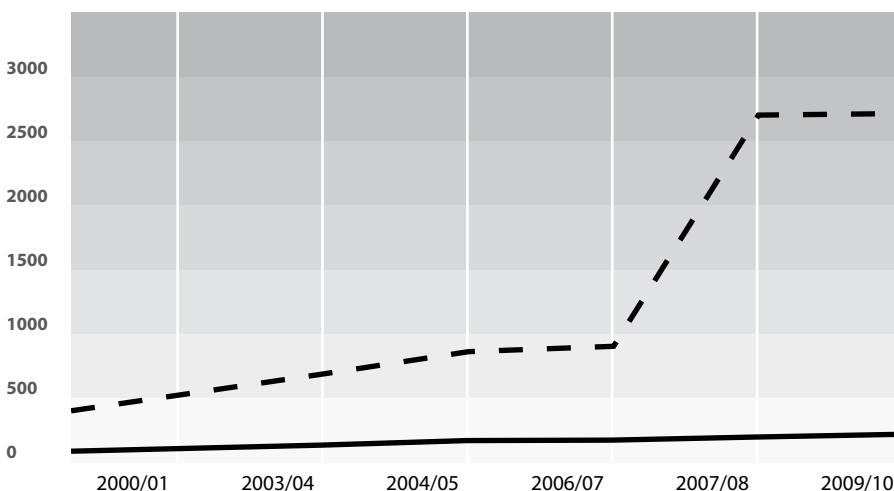
Supporting a changing sector

The RSCs provide a cost-effective means of supporting a sector that is evolving almost as rapidly as technology. In 2000 the RSCs supported under 500 learning providers. In 2010 they are supporting over 2,500. Whilst RSC staff numbers have increased from 63 to 140, and the RSC budget has more than doubled over 10 years, this resource is now supporting more than five times the original number of learning providers.

The RSCs have adapted to meet the needs of an ever-increasing range of different types of learning provider within the FE and Skills sector (as well as some parts of Higher Education).

A series of independent reviews in 2003, 2006 and 2009 provided the basis for renewal of the RSC funding agreements and also supported the broadening of the RSC remit in order to increase the range of support services they provide:

- 2000** Remit predominantly technical - ensuring that learning providers were connected to the academic network and providing helpdesk support.
- 2002** Support broadened to include curriculum and library/learning resources staff.
- 2003** Harmonisation of service provision across the UK. Greater emphasis on curriculum and use of new technologies in teaching and learning. Increased support and advice on accessibility.
- 2007** Increased focus on strategic application of technology.
- 2010** Now supporting the use of technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness across the whole of a learning provider's business.



--- Supported Providers
 — RSC Staff

10,000

In 2009/10 the RSCs delivered staff development to over 10,000 event delegates. This corresponds to training almost 4 staff in every supported learning provider.

2,500

In 2009/10 the RSCs delivered some 2,500 provider consultations. This means that over 80% of the supported learning providers received individual support in the form of Organisational Reviews, ILT Health Checks & Strategic Development support.

14,000

In the North West region alone the RSC newsletter is viewed on almost 14,000 different computers per year.



'The RSCs have developed very considerably since their inception, and they supply valuable services needed by their constituency. Their staff, and the JISC, should receive credit for establishing these units, which have become respected service providers in the post-16 landscape. Importantly, they now have a substantial investment value.'

REVIEW OF JISC REGIONAL SUPPORT CENTRES, DUKE & JORDAN 2006.

