LEARNING FUTURES PROGRAMME

FINAL REPORT

DIGITAL DIVERSITY PROJECT

Worker's Educational Association

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

NIACE

Contents

Project title
Digital Diversity

Name of lead organisation
Workers Educational Association (WEA)

Project summary
Digital Diversity is a whole organisation action research project. The WEA brought together senior managers, educational staff and tutors, to explore ways in which technologies can be used within learning. The project provided a space in which tutors could experiment with technologies within their course delivery, knowing they had the support of educational staff. We didn't target 'early adopters' or 'technology experts' to take part in the project. The focus was on the support, encouragement, tools and resources that would enable all tutors to develop skills, knowledge and confidence. For the WEA, the FELTAG agenda isn't just about increasing the provision of online and blended learning; it is also about identifying ways in which technology can enhance our face to face teaching, learning and assessment as part of a digital inclusion agenda. The tutors involved in the project piloted different applications and tools, and participated in an online community of practice to share their learning and reflections. The leadership and management element of the project has focused on the leadership role in setting the strategic direction and exploring ways of scaling up the pilot approaches to involve more tutors and benefit students across the WEA.

Who should read this report and why
This report will, for example, interest:

- Adult and community learning providers;
- Organisations employing sessional tutors to work in community settings;
- Tutors wanting to develop their skills and knowledge of using learning technologies as part of their teaching and assessment of learning;
- Organisations with an interest in digital inclusion agendas.

CPD resources developed

The following resources have been developed through the Digital Diversity project. More information is available in the resources section of this report.

- Showcasing student work on Flickr – case study.
- Recording distance travelled.
- Developing an online community of practice.
- Using iPads and Tablets.
- Bring your own devices.
- Social media in learning.
- Creating eLearning modules using Adapt – case study.

Project lead contact details

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About the Workers' Educational Association

Founded in 1903, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) is a charity and the UK's largest voluntary sector provider of adult education. In 2013/14 we delivered 9,700 part-time courses for over 70,000 students in England and Scotland with classes in almost every local authority area and our work in England was assessed in 2014 as 'Good' by Ofsted. With the support of nearly 400 local branches, 3,000 volunteers, 2,000 part-time tutors and our active membership, the WEA provides high quality, student-centred and tutor-led education for adults from all walks of life. We bring education into the heart of communities, helping people learn whatever they want – from maths, English and skills for employment, through health and wellbeing courses, to cultural studies that help students broaden their horizons and community engagement programmes that encourage active citizenship. We also have a special mission to reach those who want to improve their lives and communities. Education is a beautiful and powerful tool for tackling economic and social disadvantage because it raises aspirations and helps people create their own change. http://www.wea.org.uk/home

Members of partnership

We have worked closely with NIACE and JISC as part of the advisory group for this project, acting as critical friends and helping us to reflect on the learning and identify next steps.

NIACE are also working with us on the dissemination of the project outcomes and resources.

What the project set out to do and why

The key aim of this project was for engagement with technology to be seen as a core part of the teaching, learning and assessment pedagogical approaches within the WEA, and not as a bolt on activity. For this to be achieved, learning technology needed to be considered as a key part of the planning and delivery of learning, enhancing the student experience and achievement of learning outcomes, and not as something that should be done just to tick a box. Central to this was the importance of CPD for tutors and educational staff. The aim was to create a flexible CPD offer that could be used as part of initial teacher training programmes, but could also be accessed as stand-alone resources for more experienced tutors. The action research approach was key to the project, as we wanted to explore what the barriers to the use of learning technologies might be, and how we could work with staff and tutors to address issues of confidence, skills, or potentially reluctance to engage.

The process

The project set out to involve different stakeholders within the WEA as part of a whole organisation approach. The key ways that we did this were:

- Recruiting tutors and digital leaders (educational staff) from across five regions, representing different parts of our provision. The project involved 10 Digital Leaders and 15 tutors.

- Identifying a Senior Management Team (SMT) champion to work with the project and ensure that SMT colleagues were linked in.

- Setting up an online Community of Practice within Yammer, for project participants to share ideas, findings and reflections in a safe environment, with peer feedback.

- Digital Leaders facilitating introductory sessions with tutors within regions to set the scene and find out more about the tutors' current levels of confidence with, and use of, learning technologies.

- Holding a face to face training day at the start of the project for participants to meet in the 'real world' and to introduce the approaches and online applications that we planned to use for the Community of Practice.

- Modelling the use of open source applications such as Yammer, Padlet and Socrative as part of the training day, to provide examples of their application within teaching and ensure that everyone has access.

- Encouraging participants to bring their own devices with them to the day (lap tops and smart phones/tablets) and to incorporate their use into the planning and delivery of the session.

- Holding a Leadership and Management day for SMT and representatives from the Extended Senior Management Team.

