

HOW TO GUIDE



BLACKBURN COLLEGE

CULTURESHIFT: Embedding technology in staff and student practice

How to guide to 'DigiPals'

PROJECT LEAD

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1. WHAT ARE THE 'DIGIPALS'?

The 'DigiPals' are specific teams of staff and students recruited as 'peer mentors' to support their colleagues and each other in the use of learning technology within teaching and learning.

The 'DigiPal' roles were created to support a *CultureShift* to embedding technology in staff and student practice initiative that is being implemented at Blackburn College.

The Student 'DigiPals' were created as it was acknowledged that it was extremely important to ensure that the student voice was present in influencing the changes being made and that staff working in collaboration with students would give a more effective and relevant approach to the *CultureShift*.

Partnerships between staff and students and the sharing of knowledge and experiences with regards to technology were also identified as imperative when supporting staff and students with using technology in the classroom.

2. JOB ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Blackburn College chose to recruit six student 'DigiPals' and four staff 'DigiPals'. This was to ensure an even spread across the College. All 'DigiPals' were recruited and managed by the College's Head of eLearning.

Staff 'DigiPals'

Job descriptions and person specifications were created for the staff 'DigiPal' roles. These were created in conjunction with Human Resources to ensure that the roles followed college policies and procedures. The roles were awarded remission hours from teaching and a bursary.

The roles were advertised across the College as Advanced Practitioner roles who would use their digital expertise, enthusiasm and knowledge to lead the development of technology enhanced learning and inspire and motivate others to embrace new methods to improve teaching and learning across the College.

The aim was for them to develop and implement strategies which raise the quality of Technology Enhanced Learning and blended learning and general ILT practice.

The 'DigiPals' were asked to focus on enhancing staff practice by sharing and disseminating best practice across the College and researching learning technology developments and practices from a global perspective to inform the College's future direction. This leads to a network of knowledge and support, ensuring that 'DigiPals' have the relevant information needed to encourage others.

Two staff 'DigiPals' were recruited. Each 'DigiPal' was tasked to work with four individual members of staff and their learners to review their skills and knowledge, improve their confidence and trial new learning technologies.

The staff 'DigiPals' reported directly to the Head of eLearning and were given specific areas of focus – External Engagement, Internal Engagement. The student 'DigiPal' team is overseen by a staff 'DigiPal', who works to support and develop them throughout their time in role.

Staff 'DigiPals' work with students in the learning environment to help them overcome any of their issues/doubts about using technology, whilst identifying and encouraging students in the class that have the knowledge and experience to assist with supporting the class and member of staff with the technology they are using. This is also in conjunction with Student 'DigiPals', who may join the Staff 'DigiPal' in the classroom to support their peers.

Student 'DigiPals'

The student 'DigiPals' reported to one of the Staff 'DigiPals'. The staff 'DigiPal' co-ordinated their activities and they were expected to meet regularly.

Student 'DigiPals' use their knowledge and expertise to encourage and support both staff and students on the use of technology within a learning environment. They are digital leaders, who inspire an interest in technology in those they collaborate with.

The successful candidates are then assigned one of the six student 'DigiPal' roles, based upon their individual skills.

The typical roles and responsibilities are:

- Promotion/Social Media - Manages: 'DigiPal' website, Twitter, Facebook, Scoop.it, etc;
- Event Management - Organises: conferences, schedule of online webinars, staff development, student development;
- Journalist/Case Studies - Collates: interviews, surveys, writes up case studies;
- External Collaboration - Connects other 'DigiPals', DigiChamps, etc., to join together, generate a wider network of 'DigiPal'. Foster and build positive relationships to share best practice beyond the college;
- 2x Learning Technologist - Encourages staff and students to use digital resources, 1-1s, co-deliver sessions.

3. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

We wanted to recruit a mix of staff and students.

