

In conversation with Becta

Making an impact



Contents

Foreword	1
Introduction	2
Roger Clegg, Head of Learning Resource, Oldham College <i>Technology abandons paperwork to the dustbin of history</i>	6
Michelle Freeman, Director of Corporate Services, Coleg Menai <i>New technology brings success in any language</i>	8
Heather Frankham, Chief Executive Officer, Lifetime Health & Fitness <i>VLE is the best environment for educational health and fitness</i>	10
Chris Kemp, Deputy Head of Service, Middlesbrough Council Adult Education Service <i>The digital approach keeps learners learning longer</i>	12
Stephen Orbell, Centre Manager, Every Step Ltd <i>Prison presents no bars to those who are keen to learn</i>	14
Peter Birch, Assistant Principal, Xaverian College <i>Personalised learning has a big impact on achievement</i>	16
Glen Singleton, Director of Resources, College of West Anglia <i>Personalisation of learning and staff development go hand in hand</i>	18
Geoff Rebbeck, ILT development co-ordinator, Thanet College <i>Reflective practice increases confidence of staff</i>	20
Christine Sherman, ICT Team Leader, Henshaws College <i>Technology helps disabled learners demonstrate their abilities</i>	22
Conversation points	24
Biographies	26

Foreword



Jane Williams

Much has happened since we published the first *Technology strategy for Further Education, skills and regeneration: plan for 2008–2011*. The Technology Exemplar Network has become established, is popular and growing rapidly; the National Improvement Strategy (NIS) lays a clear pathway to greater responsibility and accountability for all providers of Further Education (FE) and skills. The global economic changes have brought new challenges for us all. In this, the fourth edition of *In Conversation with Becta*, we therefore take the opportunity to review progress in recent years and ask some challenging questions about the impact technology has made on everyone involved in FE and skills and on the wider community. In so doing, we ask the question: “What difference has it made?”

As we look to the future, we all face tough decisions over funding in the wake of the economic downturn. But it is important to remember that the FE and skills system is a key part of the solution and can do much to keep the UK on the road to economic recovery. Technology and how we use it will make a major contribution to that upturn.

In the first edition of *In Conversation with Becta* we focused on the application of new technologies; the second addressed questions of leadership; the third looked at how governors were facing the challenges of self-regulation and improvement. In this issue we concentrate on the impact of the sector’s efforts to improve the application and uptake of technology in all aspects of the FE and skills provision.

We look at a wide range of work where technology has an influence, from personalisation of learning and preparation for working life to the improvement of learning outcomes and the drive for greater effectiveness. In so doing, we have interviewed people in key positions to lead strategic change, monitor the results and advise on the best way forward for continuous improvement.

There is clear evidence that many colleges and providers generally are exploiting in a most creative way the best software, hardware and support systems available, and where existing digital resources fall short of the mark they are creating their own. The rapid take-up of the sector-wide technology improvement leadership tool – Generator – is also encouraging evidence of a strong desire to progress. Working with our partners our focus will be continuing to build on the progress achieved to date and ensuring that investment in technology delivers the premium to support colleges and providers in the tough times ahead.

I would like to thank all of those who have contributed to this edition of *In Conversation with Becta*. If you would like to join us in our ongoing conversation and/or give us feedback on this publication, please email feskills@becta.org.uk.

Jane Williams

Jane Williams, Executive Director, Further Education and Skills, Becta

Introduction

The rate of growth and change in the application of technology in learning and skills is so rapid that it is often difficult to stand back and take stock, to reflect on the achievements and lessons learned. This edition of *In Conversation with Becta* takes a snapshot of progress to date and of the benefits that managers, staff, learners, employers and people in the wider community are seeing from the effective use of technology in learning. In this edition, the fourth in the series, nine people with significant responsibility for the practical implementation of technology in the FE and skills sector give their views on the impact the changes are having in their organisations.

Their observations are most encouraging as evidence emerges of improvements in areas of work such as personalised learning and preparation for employment. Moreover, they report, good practice is spreading from one institution to another through partnerships, collaboration and a general exchange of ideas and resources. They also describe substantial gains being made through the Technology Exemplar Network – in which many are involved – and from the sharing of experiences as Next Generation Learning, learndirect and AoC Beacon Award winners.

While much of what they report is becoming increasingly common practice across the sector, there is still considerable work to be done. In this introduction, we focus on seven areas where significant impact is being made – starting with issues around increased efficiencies – before presenting brief summaries of their key observations in their own words in subsequent chapters.



Efficiencies

Considerable savings have been made by cutting costs of everything from travel for training and wasteful paper-based records to the hire of conference venues and diversion of expert staff for training which is more effectively done online. Appropriate software on a virtual learning environment (VLE) is creating the platforms for such savings. At Oldham College, online assessment in areas such as Key Skills allows learners to do the tests at a time and pace that suits them. At bilingual Coleg Menai, where all information is stored in two languages, digital access makes updating easier, more efficient and cheaper. And the work-based learning provider, Lifetime Health and Fitness, saved £20,000 a year by eliminating paperwork, which it ploughed back into the business.

Learner outcomes

Every provider contributing to this issue has seen significant benefits from technology in terms of learner outcomes, from sixth form and general FE colleges to independent colleges for those with learning disabilities and prison education providers. TeesLearn, an online adult education service created by a consortium of six local authority colleges, has seen recruitment grow by 2,000 in two years with an 11 per cent improvement in retention rates. Every Step Ltd, a learndirect provider for HMP Chelmsford has witnessed marked improvements in self confidence and successes in learning among prisoners who, for the first time, are securing guarantees of employment on release.

Personalised learning

Personalised learning is a powerful concept. Xaverian Sixth Form College and West Anglia, a general FE college, have shown how a combination of adapting and making curriculum materials more easily available, along with access to individual targets, grades and reminders, can motivate learners and improve attainment and attendance. The tailored approach has also brought success to learners as varied as prisoners, disabled people, shift workers and pensioners.