- Initially working within three themed groups focused around the three areas of the CIF – a) Leadership and Management, b) Outcomes for Learners, c) Teaching, Learning and Assessment. This was reflected within the structure of the Yammer network, where the discussion forums were structured around the three themes as well as a general area for the whole project.

The results

Challenges overcome

A key aspect of the project's methodology and overall approach was to start from where our tutors are at. Working with non-IT specialists, we modelled different uses of technology within teaching, learning and assessment. Although small in scale, we wanted to explore approaches that could be scaled up across the whole of our provision/tutor base. Challenges and how they were overcome are summarised below:

Tutors' concerns about lack of confidence/skills/knowledge in how to use technology in learning:

Modelling the ways that different apps can be used within learning proved to be an effective way of introduction learning technologies to tutors. This proved to be particularly successful with open source applications such as Padlet, Survey Monkey and Socrative. These weren't introduced with a fanfare, declaring them good tools for tutors to use. Instead they were introduced during the face to face session as part of a learning activity, with a clear purpose and link to the session plan. When tutors found them easy to use, they asked how they could get hold of them, so the impetus came from them. Accessing applications that do not require students to have user names and passwords was seen as particularly beneficial for some cohorts, although potential limitations with gathering data were also explored. The simplicity of these apps are particularly useful as a way of introducing more technologies within face-to-face teaching sessions, with links to employability and life-skills to support digital inclusion.

This video link provides a summary of the involvement of Margaret Normansell, one of the tutors participating in the project. This demonstrates a transition from using technology as a tutor, and how to engage students in group activities incorporating technology. This is a key driver for the WEA, ensuring that learning technologies are integrated into sessions to develop students' digital skills as part of any subject area.

Technology seen as complicated and/or not relevant to all curriculum areas:

Two theme groups (*Teaching, Learning and Assessment* and *Outcomes for Learners)* incorporated pilots focused on initial assessment, achievement and feedback/evaluation, demonstrating that technology can be used to enhance any curriculum area. The tutors involved in the project piloted the use of Padlet, Survey Monkey and Book Creator, as well as Open Badges. In addition, piloting the use of IPads within a practical art class, with clearly articulated benefits arising from this, helped to demonstrate the ways that technology can be fully integrated into teaching and assessment activities, and provide appropriate levels of challenge within a group.

Tutors being reluctant to try out new ways of working:

One of the concerns that is often raised when exploring increased use of technologies in learning is that some tutors will be reluctant to try new ways of working, or may see the technology as 'getting in the way' of the subject they are teaching. Whilst accepting that the tutors participating in

the project were self-selected, and therefore open to learning more about technologies, the project did not find any reluctance from tutors to incorporate technology as core part of planning, delivery and assessment. The tutors were keen to try things out, to learn from and build on the experiences of others, and crucially to focus on ways of actively involving students in using technology within face to face sessions and as activities outside of the classroom, using flipped learning principles. When tutors saw the benefits of changing the way they worked, this spurred them on to try different approaches and to share their learning with others.

Impact identified

The action research approach was critical for our project, in that we learnt as much from the process as we have gained from the resources produced as an end product. Key areas of impact for the WEA are:

- The involvement of senior managers and leaders in the project has led to a renewed focus on technology and digital inclusion strategies within the WEA

- The SMT champion has provided a link between the project and strategic developments both internally and externally, including through the WEA's involvement in the FELTAG coalition

- The learning from the technologies and approaches piloted by individual tutors have helped to inform the five eLearning modules and resources produced, and the next steps for the WEA to scale up our response to FELTAG – within face to face, blended and online learning models. This includes at least 40% of our tutors developing their use of learning technologies, and a minimum of 10 pilots using Moodle and Google Apps to pilot blended and fully online approaches. This will include a pilot of the WEA Initial Teacher Training course using a blended learning model that combines some face to face sessions with video calls, online discussion forums, eLearning modules and self-directed learning and research activities.

- The personal development of individual tutors. Feedback, evaluation and participation in the community of practice indicates increases in confidence, skills and knowledge in the pedagogical approaches to the use of technologies in learning, as well as the technical skills/confidence required to 'play' with technologies and discover the innovative ways that individual applications can be used as part of the teaching, learning and assessment process. Responses from 12 of the tutors involved indicate skills and confidence development in a range of areas including creating eLearning modules using Adapt, selecting open source applications to support teaching and learning, using social media within adult learning, and flipped learning approaches. This development has been gained not only from the practical application of technology in their teaching practice, but from the peer support and feedback received from tutors and educational staff, as part of the Community of Practice.

- Building on the WEA value of tutors and students as equal partners within the learning process, that it's ok for tutors to be learning alongside their students, and to ask students for help and advice when they need it. One example of this was the introduction of YouTube playlists by a tutor, following a suggestion from one of the

students. The tutor was in regular email contact with the student, asking technical questions about how to set up the playlists and how to generate links to send to the whole group. As the course progressed, the tutor reported that "…some learners are starting to make their own suggestions as to videos to add to the Playlist... It's a neat indicator of their growing confidence and engagement as co-contributors."