Staff 'DigiPals'

The staff 'DigiPals' were recruited internally. The posts were advertised via the College's staff intranet and an 'everyone email' was sent out by the College Principalship to highlight the roles to all staff. All applicants went through a formal interview process.

The key attributes we were looking for were the ability to:

- build effective working relationships;
- motivate and enthuse others;
- develop and implement innovative solutions;
- act on their own initiative;
- provide constructive feedback and set standards for improvement;
- use self-reflection to make improvements to own professional practice;
- Meet deadlines and have good organisational and administrative skills.

Student 'DigiPals'

The role of the student 'DigiPal' is a Scholarship and potential 'DigiPals' must complete an application. Shortlisted applicants are invited to an interview.

This process consists of:

- a 5 minute presentation with the title 'All about me' using Prezi - *this is so the panel can identify any skills and/or qualities the candidates may have;*
- a research task in groups of 2/3 on the benefits for staff and students on a given app - *this task highlights how well the candidates can work collaboratively and establish positive relationships;*
- a 1-1 with a member of staff to promote and encourage use of the app researched in the previous task - *this task shows an ability to give clear explanations and the ability to enthuse staff in the use of technology in a learning environment;*
- answering the question: 'How do we communicate the value of using technology for learning, particularly to those who do not want to use technology?'

Student 'DigiPals' should have:

- Good communication skills;
- Positive attitude;
- Enthusiastic approach;
- Ability to build effective working relationships;
- Willingness to work flexibly.

4. 'DIGIPAL' BENEFITS

Staff 'DigiPals'

Staff were offered 180 hours remission from teaching to dedicate to the project. They also received a £2,100 incentive per year.

Student 'DigiPals'

The 'DigiPal' roles were advertised to students as Scholarships. A bursary of £1,200 was awarded to each 'DigiPal'. This was paid in installments at key points through the academic year.

5. LESSONS LEARNED

Staff 'DigiPals'

Staff 'DigiPals' can support an intuitional culture shift in many ways, e.g. college wide staff development sessions/events, producing instructional guides/films, contextualising digital resources for teams, subjects, areas.

However this tends to support only those wishing to develop their skills further. Identifying one or two reliable and flexible digital resources ensures that the staff member does not feel too overwhelmed by the technology they will need to become familiar with.

We found that the most effective way to support and encourage technology enhanced learning is much more focused. 'DigiPals' work with an identified member of staff – either volunteers, referrals for pre-observation or post-observation support, appraisal recommendations. In this instance, 'DigiPals' review Schemes of Work, lesson plans and methods of delivery, and then liaise with tutor to draft an intervention plan, which suggests one or two ways technology can be used to enhance learning.

Some of the key lessons learned were:

- As with all roles, staff absence cannot be anticipated. Two of the 'DigiPals' left the project due to maternity leave and additional teaching commitments;
- The 'DigiPals' experienced some resistance from teaching staff who felt they didn't need technology to improve their teaching and learning;
- The staff members who engaged the most were those with an enthusiasm for technology and willingness to improve their skills and knowledge;
- Focusing on two staff members per 'DigiPal' rather than trying to work with more, created a more positive ripple effect across departments;
- Staff who volunteered to participate in the project benefitted a lot more from the experience and made the most progress. Those staff who were asked to participate by their Line Managers as a result of development recommendations following an observation, for example, did

not participate fully and therefore did not show as much progress.

Student 'DigiPals'

The Student 'DigiPals' worked well together as a group. The initial idea was to send them into classrooms to support tutors and learners to adopt and trial new learning technologies. However this will change moving forward so that tutors and their learners work together as a team and the 'DigiPals' are offered as additional support.

In the next academic year we will look to include additional activities within the student 'DigiPal' roles:

- Form Communities of Practice to support each other;
- Create a network of 'DigiPals' beyond our own college to create additional resources and widen the support network;
- Deliver a schedule of webinars to support tutors and learners using new learning technologies/methods.