Skills for the workplace

Employers need their workers to acquire new knowledge and skills in a timely way, not having to wait for courses to be put on in distant places. Thanet College says e-portfolios can be effective in providing bespoke training for employers. Oldham College has shown how doing key skills tests online creates more time for shopfloor training and, therefore, more efficient use of employer time. Since various groups of workers are busy at different times of the day, so online portfolios and materials on personal devices enable them to make good use of slack time for training.

Staff development

With technology changing so quickly, training for support staff is crucial, but teaching staff should also benefit. At Thanet College e-portfolios are being used by staff to encourage reflective practice, put them more actively in control of their continuing professional development (CPD) and increase their professionalism. This project provided valuable lessons for using portfolios with learners and for providing bespoke training responsive to employer needs. It also raises important issues about the ownership of the contents of the portfolio and how social media may impact on the way that learners create and store their work.



Benefit to communities

Rural and dispersed communities make it difficult for people to keep attending courses – as do factors such as moving house or changing shift patterns. But TeesLearn has shown how email, instant messaging and online forums encourage people by creating a community of learners and making it easier to access materials. Communities also benefit when prisoners are equipped by training organisations such as Every Step with the self-esteem, knowledge and skills they need for employment and constructive living on their release.

Preparing learners for employment

Work-based learners and those on block release need as much time in the workplace as possible, and Oldham College has found that putting Key Skills practice and assessment online allows them to work on these at their own pace and take the test when ready. Entering the labour market poses particular problems for people with disabilities, but Henshaws, an independent specialist college, has shown how the right technology can give more people the means to express and develop their talents.



Roger Clegg

Head of Learning Resource, Oldham College



Roger Clegg



Technology abandons paperwork to the dustbin of history

Our software systems are rapidly driving us towards being a paperless college. Not only is this much more efficient and less costly, it is also very popular with staff who have seen a huge reduction in time spent repeatedly processing information. The software we use enables us to work more flexibly and we are better informed than we ever could have been with a paper-based system.

Oldham is a vocational college with large numbers of work-based learners on six to eight week block release. And with the curriculum being module-based, this makes paper-based monitoring difficult – more so as we expand Train to Gain provision. We may have been graded ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted, but that doesn’t mean we can’t do things better. For example, tracking attainment was very localised – tutors knew how their learners were getting on, but no-one else did. Where was the monitoring coming in?

We also want more personalised learning, which means learners taking more responsibility. But, when a learner in a paper-based system is given a printed assignment schedule, what can they do with it? What if they fall behind or want to speed up? The schedule itself never changes.

Traditionally, teachers have reported back to their teams but we need to widen that to include managers. Again, the software we use means that we can feed all the information we need into one place, which gives consistency of data – ‘input once, use many times’. Where before, we could only look at the percentage success rate of a course, now we can drill down and analyse what’s going on at individual learner and tutor level. Progress reviews and tutorial records are also being embedded in the system.

We already do a lot of e-assessment. For example, the health and safety element of induction is done online. It used to be a time-consuming paper-based exercise, now it’s done in 20 minutes.

Key Skills assessment was the first area to go online because everyone has to do it. It gets the biggest hits for people logging on. They practice and then do the test when it suits them, but no-one is allowed to take the real test until they’ve passed the mock test. It feeds back into our software and the tutors are tracking it. Learners see straight away how they have done, as do the tutors and managers.

With such a wide ability range and variety of backgrounds, learners need to progress at their own pace. If I'm a bricklayer and can complete Basic Skills in my own time, it means I can spend more time in the workshop, which gives greater opportunity to complete the framework within the set time. There is also a cost implication for the college if the learners take the test when they're not ready. However, there is real evidence that with our system learners become very competitive and are motivated to achieve more. When they see others passing the test, they want to do the same. It's more dynamic from the learner's point of view and we hope it will encourage people to achieve earlier. Learners are keen to have their grades quickly and when they see success it helps with target setting.

Consultation with staff is key. People were used to working in different ways and so, with centralisation, they felt they were losing control. There were so many different areas linking in, including MIS, IT support and the Students' Union. But tutors soon changed their minds when they saw the advantages. For example, learners and managers no longer needed to keep pestering them for information on attainment and progress. As a result, a significant number of staff are looking to collect evidence digitally; online submission and marking is becoming popular. Also, course tutors' information gathering used to involve a lot of photocopying; now it's paperless and on an interactive whiteboard.

Where now? We want to embed e-learning in the curriculum, including assessment and portfolios. Learner feedback is the next stage. We want them to put their own comments into the feedback, set their own targets and help to shape the course in terms of how they do the assessment, which could be much more varied than written assignments. We've also started to look at peer assessment and accelerated learning. The key impact measurement for this year will be the level of learner interaction. Technically, we could make it accessible to employers, but first we want to make sure we've got our own arrangements right and that learners are comfortable with it.

As a member of the Technology Exemplar Network we have visited other colleges and have greatly improved our strategic planning, which linked everything together and gave it a higher profile within the college. Inevitably, different staff have different views on how fast change should come, some are more enthusiastic than others. When academic staff can see the whole vision, they are more likely to buy into the whole project rather than just the bits that interest them.

Michelle Freeman

Director of Corporate Services, Coleg Menai



Michelle Freeman



New technology brings success in any language

Coleg Menai serves the needs of 9,000 learners in North West Wales spread evenly across six sites. Most staff and students speak Welsh as their first language, therefore everything we produce has to be bilingual. Students are offered a bilingual assessment at interview and, once enrolled, they can access all their materials in either language from any location. Our aim with students is to empower and engage them by enabling them to learn what they want, when they want and in the language they want.

Teaching staff are crucial to the success and in helping students become e-confident. This is a key element – having staff who are unable to use our systems is simply not an option.

We have a minimum of 12 days training for each full time staff on a range of subjects for each full-time-equivalent staff member every year. We have e-expert staff available on demand in open access areas, a staff newspaper with e-tips including an IT bulletin, and help and support documents available on the intranet. We hold a big IT roadshow every year across all the major sites, providing small group presentations and helpdesk-type support. Another key aspect is that we make an annual commitment to provide industrial-level IT training for our software developers. The two weeks training this gives has really moved us forward and helped us develop and deliver leading-edge bilingual systems.