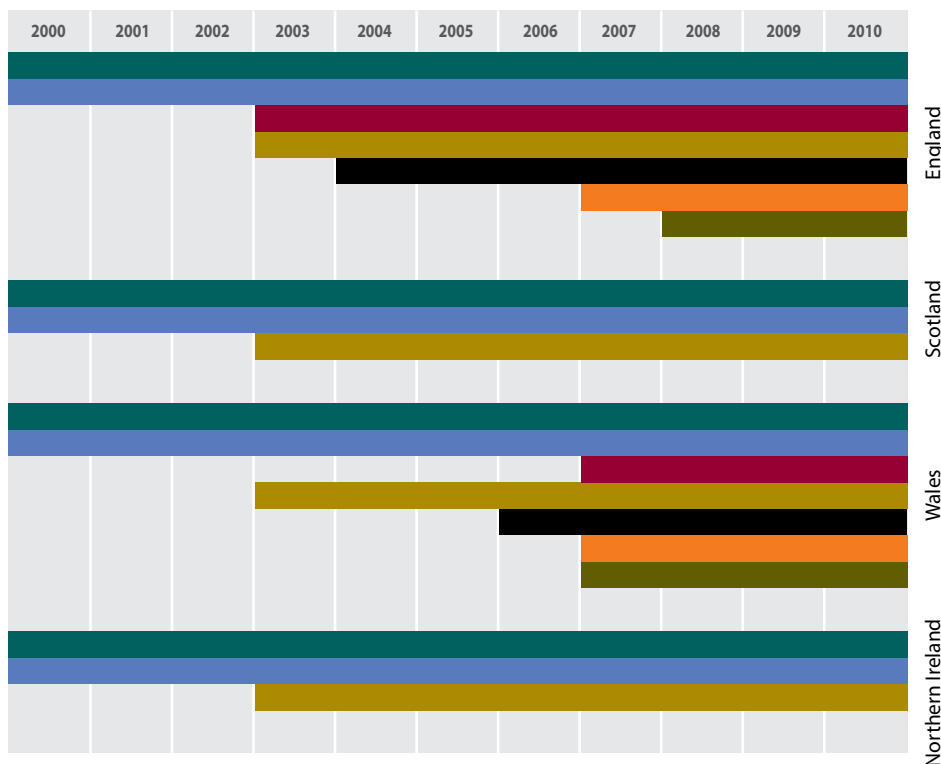
'A real strength of the RSCs is their evolving service, challenging new demands arising from technological developments and new political objectives. The changes impacting educational sectors, particularly in England, are massive and, as one supported organisation said, 'the RSCs are an island of stability in a sea of change.'

REVIEW OF JISC REGIONAL SUPPORT CENTRES, HE SHARED SERVICES LTD 2009.

'The RSC advisor's presence ensures that we get the best advice to help develop and monitor our plans. The high-quality training events and online seminars organised by the RSC, which we actively promote, also help to keep us and our partners up to date. I just wish that the fantastic array of services offered by the JISC in general and the RSC in particular could be applied universally to all post-16 skills sectors so that ACL could access the whole package.'

STEVE GLENNON, HEAD OF LIFELONG LEARNING, PORTSMOUTH CITY COUNCIL.

Supported Sectors



- FE Colleges
- 6th Form Colleges
- Specialist Colleges
- Small HEIs and HE in FE
- Adult & Community Learning
- Work-Based Learning
- Offender Learning



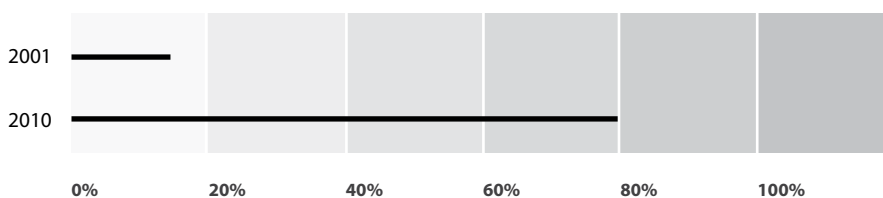
Increasing technology uptake

The support of the RSCs has played a vital role in enabling learning providers to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by new technologies. Significant shifts in learning provider e-maturity reflect closely the changes in the RSC remit.

The RSCs do much of the 'legwork', as one grateful learning provider put it, in evaluating the usefulness of new technologies in different contexts. They are often able to loan or demonstrate equipment to learning providers on a 'try before you buy' basis and there is likely to be an RSC forum covering most types of specialist technology.