Key learning points

A key learning point is around the importance of bringing people together face to face at the start of the project to maximise ongoing engagement in the online communication and collaboration tools. We found that staff and tutors who attended the Digital Diversity training day played a more active role in the discussions within Yammer and in sharing the findings from their pilots. They were more likely to reflect on aspects that didn't go so well and to ask for feedback and advice from their peers. Individuals who weren't able to attend the training event participated in Yammer at a more 'surface level', were more likely to 'lurk' (read but not comment) and were less likely to share aspects of their pilots that didn't work as intended. The exceptions to this were individuals who had previous experience of contributing to online forums in other contexts, and had more knowledge and confidence in how to take part.

Another key learning point was the importance of involving SMT in a whole organisation approach. Encouraging SMT to play an active role in the project and to work with staff and tutors to understand starting points and barriers, and to identify solutions, has enabled the project outcomes to be 'mainstreamed' as part of a new digital strategy going forward. Key areas of work linked to this strategy are:

- a digital technologies road show, providing opportunities at a local level for tutors to get hands on, try using different technologies and devices, and to ask questions;

- a 'Go Digital in 2016' campaign across the WEA encouraging 100% of tutors to sign up to the tutor portal and a minimum of 40% of tutors to develop their use learning technologies in their course delivery during the first year;

- larger scale pilots to build on the CPD resources and extend reach to more of our students – pilots will include use of Moodle, Google Apps, and Socrative, and will involve all nine English regions and Scotland in at least 20 pilots involving 250 students;

- a strategy to support Bring Your Own Devices, including identifying which community venues have WIFI access as part of assessing suitability for use as classrooms;

- a clear focus on use of learning technologies as part of the Observation of Teaching, Leaning and Assessment (OTLA) process.

One of our key aims was to develop an approach that could be embedded within initial teacher training (ITT) programmes. As a direct result of the work undertaken as part of the

project, we are in the process of developing a blended ITT course utilising many of the tools and approaches piloted in the project including Adapt eLearning modules, Socrative evaluations, Padlet walls, open badges, Zoom calls for tutorials and discussion groups, and Google Classroom to manage assignments and feedback. Building on the findings from the project, the blended ITT course will start with a face to face meeting to introduce the tools and build trust and support in the 'real world' prior to working together online.

Resources

Showcasing student work on Flickr

This case study provides an introduction to ways of showcasing students' work online. It focuses mainly on Flickr, as this was piloted by tutors and students within the WEA.

Recording distance travelled

This module focuses on Book Creator as an example of an app that can be used to work with students to record their own progress and development in learning. Book Creator is used as the focus, as this was piloted by WEA tutors as part of the Digital Diversity Project.

This is an eLearning module produced in Adapt. The published zip file can be uploaded to a Scorm enabled environment such as Moodle.

You can also view the module with guest access at:

http://wea.learningpool.com/course/view.php?id=68

Developing an online community of practice

This module provides an introduction to Communities of Practice, and what makes them successful, with a specific focus on the development of Communities of Practice in an online environment. It includes an example of how the WEA has used Yammer to create an online space for participants in the Digital Diversity project to communicate and collaborate.

This is an eLearning module produced in Adapt. The published zip file can be uploaded to a Scorm enabled environment such as Moodle.

You can also view the module with guest access at:

http://wea.learningpool.com/course/view.php?id=70

Using iPads and Tablets

This module looks at ways that iPads and Android tablets can be used within adult learning. It includes case studies of some of the ways that WEA tutors have been using iPads and tablets, and feedback from students.

This is an eLearning module produced in Adapt. The published zip file can be uploaded to a Scorm enabled environment such as Moodle.

You can also view the module with guest access at:

http://wea.learningpool.com/course/view.php?id=69

Bring your own devices

This module explores some of the benefits and areas to consider when students bring their own devices into the classroom, for use as part of the teaching and learning process.

This is an eLearning module produced in Adapt. The published zip file can be uploaded to a Scorm enabled environment such as Moodle.

You can also view the module with guest access at:

http://wea.learningpool.com/course/view.php?id=71

Social media in learning

This module explores ways that social media can be used as an effective part of teaching; learning and assessment, with case study examples of the ways in which WEA tutors are using social media as part of digital inclusion strategies.

This is an eLearning module produced in Adapt. The published zip file can be uploaded to a Scorm enabled environment such as Moodle.

You can also view the module with guest access at:

http://wea.learningpool.com/course/view.php?id=67

Creating eLearning modules using Adapt – case study

A case study of the WEA's journey with the new Adapt authoring tool, and how we are developing a team of authors and subject matter experts to develop new modules.