

Case study



**HARLOW
COLLEGE**

Association of Colleges in Eastern Region (ACER)

Digital Approaches to English and Maths

- using technology to support learners on traineeships and apprenticeships
- Harlow College

PROJECT LEAD

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Commissioned and funded by

The
Education
& Training
Foundation



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1. About the Provider

Harlow College is a single-site, open campus Further Education college in Harlow town centre. The College welcomes students from all ages, abilities and interests, studying on a range of academic, vocational and technical courses.

2. The Challenge

About The Practitioners

Jo Thompson and Abel Omiyale work with apprentices on the BTEC IT Users and BTEC Business Administration programmes. Apprentices attend college for 1 day a week.



Jo is responsible for the delivery of Functional English whilst Abel offers support in Functional Maths. Abel also runs Functional Maths programmes for adult learner groups.

Jo and Abel have been supported by Victoria Clayden-Smith (Project Coordinator) and Dave Monk (e-learning).

The Challenge

Like other providers in the ACER project Jo and Abel faced the challenge of trying to engage workplace learners in valuing the support and qualifications in English and maths that were an integral part of their apprenticeships. Their

apprentices attend sessions in college one day a week but are otherwise out on work placements and are often reluctant to work on their Functional Skills outside of the classroom as they had limited time and sometimes failed to see the relevance of those subjects to their career aspirations. Jo was therefore particularly keen to offer support in a way that was of immediate relevance to the vocational interests of her IT and Business Admin learners and was hopeful that she could embed elements of English into their main programme. She was keen also to explore ways in which she could use some e learning tools to create formative assessment resources that would be useful to learners in developing their knowledge and skills for course assignments and tests.

In responding to similar challenges as Jo, Abel was also interested in trying to reduce the amount of paper-based material that he uses in his maths teaching so that the resources would be more interactive, engaging and accessible to learners as blended learning material. He was keen to find ways of presenting this material in an integrated way so that both he and his learners could quickly find their way to resources on particular topics at different levels. Abel works primarily as an instructor within the college on several courses and so he was interested in trying to collate or create digital resources that he could use flexibly during the week, whether he was working with his apprentices or with his groups of adult learners.

3. The Solution

Developing a Wiki Site

In order to engage her BTEC IT Users apprentice group in a programme of English support that would seem relevant and engaging, Jo decided to adopt an embedded approach. As their course required them to work effectively in a collaborative project, Jo decided to involve the group in developing a wiki site and to use the project as a way to embed support with Functional English.

Jo set up the initial wiki on the wiki-spaces website and then supported the IT group in building the platform, developing her own confidence and skills at the same time as this was an area of web development she had not explored before herself.

In setting up the wiki project Jo was keen to provide learners with an opportunity to work collaboratively in developing the wiki pages and to involve learners in focusing on key English skills such as choosing appropriate content for the audience, proofreading, checking their own and others' work for technical accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar, etc.

The Business Admin apprentices were asked to develop a wiki to support Unit 319 – Principles of Administration, consisting of 6 learning outcomes, with each apprentice being asked to develop a page for each learning outcome, review the submitted pages for accuracy, correct any errors, and evaluate their own workplace experience with using the principles and criteria in the units. All learners were required to complete the outcome relating to Legislation. The

group were introduced to the concept of a wiki during the introduction to the unit Session and asked to complete some initial tasks to develop skills in using a wiki.

Socrative

Jo used an online quiz making tool, Socrative to create mock tests in preparation for the final assessment which she then shared with other tutors and assessors for use outside of the college.

Progress Updates

Jo and Elaine used Microsoft OneNote as a means of recording and remotely sharing updates on progress. Using Microsoft OneDrive they were able to share the notebook and automatically synchronise changes.

Padlet

Abel initially developed a Padlet board to support the delivery of Functional Maths with the IT apprentices and adult learner groups. The Padlet board provides links to a variety of resources to support maths development. Abel noticed that for some learners the information on the Padlet board was too complex. He went on to customise the information for each learner by developing a series of Padlets linked to a main board. By selecting their own name on the main board, learners are able to access their individual objectives and learning outcomes for the session along with links to the resources they are required to work through for the session.

More confident learners are able to work through the resources independently; freeing up time for Abel to support less confident learners. Learners who are not able to attend the session are able to access the resources remotely.