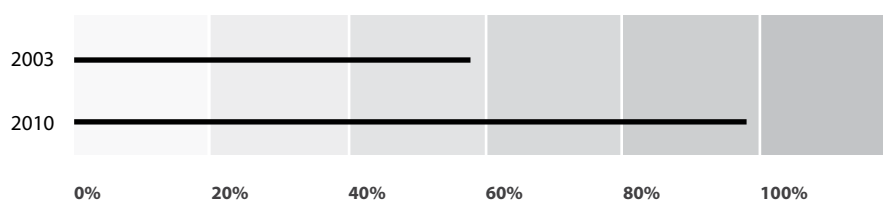
The initial success of the RSCs in connecting learning providers, many whom would not otherwise have been able to make such significant infrastructure changes, to the academic network resulted in a major increase in technology use amongst teaching staff. The provision of internet connected computers for teaching staff in FE colleges has jumped from 15% in 2001 to 80% in 2010.

% FE Colleges with internet connected PC for every teacher



A similar pattern occurred following the extension of the RSC remit to include curriculum development and learning and teaching support in 2002. The use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) in FE colleges increased from 58% in 2003 to 98% in 2010 with over 70% of individual teachers using some form of technology to deliver lessons.

% FE Colleges using a VLE



RSC advice is wide-ranging in scope and, as part of the JISC Advance family of services, the RSCs have access to a variety of specialist support. For example, JISC Legal and JISC TechDis are key partners in helping the RSCs deliver on the Accessibility and Inclusion agenda.

Statistic Source: Becta Harnessing Technology Surveys

'It's beginning to improve the quality of provision, and certainly more staff are starting to engage with the technology and are asking for more support. They are really enthusiastic and are disseminating information among their teams. I think with this change in culture we will hope to see the use of learning technologies being more demand-led by the users.'

**NIKI KEARNS, E-LEARNING STAFF
IT TRAINER, PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT, WEST
SUFFOLK COLLEGE.**

'The RSC advisor has been an excellent source of support and has been positive and encouraging throughout our partnership. He has offered flexible and individually tailored support and guidance on all of the issues and has provided motivation when we have faced barriers to uptake using the technology.'

**EMMA BARRETT, QUALITY MANAGER,
RAPIDO TRAINING LIMITED,
GLOUCESTERSHIRE.**

'We struggle to find out whether we are spending our money correctly and it's easy to get carried away with enthusiasm for a particular product. By talking to RSC staff and delegates at RSC events, you can find out about cheaper alternatives and learn about things that other colleges have tried – both successfully and unsuccessfully. It's a great opportunity to share practice.'

**STEVE WILLIS, PRINCIPAL,
STAFFORD COLLEGE.**



17,000

Since 2009 there have been over 17,000 downloads of the EduApps software from the RSC site. This represents only a small percentage of actual use since learners and teachers are encouraged to pass the materials on freely to others.

100,000

Downloads from the RSC site of the MyStudyBar tool launched in 2010 represent a saving to the sector of over £100,000 per month so far (equivalent to £1.4 million per year) on the commercial price of similar software.

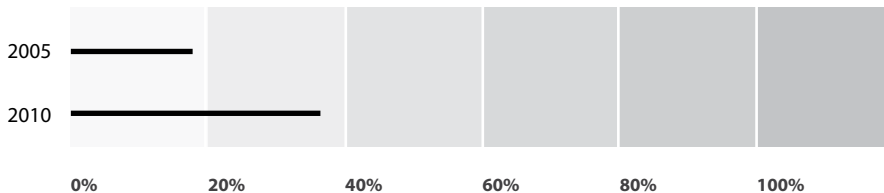
3,384

The latest in a series of Enhanced Training Needs Analysis surveys in Scotland attracted 3,384 responses; a rate of almost 70 responses per supported provider.

Survey data again shows that knowledge and understanding of equality legislation has risen from approximately 35% to 65% in RSC supported learning providers and learning resources are becoming increasingly adaptable and personalised.

