

Case study



Association of Colleges in Eastern Region (ACER)

Digital Approaches to English and Maths

- using technology to support learners on traineeships and apprenticeships

- KEITS Training Services Ltd

PROJECT LEAD

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1. About the Provider

KEITS Training Services Ltd is a private training provider for work based qualifications and offer Traineeships and Apprenticeships as well as other recognised awards. They specialise in land based industries and the business sector with over 30 peripatetic assessors working nationally.

2. The Challenge

About the practitioners



Rion Richards works as an Assessor on Business Administration and Customer Services Apprenticeships. Before he joined the project, he had helped to develop the use of the moodle at KEITS and was already exploring the use of digital technology in his assessor role.



Kate Knight (left) also works as an Assessor on a Horse Care and Customer Services Apprenticeships. Kate has taught in FE and is working with a colleague to offer a Level 4/5 Teaching Award for other colleagues who work at KEITS. In contrast to Rion, Kate was much less experienced in using learning technology and was quite uncertain about the challenge that faced her.

Improving access to online resources

A key concern for both Rion and Kate was to improve the use of the Moodle-based learning resources in English and maths which are currently not used very often by learners. They felt that perhaps the resources and recommended websites needed to be reviewed and updated in both format and content so that they were more engaging and user friendly. Given the limited time candidates have on their apprenticeships and the limited support and contact time they have with their assessors, Rion and Kate felt that it was important that learners should make good use of blended learning resources. In light of the amount of travel involved in supporting workplace learners Kate and Rion were keen to explore the benefits of using Skype and other video conferencing platforms to offer remote support.

Engaging Employers and Senior Management

Rion and Kate were supported in the Learning Futures project by Karen Hampshire, a senior manager and director at KEITS. When helping Rion and Kate to draw up an action plan she suggested that one way to raise employers' awareness of the benefits of learning technology might be to develop some digital resources that employers could use themselves in supporting their employees towards one of the examinations their employees have to pass, for example those offered by the British Horse Society. Employers are actively involved in the delivery of the practical, workbased element of those qualifications and so she felt that they would almost certainly welcome some blended learning resources that would save them time in preparing their employees for the exams.

3. Some Solutions

At the start of the project both Rion and Kate were keen to explore ways in which they could create digital resources in English and maths that their apprentices could access between workplace support visits. KEITS as a company had set up and piloted a Moodle as a VLE but had found that, for a range of reasons learners were not accessing the resources offered as frequently as they hoped and so they were looking for an alternative way of offering blended learning resources that would be more engaging.

Padlet

When the use of the online sticky board **Padlet** was demonstrated at the first Learning Futures workshop, Rion and Kate were very keen to use it as a tool to collate web-based material for use in supporting learners with particular topics in English and maths. They soon discovered that Padlet boards were easy to create and could be accessed on PCs and mobile devices without asking learners having to go through a lengthy log in procedure. They also found that Padlet boards could be given a varied, colourful format with multimedia features and that it was easy for learners to view and download resources. All of these features prompted Rion and Kate to begin to use Padlet as a key tool to create resources for their apprentices.

One of the first Padlet boards that Rion created was designed to host resources that learners could use to develop their reading skills for the Functional Skills assessments. In creating this Padlet board Rion included links to a set of screencasts about Functional English by Steve English. These screencast resources soon became popular with other tutors on the project too.

In developing other Padlet-based resources for maths Rion also began to put in links to quiz activities he had created using the **GoCongr** website that enabled learners to check their progress with particular number skills such as averages and range calculations. Kate went on to use Padlet to host collections of vocationally related resources on a range of topics.

X mind

When designing other learning resources Rion also began to explore ways in which he could use **X mind**, a free mind mapping tool, to create graphics that would make his Business Administration materials more attractive and meaningful.

‘As soon I saw X mind, I could see all the possibilities... it seemed a more natural way of presenting information on the page...’

Rion also began to recommend X mind to his learners as a tool that they could use to organise their ideas for Functional English writing tasks as well as a tool to use when giving presentations.

Using Skype as a video conferencing tool

From the very start of the project Rion was keen to explore the use of Skype to increase the level of contact he has with learners and his colleagues. Like most assessors, travelling takes up a great deal of his week as he drives to visit his apprentices or to attend meetings with colleagues. Having completed the two Mactrac open learning modules on video conferencing Rion was one of the first of the tutors on the Learning Futures project to begin to explore this

approach to remote support for his apprentices. Rion has since progressed rapidly in his confident use of video conferencing and has worked with Mick Martin from Cambridge Regional College to take part in Skype-based tutorials with apprentices to gain more experience of this model of support. As a result both Rion and Kate now regularly use Skype as a key workplace communication tool and their manager, Karen Hampshire, has provided opportunities for them to share their experiences of using Skype at team meetings with other colleagues.