The electronic register system introduced several years ago helped to instill the idea of using technology more widely. Staff gain access by using a classroom PC or handheld technology. We upgraded the IT skills and knowledge of our staff because everyone has to use it daily. But once they had got used to it, people were asking for more things to be done electronically.

Staff at all college sites have access to a bilingual virtual staffroom where all our systems and documents are available, e-administration can be performed and e-services can be accessed. This improves efficiency and fits in with our green agenda because the systems provide equality of service across all sites, with much reduced paper traffic between sites.

One of the most important gains to the college is the creation of more effective business processes by streamlining and replacing cumbersome systems with new e-systems. As a result, administrative tasks are performed faster and we have improved data accuracy through keying data only once. We have also raised standards evident through improved attainment rates throughout the college.



Overall pass rates are up by 6 per cent (currently 9 per cent above benchmark), e-learning pass rates are also up by 6 per cent (currently 27 per cent above benchmark) and we had 100 per cent pass rate in A-levels this summer. In our last inspection, we gained Grade 1's for all work-based learning, we have improved action planning with 98 per cent of our objectives met in the last year, we are constantly increasing availability of e-learning, staff absence rates have decreased and bilingual delivery is up 14 per cent. For the future, we're looking at ways of improving completion rates through strategies including a bilingual student tracking system developed in-house.



We're not resting on our laurels, a new Bureaucracy task and finish Group is looking at how we could do more things with a higher level of efficiency and there is also the environmental agenda. As more PCs mean higher energy bills, our Green Group recently implemented technology to power down systems when not in use which could make substantial savings after just one year.

All development are supported by an active Systems Group, which has a cross section of all staff from all areas of the college. This ensures everyone knows what is going on and staff can have an input into the technology plan. This Systems Group acts as critical friends to the development team. We also invite students in to discuss what they would like and gain feedback from focus groups, questionnaires and the online forum.

As a bilingual college, we employ two translators to help translate materials and assist in meetings. To support them, we developed a translation request system that could have commercial value. When a member of staff has electronically posted a document for translation, it can be tracked and managed using an online facility with a traffic light system that indicates where each document is in the translation process. All the documents are backed up annually in the system, which reduces duplication of work and makes it easier if only slight changes are needed to a document.

Winning an AoC Beacon Award for e-enabling organisational development has helped us dramatically. It has raised the team's morale, given them a sense of pride and confidence in their abilities. It has opened up networking so that suddenly people in the rest of the UK know what we are doing. We have had meetings with other colleges and we always learn something new from everyone who comes here.

Everything we develop is built to last but technology changes so quickly; it has moved desperately fast in the last decade. The challenge is to engage learners with new technology and to embed the technology they use in their everyday lives into teaching and learning. Students want to be able to use their own handheld devices, so we're looking at how they could use these to learn when and how they want.

Heather Frankham

Chief Executive Officer, Lifetime Health & Fitness



Heather Frankham



A Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is the best environment for educational health and fitness

Technology has enabled us to rapidly grow the business whilst maintaining and improving quality and managing risk within the business. Without this, Lifetime would not have been able to grow from £2.1m turnover in 2006 to a projected £18m turnover in the current year, achieve and maintain Ofsted Grade 2 inspections and achieve 0 per cent errors on LSE financial audits. For the most part, the success of the business is thanks to the full integration and visibility the system provides.

From a learner perspective the system provides easy access to the students' portfolios, their individual learning plans and their monthly action plans. The SMS text message alerts remind learners of upcoming appointments with their trainer and we no longer lose valuable time because a learner has left their portfolio at home as everything is available to view online.

For our employers the system provides accurate and timely reporting. We have been able to integrate and share data visibility of learner progress and flag when learners are slipping behind. This ensures effective partnership which allows us to work together to deliver timely achievement and builds accountability and trust in the relationship between ourselves and our employer partners.

Management information within the business enables us to effectively target and monitor performance of all Lifetime team members, promoting good practice and setting this as the aspiration for all staff. With this, we have been able to drive up completion rates and ensure that any under-performance is immediately recognised and addressed. The system also enables us to produce reports and information for profiling and demonstrate trends and performance against targets for a variety of scenarios including quality impact measures, age profile breakdown, programme breakdown etc for both the LSC and Ofsted.

One essential element of the system is there is only one point of input. During initial assessment, trainers input learner information into tablet PCs that then generate Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and individual learning plans for signature by learners. There is no paper input or retyping of information back at head office. Instead, the trainer enters the information, it is checked and validated by the learner and once synchronised with the main server it generates batch files for upload of ILR data straight to the LSC.



At three quarters of a million pounds, the investment in the new system has been significant but it has paid for itself when compared to the growth achieved within the company. We have a full-time IT team who are constantly working to develop and evolve the setup (version 4 will be going live this year) in response to growing business needs and external changes in areas such as LSC requirements, new frameworks, the coming transition from the LSC to the Skills Funding Agency and changes within QCA. You have got to keep working with it. Our system allows us to be much more responsive to changes in courses because materials can be adapted quickly electronically. That is what makes a system future proof – you can't just put it in place and say "that's done".

There is more software available now for providers, but it is about making sure the solution you go for matches your business processes, not letting someone else come in and being driven by their sales talk. It can be quite difficult taking those first steps with IT and seeing your way through it, but once you get involved there is a huge amount of support from networks and other providers out there.

The next step for us is to extend the system to provide e-learning modules so that we are not only assessing electronically but we are also able to train electronically and ensure the two are integrated and bespoke to individuals. A big issue for operators in manning their gyms is that their peak times are early mornings and evenings, so their staff cannot do whole day courses but have to work their training into slacker times of the day. Years ago computers were a back-office luxury in gyms, but now they are more available. Learners can also log on at home to view their portfolio. At the moment all learning materials are provided as a printed pack or CD ROMs, but we are looking at putting those online too as podcasts and text. Not only does it make everything easier to use and more accessible but there is also a great environmental driver there.