The trend is repeated across the other supported sectors such that within five years 80% of Adult and Community Learning (ACL) practitioners had access to a VLE. Usage of a VLE in the, often difficult to reach, Work-Based Learning (WBL) sector, has almost doubled since the sector received RSC support.

% WBL Providers using a VLE



Not only is there more technology, there is also evidence that technology is being viewed more as a strategic investment. Since 2007 the RSCs have been supporting learning providers in the strategic application of technology across the enterprise. By 2009 over 90% of supported ACL & WBL providers and 100% of Specialist Colleges had an Information and Learning Strategy (ILT).

'From the outset, it was clear that only a small proportion of FE Colleges had the skills necessary to implement such a significant step change in their IT infrastructure and be able to exploit the opportunities resulting from having a JANET connection and gaining access to online resources and other functions. This deficit was met by the creation of technical posts and RSCs. Given that Colleges' IT infrastructures had been developed in a completely ad hoc manner with little central guidance, there was a very wide variety of hardware, software and infrastructure. This created a demanding and challenging role for the RSC technical staff, whose job was to liaise with the support teams at JANET (UKERNA at that time), co-ordinate work with the Regional Network Operators, configure and install routers and firewalls that were integrated into the colleges networks. This often required the staff to work outside of their remit in order to ensure that any college network problems were addressed, otherwise connections to JANET and access to the Internet would not have been successful.'

ROBERT PRABUCKI, ACCOUNT MANAGER, JANET UK.

'Having the RSC support and having someone who has already done the legwork is really important to us, as we don't have the time and resources to go and do that ourselves.'

STEVE TROAKE, ICT DEVELOPMENT TUTOR, LEICESTERSHIRE ADULT LEARNING SERVICE.



Working in partnership



Brokerage and partnerships are key features of the way in which the RSCs operate. The emphasis on collaboration over competition helps them deliver support in the most efficient manner. The RSCs help foster collaborative relationships between learning providers in their regions, to integrate the various elements of JISC support available to learning providers and to disseminate the work of other agencies.

From the academic year 2010/11 the RSCs form part of the JISC Advance portfolio of services further strengthening their links with, and ability to draw on expertise from, a wide range of trusted support services.

In 2008 in the south west of England, the RSC supported 8 learning providers in the Western Training Provider Network to bid for a Learning Innovation Grant (LIG) and implement a VLE 'Hive' for their members. The objectives were to:

- encourage partnership and collaborative working;
- support WBL providers to embrace and embed next-generation technologies;
- assist WBL providers to develop and implement their own e-technology strategies;
- improve accessibility for hard-to-reach and disengaged learners, and improve existing provision;
- increase WBL providers' ability to be responsive to employer needs.

The facilities available to learners now include innovative simulation tools and online assessment.

'How do you do it? What is the magic potion you use to achieve this level of sharing of best practice? Many organisations claim to promote sharing but only the RSCs seem to do it well. You must talk more about the work you do.'

ASHRAF HASSIM, BSIX COLLEGE, LONDON.

"We have had great interest from providers who want to become part of the Hive, as they recognise that our VLE is really helping learners to succeed. This is dynamic learning at the cutting edge of technology & education."

JON WINTER, MANAGING DIRECTOR, S & B AUTOMOTIVE ACADEMY, BRISTOL.

'An important, but unrecognised, benefit of the RSC model is that they operate as a 'bottom-up catalyst' for change by informally linking up individuals between like-minded institutions and colleges within their region, transferring best practice and ideas between regions and directly identifying opportunities for efficiency gains between different sectors. Through this, the RSCs have the ability to deliver a cost-effective impact which is unrivalled within the Education sector.'

REVIEW OF JISC REGIONAL SUPPORT CENTRES, HE SHARED SERVICES LTD 2009.

'We have gone from being a college relying on a few networked computers and an ISDN line to being an example of best practice. We just couldn't have done it without these relationships.'

RUSSELL PENTZ, LEARNING RESOURCES, CENTRE MANAGER, DERWEN COLLEGE.