Using screencasting to give feedback on learner work

In the first Learning Futures workshop at ACER, tutors had an opportunity to see how screencasting software like **Screencast-o-matic** can be used by tutors to create video tutorials and give video feedback to learners on written work. Kate immediately saw the benefits of using screencasting in this way and began to pilot this form of feedback using pieces of learner work she had received from her apprentices who were working towards Level 1 Functional English assessments. Like other tutors on the project Kate found that there were several advantages in this form of feedback. She found that it was quicker and easier to explain areas of improvements in grammar and spelling by talking through them and learners liked the personalised 'feel' of the feedback.

Using learning technology to embed maths support into vocational resources

Like Rion, Kate quickly saw the potential of Padlet as a way to share resources and at the start of the project she also began to develop some Padlet boards to

collate generic support materials for other assessors and candidates to use. However, Kate was particularly keen to use her newly acquired digital skills to create some vocationally related learning materials that would be of interest not only to other assessors but also to employers who had said they would appreciate blended learning resources to support the training that they themselves offer in the workplace. Kate therefore decided to set up some Padlet boards to host some web-based materials around the topics in equine studies that she knew regularly caused difficulty for apprentices and which employers also had to cover with learners during workplace routines. She decided to begin re-designing some of her existing materials for three topics: diet planning; working out jumping distances; mixing up sugarbeet feeds.

To produce the Padlet board containing resources on planning a horse's diet Kate had to use a combination of e learning tools. She had to:

- create a set of Powerpoint slides to introduce the key points about diet;
- record a video tutorial by recording a commentary over the slides;
- embed some quiz questions into the video tutorial using Edpuzzle;
- design a multiple choice quiz using the GoConqr website;
- post all of the above resources on to a Padlet board;
- add other weblinks and support material to the Padlet board.

Using these digital skills to create a multimedia resource was a very rewarding achievement for Kate who had started the project as a 'real technophobe'!

4. Reflections

In looking back over her work on the Learning Futures project Kate feels that she made enormous progress in her use of learning technology within her assessor role. Starting from a level of real anxiety about using any e learning tools she is now able to use a wide range of digital skills to create multimedia resources and to use video conferencing packages when communicating with learners or with her colleagues.

'I have got over my "phobia" of You Tube, where I thought everything you published anybody can see! I am now much more comfortable with this and can see how saving presentations with voice overs on You Tube can be used by learners and staff. I have generally improved my use of technology and finding my way round things like inserting text boxes and pictures into documents, using Powerpoint including animations, colour etc, using the snipping tool, embedding links into documents.'

"The use of Skype has many benefits. It has enabled me to interact with my mentor Bob Read regularly and also other members of KEITS staff. The financial and time benefits of this are enormous. I've also been able to use the screen share option and receive and send messages, files and links."

"Screencast o matic has enabled me to add a voice over to a presentation or whilst marking a piece of work. For presentations and resources this adds real value. For marking work remotely for learners, I can see how we could develop this as an organisation in order to offer support between visits and also save time at visits giving feedback on work."

Kate found that using Padlet as a way to share resources with learners was much easier and more engaging for learners than involving learners logging on to a VLE –

'Padlet has been amazing... all the resources, the links, the videos, the websites, they all seem much easier to access. It's easier to see everything all in one go. It's more visual. You can get straight to where you want to go.'

And perhaps the biggest 'learning revelation' of all for Kate was Skype – over the seven months of the project activity she used Skype for all but the very first of her regular two weekly tutorial sessions with her mentor, Bob Read –

'A lot of these things I've used make me smile and have really inspired me about stuff but Skype has been the biggest learning revelation for me really because, as you know, I was a little dubious about Skype. I thought the connection would be rubbish, the sound would be hopeless and it would be a bit awkward when you're doing group Skype as someone would talk and it will all get distorted and - of course it's not like that at all! You've shown me round it really fabulously and I've now Skyped other colleagues and held group Skypes and I found myself helping another colleague in a way that you sometimes help me. So I feel that I showed her how to share her screen and then shared my screen with her and showed her some things and I think other members of the KEITS team that have been involved in this project will tell you also that Skype has made a big impact on us and is going to continue to do so from a logistical point of view as well as for the practitioners.'