As a result of winning a Next Generation Learning award, we have just started working with two other training providers. We are looking to learn from each other, and we hope to have a project up and running in a few months. The Award, which we consider to be a valuable creation by Becta, has raised our profile and opened up opportunities to work with other organisations. Our system was something we developed in isolation and it was good for the team to feel proud of it. For them it was a great achievement.

Chris Kemp

Deputy Head of Service

Middlesbrough Council Adult Education Service



Chris Kemp



The digital approach keeps learners learning longer

When more than a hundred pensioners logged in for their regular language lessons from apartments in Spain and retirement homes in France, we knew we were doing something right. To be precise, that's 107 people who would not have kept up with their learning in the days before virtual learning environments and whiteboards. TeesLearn was created in 2005 to develop a virtual online learning environment for the people of Tees Valley and County Durham. What we are witnessing is quite phenomenal, as the boundaries between formal and informal learning are fading fast.

We're pioneering new ways for adults to learn using interactive learning tools so that learners can post examples of their work online which tutors can then access anywhere and learning resources created by one teacher or tutor can be used by all. This has to happen in a geographic area like ours with both urban and substantially rural locations, and where local employers in steel and chemical industries depend heavily on shift workers. That's the point of having online access – for those who can't get to centres.

Adult education services in six local authorities – County Durham, Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton on Tees – work in partnership and share the costs which, staff and core costs apart, are marginal. Each local authority contributes £2,100 a year, that's around £13,000 but it stretches a long way through the drive and efficiency of managers and staff. And our teams work to cut costs further using technology for communications and less travelling to meetings. Numerous web-based communication tools are now available for tutors and learners, including email, instant messaging, chat rooms, online forums, online shared documents and video conferencing.

In 2005, we started in Middlesbrough, along with Hartlepool, to experiment with Moodle as our VLE. Since then it has grown steadily with annual growth in recruitment to around 7,000 this year – half of them aged over 50. But what really matters is who stays the course; we have most promising results in recent cross-the-board sampling survey which showed an 11 per cent increase in retention in one year. There are multiple reasons why people fail to stay the course: shifts change, people move, older people disappear on holiday at odd times, keen to take advantage of cheap rates and life issues often just get in the way of learning.

More and more, we are no longer losing these learners. Indeed, holidays now are becoming a learning resource – for example we've had teachers and tutors interviewing bakers and other trades people in France with live video links to current classes here. From a learner's point of view you are speaking to someone in France talking about the latest news about what may have happened.



Of course, to get this sort of response from teaching staff, you really have to let them have their head. The ethos here is deliberately 'always come in and have a go' and we actually encourage staff to run with it, however oddball the ideas. One approach is to spend a lot of time shaping and controlling things around copyright, accessibility, usability etc. before making a move. That's not our way. Granted, there comes a stage where we have to control it; that's when we go into online classes and tease out good practice. This is the work of what we call the 'Weeding Group', which three times a year looks at the VLE to find out what's what. And if they spot something that needs correcting, we send in the 'Moodle police' who make the necessary changes to the content in the system.

Winning a Becta Next Generation Learning award this year was a tremendous boost to morale as well as giving us the extra resources to develop and spread our ideas further. We are sharing our experience more widely. We have helped different consortia in Wales, Reading, Kent and several local authority areas. We also have three European partners in France, Greece and Spain. We have helped each partner develop their own online learning through visits and online support for each country. Communications between partners at home and abroad have been routed through the TeesLearn project, saving thousands of pounds in phone calls, documents, letters and visits.

As I said, the boundaries between informal and formal learning are vanishing. In a single class you will get people on both funding streams. You will have certificate classes with, say, three people there, not for the certificate but for leisure, and the internet is blurring boundaries even further.

Since the start of this project, we've been supported by the JISC Regional Support Centre (RSC) Northern who have given sound practical and technical advice throughout. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) provided the initial project funds and helped with several smaller linked projects, which you can still see traces of in the big project of today.

If asked what the most important gain or improvement resulting from TeesLearn was, I would say it's the engagement of both staff and learners through the good name of this thing. People say we want to access courses that have an online dimension. Other key gains are the sharing of resources, time and staff and what they do. We have gained a lot from working together and are now doing so in much wider ways.

Stephen Orbell

Centre Manager, Every Step Ltd



Stephen Orbell



Prison presents no bars to those who are keen to learn

Equipping prisoners with the skills for work is not just a benefit to the individual but a service to the wider community where ex-offenders can otherwise too often live wasted lives. But convincing them of the personal benefits when they have such low self-esteem and little self-confidence is another matter.

It doesn't help if all we have to offer is the remedial tools of learning – classrooms, textbooks and learning aids – they too often associate these with school failure.

If they do sign up, how long will they remain? Some are on local remand and can be released by the courts, others who have been sentenced are transferred to other prisons. The little they achieve is lost through lack of continuity and, when on the outside, they have other priorities and education is not 'cool'. And the old paper records of what little achievements were made are too easily left behind.

When we first started here it was very difficult. We had very few resources and it was extremely hard working with the security measures within the prison. We didn't have internet access, which made it very difficult to deliver learndirect courses, as they are based online.

However, things are changing thanks to digital technology. In the three and a half years that Every Step Ltd has been delivering learndirect at HMP/YOI Chelmsford in Essex, I have been in a position to help develop the service. Not only that but, also, we as providers are learning lessons from the service applicable to the wider world of employment and skills training.

We had to start by creating a dedicated online centre where there was none and reach out to prisoners who did not want to be there. We had to promote our services and move quickly to create resources matching the preferred learning styles of each prisoner and ensure rapid progress through often very short courses that would give them a qualification if they were moved without warning. It requires more than technology; we had to go one step beyond what the learndirect contract required and create additional support such as pocket-sized learning resources prisoners could take away with them.

This has made a difference. At first people are wary and unwilling to engage in eye contact but within a couple of days they are actively engaged with us and officers see benefits in terms of behaviour. Deeply ingrained attitudes have to be overcome. There's the group of older learners who say, "well I'm out of my cell for a few hours each day", and younger ones who ask: "why should I do this?"