Regional Support Centres

'An e-Learning Adviser for the RSC South East, sits on our e-Learning Steering Group, her presence ensures that we get the best advice to help develop and monitor our plans... the RSC has been a great ally in our drive for e-maturity.'

STEVE GLENNON, HEAD OF LIFELONG LEARNING, PORTSMOUTH CITY COUNCIL.

Thanks to support from the RSC and strong partnership working between the JISC Advance services, Derwen College, a residential college for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities in the West Midlands has become a pioneer in innovative learning and teaching.

In 2005 the college had a few networked computers and its staff had limited experience of implementing technology based learning. With the support of JANET UK, JISC Mail, JISC TechDis and the RSC providing advice and guidance on its e-strategy, Derwen College is now a confident, e-mature college, seen as exemplary amongst the specialist college community for its innovative use of technology and enthusiasm for trying out new approaches.

The college has achieved 'Beacon' and 'Technology Exemplar' status, was nominated in 2009 for a Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) Provider of the Year award and is currently implementing an e-portfolio system that has been developed in-house and looking forward to the next challenge...

'The RSC has provided invaluable support, advice and guidance: they were instrumental in setting up cooperative working agreements between (named partners) and supported the delivery of their mainstream programmes. In addition network members benefited from attendance at the many RSC provided events, forums and workshops run throughout the region.'

JON WINTER, MANAGING DIRECTOR, S & B AUTOMOTIVE ACADEMY, BRISTOL.

'We called out the RSC to talk about what has worked well for other providers so we are not repeating the same cycle of events. The advice you get is impartial as they have no axe to grind, ... they have no products to try and sell you.'

STEVE TROAKE, ICT DEVELOPMENT TUTOR, LEICESTERSHIRE ADULT LEARNING SERVICE.

'RSC-Northern was vital to the success of the ComPort e-portfolio project. This was a collaborative project involving three Colleges in the North-East of England. With RSC-Northern as part of the Steering Group, we benefited greatly from the experience and objective advice available, enabling us to keep focused on the project objectives and ensuring activities moved forward in a timely way. The outcomes have helped each of the project partners to move forward their e-portfolio strategies and provided case studies for the sector in general.'

ANDREW ROBSON, HEAD OF QUALITY AND INNOVATION, GATESHEAD COLLEGE.

10,000

Since 2008, the RSCs have been sharing good learning & teaching practice nationwide by means of over 250 case studies published on the Excellence Gateway website.. The case studies attract almost 10,000 page views per month.

RSC

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Making a difference



The overall impact of the RSCs support is almost impossible to quantify, reaching as it does teachers, managers and learners in every part of the UK FE and Skills sector and beyond. A few snapshots may however give a flavour of the types and scale of benefits being experienced by users of the service.

In London, the RSC has been actively promoting Smarter, Greener Learning and their encouragement inspired Bromley Adult Education College to try and reduce the environmental impact of its classroom ICT whilst updating two IT suites. Using the RSC forum as a sounding board, the College evaluated a range of energy-efficient PCs to find a suitable solution.

Whitby and District Fishing Industry Training School was supported in a bid for a LIG to revolutionise its course delivery through the use of 3D software and equipment. The School faced particular retention issues as, after eight weeks training, the students boarded a fishing vessel in the North Sea and many were unprepared for the experience. The 3D software gives learners a taste of what life is like on board a boat including the layout, where equipment is stored and everyday living conditions. Another issue particular to this industry is assessment of the offshore elements of training. Previously assessors often had to rely on verbal evidence as part of the portfolio; now learners use headcams to record their work. The School's facilities are now unique in Europe and it aims to become the flagship training centre for the industry. The Chief Executive recognises that this could not have occurred without RSC support.

The RSCs UK-wide have been addressing the theme of e-safety and, in particular, safeguarding vulnerable learners. In the North West, the RSC has delivered training on safeguarding from the Common Inspection perspective, showing how appropriate risk assessment and the development of responsible practices can allow providers to maximise the use of Web 2.0 technologies without compromising safety.

'I don't think we could have managed without the RSC, as sometimes we found the process daunting. The advisor gave a lot of encouragement and support. The School is now unique in Europe in fishing training with no other training company in the industry able to provide the same facilities.'