Employer Engagement

When working with his apprentices Abel now contacts employers to explain the e-portfolio approach and the ways in which the Padlet boards are used. On those occasions where an apprentice has not been able to attend college due to work commitments Abel has contacted the employer and negotiated a convenient time for him to phone and provide support; the employer has set aside time in the workplace for the learner to work on the activities. This has been beneficial for both the apprentices and the employers concerned.

4. Reflections

Use of Padlet

In reflecting on the development of his own skills and knowledge in using digital technologies, Abel says he found the ACER workshops were the most helpful element of the Learning Futures programme –

'I would say 90% through the workshops, predominantly it's been through the workshops that I've come across all of those tools.'

Through the project workshops Abel has been exposed to a number of tools including Padlet, Socrative, and Xerte. He has valued the opportunity to

develop his skills in using digital technologies and is now much more comfortable using those skills –

‘Say I want to quickly put a resource together I now know there is an e-learning tool I can use whether it is video based, text based or a web link, so I have gained quite a bit of knowledge and have been able to use these technological tools to influence learning for my learners.’

Of the tools and websites Abel has used, he has found Padlet to be the most useful –

‘Padlet has been the easiest to use and most responsive. I have found it really useful for me to be able to do the maths resources and develop some of the e-learning materials for my maths learners as well as the IT users’.

As well using Padlet to create teaching resources Abel uses it to set and share personalised objectives, developing individual Padlet boards for his learners which enable them to make better progress at their own pace. This in turn frees up time for Abel to support less confident learners and enables independent learners to make progress. Using Padlet boards is helping Abel to plan better and reflect –

‘I use it to plan ahead of time and then also reflect as well’.

In this way Abel has radically changed his teaching practice. He no longer relies on a vast number of paper resources; everything for his lesson can be

accessed via the Padlet resources he has created which he can easily share both inside and outside of the classroom.

Adopting a flipped learning approach

Jo has good IT skills but was unaware of some of the tools and resources available at the start of the project. In terms of her own progress there have been several Eureka moments, often when hearing about other tutors' ways of using an e learning tool in the project workshops –

'Seeing what other people have done with it sort of starts ideas of my own off, that's been probably the most helpful thing. The workshops have been inspirational – I have gained lots of ideas from the group sessions'

The IT User group are now much more experienced in using technology and trialling the development of a wiki with this group was particularly useful, enabling the learners to develop new skills and achieve their assessment targets as well as providing opportunities for Jo to gain a better understanding of their support needs. With the Business Administration group developing the wiki was useful as a learning tool to develop online reading and research skills as learners had to find the most appropriate information for inclusion on the wiki pages.

Jo has enjoyed using QR codes to take her learners to the Padlet boards related to their units of study and she has received positive feedback from her learners on the mock exams she developed in Socrative –

'They are positively asking for the Socrative 'mocks' each time we do a unit.'

These Socrative quizzes have been the most useful resource for the Business Admin group.

Jo also reflects on what was not so successful about some aspects of the collaborative nature of wiki development –

‘Learners were reluctant to read or review each other’s work; they were encouraged to use diagrams, drawing, images but didn’t, they just completed their own element of the wiki.’

Jo therefore plans to use the wiki approach in future but introduce the peer support and assessment element in a slightly different way through a ‘flipped learning’ approach.

Impact on the organisation

In the college all teaching staff have been given an objective to ensure 10% of their programme is delivered via online learning and to support them the college offers e-learning training workshops within staff development days and regular skills sharing workshops. Jo and Abel are now much more confident in taking part and sharing ideas in these workshop sessions.

In her reflections Victoria Clayden-Smith (Project Coordinator) confirms that staff across college have embraced the new technologies; they have developed skills in using learning technologies and are more confident. The use of Padlet has evolved and now provides the assessor and the apprentice a platform to communicate, assess and apply remotely-

'A number of applications have been trialled and developed. Xerte is a keen favourite, along with Wiki-spaces, Padlet and Socrative. Also using OneFile, Survey Monkey, Screencastomatic, Scribblar and our own VLE Qube. The apprenticeship team have been shown how to use Socrative. Socrative has had the most impact with the apprentices, it's a great tool for refreshing knowledge at the beginning of sessions and ensuring learning outcomes are met at the end of the session. Jo has developed skills in using Xerte to good effect and using as an additional learning resource to prepare for sessions and revision. Wiki-spaces was probably the area that digital literacy skills were improved and developed upon most, apprentices were able to share the space and make comments and amendments to each others work. Abel has continued to develop and use Padlet, the impact has been seen with the ease of being able to add resources to the platform quickly and easily.'