But, through a personalised learning approach we are reaching them. At the start, we operated two mornings a week. This gradually rose to five and now we are delivering a full-time learndirect service. We have worked with 160 learners – rising from 98 the previous year – and delivered 600 courses. We have more than 400 courses to choose from, where before there were just four learning programmes which you could not easily adapt to individual need.

I think the results speak for themselves: 71 have successfully completed Literacy and Numeracy Level 1 and Level 2 tests and 15 have gained ITQ Level 2 qualifications. Our enrolment to success rate is 80 per cent and rising. Having learners study for entry Level and Levels 1 and 2 in literacy and numeracy really increases their job prospects on release. In developing our service, we are working with the prison's ICT Academy to upgrade learners' European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), qualifications to NVQ Level 2 in IT.

Of 130 prisons, learndirect so far operates in 25 and I think it is a service worth expanding. We can offer much support, since we have proved that this work is transferable. We have introduced one-to-one support to help learners with severe learning difficulties, which Every Step is applying to other business support contracts it has in Essex, through Train to Gain. We have also produced a promotional DVD to be featured on the prison TV channel, and we introduced a quarterly newsletter for prisoners and staff, edited by the learners themselves.

We have a mentor programme where current learners who have improved their confidence volunteer to mentor new starters and less confident learners. Also, the learndirect style suits those who have not been able to integrate into mainstream education in prison.

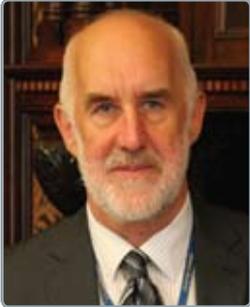
Easy Step has won numerous local awards for training and I have to say that winning the national learndirect Centre of the Year Award is a real gain.

Now a lot of people not only come to learn but they go away and recommend it to someone else and we use learner input to shape it. We are using prisoners to expand the service; for example, I now have a volunteer prisoner who is my right hand man. He has now won lots of awards for what he has done with us and will be leaving next year to take a paid teaching job. Six have gone onto other prisons recently and have carried on, and two have gone out into the community.

The prison has been great, really supporting us in our vision of having a fully functioning learndirect centre within the prison. The big difference is possible because with the computerised system, the whole learning package, progress, achievements the individualised curriculum can be retrieved at the push of a button in any learndirect centre nationwide. Nothing is lost.

Peter Birch

Assistant Principal, Xaverian College



Peter Birch



Personalised learning has a big impact on achievement

A few years ago, our experiments with digital technology enabled us to put our exam results online at midnight on the day of publication. We had students sitting in their pyjamas awaiting results. In fact, we were 'too advanced' and were told off and stopped from publishing until 6am because it was seen as giving us an unfair advantage in university clearing.

However, this was genuine evidence of how personalisation of the learning experience raises motivation. If you shape delivery to the needs of the learners and take time to find out what it is they need most, you will see improvements across the board in motivation, retention and achievement. It was clear to us early on that IT was a powerful tool in the process of personalisation.

There is evidence of impact from a range of initiatives such as the personalised ILP (accessible to students and staff alike), new forums and the single portal through which all information passes. Attendance went up from 91.3 to 93.5 per cent in two years and successes at Level 3 have risen from 96 to 99.6 per cent. On all courses, we have had increased retention and improved performance. The student ILP and staff reporting systems were used to drive an attendance and punctuality initiative, so we have been able to measure the impact.

Also, of all 147 post-16 learning providers in North West England, Xaverian is second for value added and was graded 'Outstanding' in its Ofsted inspection. This is even more significant when you consider levels of deprivation. Of the 33 Manchester city wards, 27 are in the top 10 per cent most deprived nationally, and 70 per cent of our students come from the city. We have 35 per cent from ethnic minority groups and 55 per cent qualify for EMA. The idea that one size fits all was never an option for us, with students from this background and on courses ranging from foundation level (those with grades F&G at GCSE) through A-level and Btec to 91 on a university foundation year.

Last year, we became an Exemplar College in the Technology Exemplar Network, which has helped us spread good practice and make further gains, particularly around learner responsiveness. The role of Becta in helping bring colleges together in this network has been key to promoting success. The underlying partnership philosophy is one we have stuck to since the start of our VLE/MLE project in 2003. We have built on a strong tradition of collaborative working with HE, FE, the local authority, the Manchester Catholic Education Partnership and our Associated High Schools. We also retain strong links with the business world and the NHS.

When it comes to technology we are constantly swapping ideas; there is a remarkable lack of personal ownership as everything is shared. This started six years ago when Simon Channell, Head of IT, went off timetable for development ideas after we saw the possibilities of the VLE. He started with commercial products but soon realised that we could get what we wanted far more effectively by building bespoke systems from our own resources.

Lots of colleges use Moodle and other packages; we don't and we are proud of delivering everything through one system for all pastoral, academic, subject and resources issues. Over the years an increasingly sophisticated system has evolved covering end-of-course quality surveys, careers interviews booked online, development of online ILPs and the integration of the student review and reporting systems.

We started by asking the students "what information or systems would you want to be available to you through a single, personalised portal, available from home and college?" Also "what would you need to make life richer, better and more successful?" Now, each student gets a personal intranet experience, they receive pop-ups of urgent messages, there is digital signing around the college and regular updates on punctuality, attendance, target grades, as well as lots of resources that will help them. One in three hits on the intranet is from students at home as the system really does support the notion of getting the person what they need when they need it.

Until recently, staff were still duplicating effort reviewing student progress then writing reports to parents. But Simon devised a scheme to join the two up. Now, after a student review and progress talk, a box is ticked and that review magically turns into a report for parents, with attendance data, exam results and everything – on nicely-headed notepaper. Staff like the digital technology because it saves time.

The new academic year has brought yet more development. There is a new ILP to contain personal online diaries for students and the facility for staff to add information for students on things such as coursework deadlines. There is also staff training and installation of new technologies including the latest SMART Boards and software to facilitate even greater use of ILT in teaching and learning.

It makes the ILP even more of a 'live' and reactive document, widening access for parents and new applicants, and integrating the VLE into a more effective pastoral management system.