ANNE HORNIGOLD, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, WHITBY AND DISTRICT FISHING INDUSTRY TRAINING SCHOOL.

'What a fantastic asset your advisory team is. This event has been a god-send to me. I was really struggling to get my head round the approach to e-safety and now I have a clear idea of what I am going to do.'

GARY WILLIAMS, FACILITIES & IT MANAGER, TTE TRAINING LTD, ELLESMERE PORT.

35%

Using JISC's SustelT ICT Footprinting Tool, Bromley Adult Education College is now estimated to be making a 38% reduction in Kilowatt/hours and CO2 per year and a 35% saving on equipment costs.

In Scotland, the RSC has demonstrated the efficiencies possible through use of open source technologies and has worked with JISC TechDis and all other RSCs to promote accessibility and inclusion. The RSC launched AccessApps in 2008 - a suite of open source and freeware tools which run from a USB stick. If a learner needs a particular tool, e.g. to see the screen, or to help control a mouse or keyboard, the tool is available in portable form. These tools help 'level the playing field' for learners, empowering students to control their learning environment. Building on the success of AccessApps, which has won numerous awards, the RSCs delivered more tools for learners and teachers under the banner EduApps. In 2010 they added MyStudyBar (with tools specially targeted at those with literacy difficulties) and MyVisBar for partially sighted learners. The 20,000+ downloads of the tools so far represent only the tip of a very large iceberg as users are encouraged to distribute the tools freely and many learning providers have adopted them on a large scale.

In 2005, the RSC saw an opportunity for local authority ACL providers in the north east to make considerable savings by collaborating on a single VLE and facilitated negotiations between providers. Six ACL services ultimately collaborated on the TeesLearn project opting for Moodle, a popular open source product, to be hosted by Middlesbrough Adult Education Service. By working as a consortium benefits included:

- economies of scale - saving costs on separate installations, support, maintenance and staff training;
- sharing and pooling of resources and expertise;
- tutor collaboration - joint projects across LEAs;
- a better service and range of choice for learners.

The RSC was part of the Steering Group and provided support in a range of areas e.g. copyright and Intellectual Property rights in partnership with JISC Legal. The success of the project has been nationally recognised by numerous awards including a Becta Next Generation Learning Award in 2010.

The RSC supported Oakwood College, a specialist college in Devon for learners with learning difficulties, through a review and training programme in order to make the most of a range of technologies. The students have had both their education and their life skills enhanced by the use of tools such as satellite navigation systems to help them find places in the local neighbourhood and interactive digital whiteboards to improve literacy.

The most remarkable application of technology has been the use of webcams and avatars to help students with autism and selective mutism to communicate. One student with selective mutism was able to speak for the very first time via the medium of a sunshine avatar she had chosen for herself. Her tutor describes hearing her speak as 'both a shock and a very humbling experience'. The discovery has led to other students with severe learning difficulties being able to use avatars as conversational tools. The breakthrough is life changing for the learners involved and is being researched in order that others may benefit.

Acknowledgements:

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£90m

A 2009 analysis of the value of the support provided to the Post 16 Education community by the JISC Advance services concluded that for every £1 spent on JISC Advance the saving to the community was at least £12. That figure is likely to be enhanced by the support provided by the RSCs as a major dissemination route for service provision. The current investment of £7.5 million in the RSCs is therefore resulting in savings in excess of £90 million per year across the sector.

11%

Since implementing the TeesLearn VLE the providers have seen a steady increase in recruitment and an improvement in retention of 11% in one year.

AccessApps won 'Best Accessibility Solution' at the IMS Global Conference, Barcelona, 2009; 'Highly Commended' in the Guardian Awards ('Rewarding Excellence in the Public Sector'), 2009 and winner of Scottish Open Source Software Award for Education, 2008.



The sunshine avatar that helped a mute student speak for the first time.

RSC

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RSC

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Stimulating and supporting innovation in learning

JISC advance
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