Karen has been delighted with the progress that both Rion and Kate have made on the project and has given them regular opportunities to share their

skills and growing levels of confidence with colleagues at team meetings and on training days. In identifying Kate and Rion she purposefully chose two members of her team with very different levels of experience with digital technology. She was aware that Rion would continue to expand his skills which were already well developed but she was keen to involve Kate, a 'real technophobe' in the hope that other colleagues would be motivated by her success.

Impact on the organisation

Karen Hampshire, one of the Directors at KEITS feels that the project has been of great benefit to her in planning the changes to the delivery model that she is considering in response to recent changes in funding for apprenticeships. Taking part in the project has helped her begin to explore some solutions and digital tools that she can begin to promote within the business –

'It has made me more aware of what's out there in terms of e learning tools to assist us as a business and to improve the learner journey.... it has opened my eyes about how we as a company can benefit more from digital technology.'

Impact on learners and employers

In the original action plan Kate was keen for Rion and Kate to create and pilot some digital training resources for blended learning that might be of immediate interest to employers. Karen feels that such resources could be of real value to their apprenticeship employers who are often 'micro-businesses' and so do not have the time or the staff to offer as much on the job training as they would like. As noted in the earlier section of this case study Kate went on to

really enjoy the challenge of developing these vocationally relevant materials and embedding elements of maths support where appropriate. Kate has piloted these materials with both learners and employers and they were well received. Here is a clip from Grace, one of Kate's learners –

"I found this clip very useful. I find that the voice over helps a lot with explaining different things, as well as the calculations for the feed and roughage. I would recommend this clip to people as it will definitely help if you seem to be struggling. It is well presented, very easy to understand and good to follow."

5. Next Steps

In looking back on their involvement with the Learning Futures project Karen Hampshire, one of the directors at KEITS has valued the insights that she and her colleagues have gained into the way they can use digital technology to adapt their apprenticeship delivery model in the light of changes to funding levels, Ofsted inspection requirements and the changes to apprenticeship frameworks following the Trailblazer pilots.

For example, Karen is aware that her assessors will have more of a direct training role with less time spent on assessment activities. Given the practical nature of the programmes they offer as a specialist landbased provider Karen is keen that her assessors have as much time as possible during their workplace visits to offer support with practical skills and can begin to use blended learning materials more and more to develop underpinning knowledge both in the vocational subject as well as in English and maths.

Skype as a video conferencing tool

Of all the e learning tools that she and her team have explored during the programme Karen has been most impressed by the potential of Skype and video conferencing in general to transform the way staff work with one another and with their learners. Quite soon after the start of the project Karen, Rion and Kate completed the first MacTrac module which introduced them to the basic features of Skype and how to use it as a video conferencing platform for 1:1 live online learning. They were soon using Skype for all their meetings with their project mentor, Bob Read, and Karen quickly arranged for assessors to have their monthly manager meetings to be held using group Skype video calls too. For an organisation that has staff and learners based in remote locations across the country, the use of video conferencing made immediate sense in terms of the time and money saved on travel. Once Karen had begun to use Skype herself and explored various features such as screen sharing and file sharing, she could quickly see that there were all sorts of other benefits. She found that:

- staff were more relaxed as they travelled less and could work from home more often;
- contact with colleagues and learners became much more frequent;
- staff felt less isolated;
- assessors could 'share screens' with learners to give tutorial support and feedback on assignments;
- assessors could discuss standardisation issues in group video calls.

Changes to documentation – the Visit Planner

To support her assessors in making the transition to this new assessor role Karen is keen to implement some of the changes Rion has been piloting in the design and use of the Visit Planner document that he now uses to organise and record his workplace visits to learners. Rion has been including information in a separate section of the Visit Planner that clearly indicates the digital resources that the assessors would like the apprentice to complete as blended learning between visits. The kind of resources Rion has in mind relate to the materials he and Kate have been exploring during the project and therefore would include links to:

- links to resources on topic-specific Padlet boards;
- tutorial videos on YouTube;
- screencasts that give learners feedback on their assignments;
- resources on BKSB live;
- quiz and flashcard activities using the GoConqr website for self testing;
- video tutorials with embedded questions for self testing.

Rion is hopeful that re-designing the Visit Planner in this way will give practical examples of the different ways in which assessors can use digital resources both as extension activities following an observation and as preparatory work that candidates can undertake before the next workplace visit. Rion comments–

”As it was, the planner was too static but with a few little tweaks it could be used to keep a running record of links to blended learning resources... At the moment assessors may be e mailing separate links to materials but in the new

format the planner could be much more effective in signposting useful resources and keeping those links all in one place for both assessor and learner to access. This would help learners and assessors to be much more efficient.”

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 KEITS 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/p735voz>

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