Glen Singleton

Director of Resources, College of West Anglia



Glen Singleton

The College of West Anglia 

Personalisation of learning and staff development go hand in hand

West Anglia has consistently improved its performance over recent years. The college had risen to the challenge in 2002 when its Ofsted report indicated that it needed to give attention to computer technology in teaching and learning. There was big investment in ILT resources and the design and provision of substantial training opportunities for its staff.

When assessed under Investors in People in 2006, the college received a strong accreditation and the observation that its staff development ILT programme was instrumental in bringing about change in the use of ILT. In November 2007, Ofsted's next visit, which judged us as 'outstanding' also commented positively on the use of ILT. Last year we became a developing college in the Technology Exemplar Network and this year we were recognised as an Exemplar Provider and will become the new hub for six colleges.

Two things – personalisation of learning and staff development – have contributed to gains in student progress and it is the technological innovation and recognition of how to add value via technology that has made them sustainable. As we look to the latest college assessment, we are confident it will show further improvement on the College Success Rate for 2006–07, which sustained it in the top 10 percentile of general FE colleges.

To achieve these improvements and ensure all 13,000 full- and part-time students receive a truly personalised learning experience required the provision of a huge range of new digital resources, some of which were developed in-house.

A good example is the range of demands in science and maths. Our science staff saw the need to identify resources to support independent learning programmes. We worked with science staff to produce flash-based resources to support understanding of titrations in chemistry and enzymes in biology. There was substantial pressure in curriculum terms to do things in a practical way. We realised how students could benefit from sessions before and after practical work to run through simulations of things to do in the laboratory. Resources came through the VLE, we introduced text and auto-marked questions so they could test themselves. The whole process is more efficient, saving in time and resources and easy for tutors to monitor.

We also developed work around A and AS-level maths, which requires students to access learning resources prior to going to class, to undertake some assessment auto-marked through the VLE. Tutors then look at the results so that students understand what they do and do not know. It allows staff to take a differentiated approach, to understand where their strengths and weaknesses are.



It's had an impact. Students welcomed the resources and because a lot were on access courses with many living away from home, they could access work over the weekend. It has also provided greater flexibility to revisit and reinforce learning and undertake learning at a pace they are more comfortable with.

One of the first things I did when taking up post, was to put a substantial staff development programme in place. We did it on the back of a strategy I wrote focusing on our core needs and what we wanted staff to be doing and why. We wanted three things: interactivity, engagement and 'any time any place' learning. Continuing staff development is another key to sustainability.



One thing we gained from the Exemplar college in the network we were part of was that they had a staff development unit which functioned in a way that was very proactive and reactive in terms of responding to need. If a member of staff had been observed and actions were required, a development unit stepped in quickly to ensure improvements took place. As a consequence, we've established a similar unit in this college. We're now implementing a significant change in the way we follow up session observations for staff.

We are pleased to have been awarded Exemplar status now because we have moved on rapidly and we are now in a position to support other colleges and providers in crucial areas such as the use of VLEs to enable online networking.

We are confident that it is this work, the combination of staff development and student support through technology that has contributed to improved grades and overall student performance.

If I were asked what the key things to be gained from the changes were, I would suggest three things: improved quality of teaching and learning, staff who are confident in the use of curriculum-based IT resources, and a culture where there is constant promotion of the benefits of independent and personalised learning.

Geoff Rebbeck

ILT development co-ordinator, Thanet College



Geoff Rebbeck



Reflective practice increases staff confidence

The main gain from using e-portfolios with staff has been their increased confidence in using technology. And by giving personalised learning spaces to staff, we are testing the model to be used with students, thus doing the spadework for the e-learning journey for the next couple of years. There are huge implications here for learners and for responsiveness to employers.

We wanted teachers to be less passive, to take charge and to be more active in managing their own professional development, not just once a year at appraisal. Personalised learning spaces will become much more important in education generally, but they present conceptual challenges to the ways we currently use technology and this was an opportunity for teachers to use them for their own learning before using them with students. Another advantage is to explore our employer responsiveness by testing a tool for local bespoke training where a traditional course would not do.

We gave all staff a private portfolio for their own use, somewhere they could collect thoughts in one place and then share with colleagues through critical friendship and co-mentoring. The tutor owns content in their portfolio. The subject of content is the author. They choose what to publish to others. It is impossible to allow anyone 'in' to share, but owners can publish 'out', creating a sense of ownership, with safety from critical examination where it is not sought.

Reflective practice is crucial to the success of using e-portfolios. We have to get used to the idea that when we are asked to account for ourselves we are not just ticking boxes but keeping a narrative. Our learning is characterised by a journey, not ticking arrival boxes. Each learning activity informs the next steps. We are, therefore, using the portfolio to describe a journey rather than a destination. It will also draw in other college activities such as appraisal, lesson observation, training evaluation, and reflection of formal college activities such as study days.

Privacy is really important because it encourages honesty. A resource that we as colleges are really rich in is teaching experience, but we've never had a mechanism where teachers can turn to each other and ask for help with something. This peer support is an extraordinarily rich resource in every college. It improves relationships between teachers because it is a humbling thing when someone trusts you enough to ask for your help or opinion.

The difference it has made is that groups of people who share common professional interests have started to talk to each other, for example, some of the support workers have started a blog, and it is the same with other groups.



The college has had to change. We no longer have paper-based observations and forms. The observation is held centrally, but also sits in the teacher's portfolio so they can reflect on it. We must understand that software drives behaviour: a management site informs managers, but a portfolio informs teachers. Everyone can come out looking the same when you have a management system, but the portfolio is to support professionals in their learning journey. If staff leave the college, they can take the portfolio with them because it is theirs.



In effect, the college has replaced a central system requiring standardised compliance (therefore relatively passive) with 160 personal systems, held together by connective technology. We are using PebblePad as our e-portfolio system because it is the only suitable software and tutors can then export into Reflect for IfL purposes.