Abel has noticed that Padlet and Socrative are now being used across the college –

'What I have noticed is that most people tend to use Padlet quite a bit in their work; some people use Socrative to create quizzes.'

Jo found the skills sharing workshops useful –

'There are pockets of creativity and excellence with the various bits of software around the campus and there have been people e.g. Google Apps guru or

Xerte guru who are being volunteered for delivering sessions to other colleagues as well, which is useful'.

The governing body are aware of the e-learning taking place; the Chair of Governors has observed the ways in which Jo and Abel are using wiki spaces and Padlet.

5. Next Steps

Now that the Learning Futures projects is coming to a close both Abel and Jo are looking at different ways of working in relation to their use of digital technologies.

Abel - exploring Padlet

Abel has used Padlet extensively to deliver his maths programmes and is looking forward to continuing to work with learners in his 'paperless classroom'. Abel is using Padlet to set individual objectives and outcomes for learners.

The Padlet link, which is displayed on the whiteboard, is primarily the lesson plan. When learners enter the classroom they access their own individual objectives for the session on the Padlet board and the resources they need to work on for the session. Abel's learners do this automatically now; learner feedback is positive. One learner only attends college for 1 day a month so Abel sends this learner the link in advance to prepare him for what he has to do for the next meeting. Abel has a complete toolkit of multi-media resources via

linked Padlet boards. Abel has included QR codes for quick links to video clips and online resources.

Jo – exploring a ‘flipped classroom’ approach

With her current Business Admin group Jo has adopted a ‘flipped classroom’ approach. Jo has developed a series of Xerte learning objects which her learners access prior to the classroom sessions, enabling them to prepare in advance for the discussions and activities; Jo continues to use the wiki to support the sessions-

'This is a very different approach to the one I took with the wiki which formed the majority of the learning activity for the previous unit whereas the Xerte materials are being used as an additional learning resource which learners use to both prepare for our group sessions and, of course for revision.'

The learning objects Jo has created contain important content and assessment activities. Using a "flipped classroom" approach enables Jo's learners to access the core content through the Xerte materials remotely so that Jo can concentrate on unpicking the more complex material in the group sessions -

'This also gives me more time in the face-to-face sessions for formative assessment as there is less need to spend time doing "teacher talk" as this has already been communicated through the Xerte materials.'

Jo has been able to replicate the feedback element of the wiki using 'OneFile', an e-portfolio system. Learners are given a written formative assessment

covering the week's content which is submitted for feedback, feedback is given electronically through the OneFile system -

'This part of the wiki experiment worked well and I was glad to be able to replicate this aspect using OneFile'

Jo continues to embed the development of English skills within her sessions. Learners are routinely tested on a business glossary, some of these tests have been incorporated in the Xerte materials -

'An improvement is that I am now able to give learners written feedback both on content and on their English writing skills through the OneFile assignments.'

When reflecting on progress made and next steps Victoria confirms that e-learning forms a considerable part of the organisation -

'We have been keen to share effective practice with other areas within the college. E-learning is a considerable part of the organisation. The college has invested in i-pads for the full-time learners, and on the back of this, we have been able to share applications with our apprentices that have been trialled and tested elsewhere in the organisation. Our CPD sessions held regularly through the term are open to all of the organisation, and so the push to embrace and ensure that 10% of our learning is achieved.'

6. Project website

A multi-media version of this case study is available on the ACER project website. It contains:

- clips from audio interviews with the staff from Harlow Staff who took part in the project;
- a selection of the digital resources they created;
- links to all the e learning tools they used;
- short instructional videos on how to use the tools.

To visit the case study on the project website click this link -

<http://tinyurl.com/opd9ru9>

If you would like to contact the Harlow College staff involved in the Learning Futures project, please e mail the project manager, Mark Barnsley - mark.barnsley@acer.ac.uk