What has been developed with staff will also have to apply to students. I do not see any other way in which the personalisation agenda can be met unless you give the same to them – you cannot 'do' personalisation without a personal learning space. There are huge implications here. Portfolios put the owner in charge and, in time, they will be a great way of taking students from being dependent learners just out of school to independent learners ready for university.



Becta's latest survey on trends suggests that students will be hosting technology and that mobile learning will be more important. Students will come with their own technology and wherever they go on their learning journey their portfolio will go with them. This year at Thanet, music students will be putting their assignments on YouTube for their tutors to see. In the future, we will move away from college hosting. This is how personalisation will occur, using social learning tools.

E-portfolios will also be important in meeting employer engagement. We are very close to Manston airport and an employer could come to us and say they have half a dozen employees, from an engineer to a floor sweeper, who need to be able to "get by in Italian in the aircraft industry" in six weeks. There is no off the shelf course for this, but we can supply the teaching and all the evidence can be stored in an e-portfolio that the employee can take away and show to the employer.

The college has raised its profile by winning a LSIS star award. It was an Innovation Award, so people take me a little more seriously now when I come out with ideas! I got it because colleagues have come with me on a journey and trusted me enough to follow me and that is deeply gratifying. Personally, it is nice to be recognised, it is a great honour.

Christine Sherman

ICT Team Leader, Henshaws College



Christine Sherman



Technology helps disabled learners demonstrate their abilities

Young people at Henshaws College are moving on to careers in the media that we would not have thought possible before the introduction of digital technology. The basic learning may not have changed but the technology makes it more accessible and this breeds greater confidence.

We are a national residential college in Harrogate for blind and visually impaired people. Our students have a wide range of visual and physical impairments and benefit from a variety of audio-visual recording equipment. They love getting involved in the innovative and creative use of mobile devices for learning. The accessibility this brings helps them to get more actively involved in all areas of the curriculum.

We started three years ago by buying digital voice recorders and cameras – both static and video. They were cheap and easy to use, so they would not be missed if dropped and damaged and could be adapted for learners with visual impairments. The speed at which they progressed was astonishing and they are now tackling tough assignments and progressing to media studies and other challenging courses in mainstream colleges.

A big breakthrough for them came when we formed a partnership with the Leeds Media Centre to open a media career pathway for the students. Our students use technology here and at the Leeds centre to record songs, record narration for audio magazines and to make films. And we are seeing notable achievements. An audio magazine they are creating will be available to other students and will appear in their achievement records when they leave college.

One student used a digital voice recorder to help him prepare for a programme on hospital radio, evaluating shows, listening back, assessing his achievement and getting feedback. The fact is that we have used new technology so much in the college that now everyone expects it. It is often in the simple things that you see the biggest gains, for example in a Skills for Life session where you want them to practice speaking and listening. Before this work started, if you asked them questions they might not even answer. Now if you give them a digital recorder they answer straight away with enthusiasm. They seem to get excited by it.

We want to see our learners progress to careers but for some of those with greatest disabilities, the challenge is basic living. Many with good vocational education and training experience will go on to voluntary work, supported employment and acquire the capacity and skills to live independently. The ability to be able to live with other people, find a club or society, get a taxi – that's a real achievement.



So the technology is used in every curriculum area: cameras for making films, CD players; we put our recipes on CDs to make a meal. It might be used for planned shop-cook activities – making a shopping list, taking it out, buying the food and using the ingredients and cooking. It's fundamental to everything now because it helps them understand that they 'can do' something with technology rather than telling them what they 'can't do'.

The staff can also see the benefits. We have ILT reps in all curriculum areas. We have given them training in what they want and need to learn, and they take back the skills to their curriculum area and cascade these. It's a bit like Jamie Oliver's programme where he taught people to cook and they had to pass on the skills and knowledge to friends and neighbours.



A lot of the subjects we teach are around life skills and there is no reason why this is not applicable to mainstream schools, FE and HE. The students are very inventive in tackling tough assignments. Take health and safety work – they made a potentially very boring topic interesting and memorable by creating a rap song out of the warning signs, colours, dos and don'ts when exposed to the work environment.



Outcomes from all this have varied. We have seen a general increase in motivation, with a big increase in requests to take the devices for personal use in the evenings and at the weekends. They are becoming more skilled at creating their own evidence and downloading it for tutors in the learning centre. And there is no doubt that digital technology is bringing new knowledge and enhancing the more traditional learning. Most of all, it allows learners to progress at their own speed in their chosen vocational pathway.

Winning a Next Generation Learning award meant a lot to us, and I must say the Becta initiative has played a valuable and significant part in helping us bring about change. First and foremost it's had an impact on the staff. We are now out there and people are seeing what we do. As an independent college, you can live in a bubble and have nothing to benchmark yourselves against. This helps get them to use IT more – they benefit and students benefit. It has also had a really positive impact on senior managers who are taking even more interest and want us to go out and promote what we do.

Conversation points

Efficiencies

- If your organisation grows, how easy would it be for your IT system to grow with it?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of 'input once, use many times'?
- Who in your organisation makes decisions about software and on what basis?
- Is bespoke software an unjustified luxury?
- What impact does your IT system have on the environment? How do you know?
- How future-proof is your IT system and what can you do to make it more sustainable?

Learner outcomes

- What should your system be tracking in order to have an impact on attainment and retention?
- Apart from retention and attainment, what else do you need to track?
- Who should have access to the tracked information?
- What should learners be entering into the system?
- What impact does your IT system have on parents, and are any groups of parents being excluded?

Personalised learning

- What impact do you expect greater personalisation of learning to have on your organisation? How can technology help you with this?
- Everyone hates automated call centres but technology motivates learners. Why?
- What should learners be entering into the system?
- Who owns a personalised learning space?
- Should personalised learning spaces be private?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of social media in college?
- What needs policing in your system and how do you do it?

Skills for the workplace

- Can technology help you to work more effectively with employers?
- Can some parts of training and assessment be done more efficiently online? Are there any disadvantages to this?
- What access should employers have to your tracked information about learners?
- Will technology mean the end of conferences and face-to-face training? What impact would that have on your organisation?
- What impact can technology have on collaborative working?

Staff development

- What impact does your technology have on teacher autonomy?
- Which staff do you consult about your IT Strategy and how do you consult them?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of e-portfolios for staff development?
- Who owns a personalised learning space?
- Who in your organisation makes decisions about software and on what bases?

Benefits to communities

- What impact can technology have on collaborative working?
- How can technology support communities of learners?

Preparing learners for employment

- Can some parts of training and assessment be done more efficiently online? Are there any disadvantages to this?
- Is current equality legislation and guidance to providers sufficient to ensure high quality training for employment for the disabled?

Biographies

Roger Clegg

Head of Learning Resources, Oldham College

Roger's current role within the College entails responsibility for e-learning developments and the Learning Resource Centres. Having worked at the College for a number of years he has tried to exploit the use of ILT and e-learning to maximise the achievements of learners.

Recently he has been involved in various national projects including the Technology Exemplar Network, two successful MoLeNet projects, a Becta proof of concept scheme to provide adult learners with laptops and internet connectivity whilst assisting academic colleagues with their use of e-learning in the curriculum.

Michelle Freeman

Director of Corporate Services , Coleg Menai

Michelle Freeman trained as a scientist gaining a PhD in computational physics from the University of Wales, Bangor in 1992. She later worked in research on environmental computer models before moving to Coleg Menai in 1993. In her career at the college she has held leadership roles in MIS, exams, Information security, IT support and systems and web development. She is currently the Director of Corporate Services at the college with responsibilities for planning, financial procedures and control, estates strategy, IS Strategy and corporate systems.

Heather Frankham

CEO, Lifetime

Heather founded leading training provider, Lifetime, in 1995. Following the successful delivery of the first apprenticeship in the leisure sector, the business continued to grow and adapt to meet the needs of the health and fitness industry.

An Additional Inspector for Ofsted, she is also a Patron of Skills Active (Sector Skills Council for Active Leisure and Learning), a member of the Fitness Industry Association (FIA) Vanguard Council and the Association of Learning Providers (ALP).

Before setting up Lifetime, she taught in primary and secondary schools and headed up the development of the fitness brand within the Whitbread Hotel Company Leisure Division.

Chris Kemp

Deputy Head of Service, Middlesbrough Council Adult Education Service

Chris has served in the army, including teaching Communications in a military training unit. In his ten years at Middlesbrough, he has project managed several e-learning projects, both locally and regionally.

He is currently chair of the North East Moodle Group and has an active research interest in Moodle Virtual Learning development. Currently he is researching the use of mobile devices and video resources broadcasting within a VLE.

His awards include JISC RSC Northern e-learning team of the year, JISC RSC Northern e-learning Leadership award and the Becta Next Generation Learning Award. Under his leadership the Middlesbrough team achieved Technology Exemplar Status in September 2009.

Stephen Orbell

Centre Manager at Every Step Ltd's learndirect Centre at HMP/YOI Chelmsford.

Having spent 15 years working in the financial services sector, Stephen retrained as a Skills for Life Tutor in 1999. Specialising in working with offenders he went on to manage a successful volunteer project for a Suffolk based charity. He was also Basic Skills Coordinator at Anglia Care Trust, mentoring and training unemployed 16 to 25-year-olds. He joined Every Step Ltd in 2006.

Peter Birch

Assistant Principal, Xaverian College

As Assistant Principal Peter is a Champion of the Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance (GMSA) – a lifelong learning network of 22 FE colleges and six universities – and a co-ordinator of the Manchester Catholic Education Partnership of schools and colleges (MANCEP). He is involved with Aim Higher at several levels, college representative on all three Manchester 14–19 Collegiates and an NQT Induction co-ordinator. Peter is also lead for the Manchester Post-16 Webfolio working group and member of ILP working party. He has attended and helped organise Becta events over the last two years, both national and 'hub'-based.

Biographies (continued)

Glen Singleton

Director of Resources, College of West Anglia

Glen has been the Director of IT and e-Learning at the College of West Anglia since 2003. The College was graded as outstanding by Ofsted in February 2008 and more recently achieved the status of 'Beacon College'. The college 'has embarked over the past few years on an ambitious programme of change and development incorporating strategic leaders in ILT, new technology and skills development' (Investors in People).

Geoff Rebbeck

ILT Development Co-ordinator, Thanet College

Geoff has been in Further Education for 12 years, starting out as a lecturer in Health and Social Care. He is a Fellow of the Institute for Learning, having worked with them on the introduction of an e-portfolio. He has also worked with the LSN, is a member of the JISC e-portfolio, and the teaching and learning expert groups. He is currently seconded to Becta part-time looking at workforce development. He is also working as an adviser to the South East JISC RSC and is the current National STAR Award winner in the Innovation category.

Christine Sherman

ICT Team Leader, Henshaws College

Christine became Skills for Life Curriculum Manager with responsibility for ICT, Skills for Life, Performance, Communication and PHSCE, three years as ICT Course Team Leader at Henshaws, where she developed and implemented a modular curriculum – including modules on accessibility – and developed the Media Vocational Pathway. As ILT Champion she encourages staff and students to develop their ICT skills and to promote opportunities to enhance teaching and learning through technology, which led to the college being awarded the Becta Next Generation Learning award 2009 in the specialist colleges sector for the innovative and creative use of a wide variety of technology.

© Copyright Becta 2009

You may reproduce this material, free of charge, in any format or medium without specific permission, provided you are not reproducing it for financial or material gain. You must reproduce the material accurately and not use it in a misleading context. If you are republishing the material or issuing it to others, you must acknowledge its source, copyright status and date of publication. While great care has been taken to ensure that the information in this publication is accurate at the time of publication, we accept no responsibility for any errors or omissions. Where a specific product is referred to in this publication, no recommendation or endorsement of that product by Becta is intended, nor should it be inferred.

Additional photography reproduced by kind permission of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Millburn Hill Road
Science Park
Coventry CV4 7JJ

Tel: 0800 877 8777

Fax: 024 7641 1418

Email: customerservices@becta.org.uk

www.becta.org.uk