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Enhancing the digital experience of students

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Digital student exemplars

Enhancing the digital experience of students

This case study is relevant to the digital student challenge:

Take a strategic approach to developing the student digital experience

Developing digital learning at Prospects College for Advanced Technology

Vocational education for the future

Prospects College for Advanced Technology (PROCAT) is the first UK college of advanced technology, with technical apprenticeships at the core of their offer. They specialise in training for key sectors such as engineering, aviation, rail, construction and the built environment, and focus on training that delivers highly skilled and competent people for industry.

The college has taken the strategic decision to appoint a digital learning fellow to lead the development and implementation of a digital learning strategy that focuses on vocational training and work-based learning. The strategy is designed to improve the way that vocational education and training is delivered and fulfil the vision of vocational education for the future and to improve the outcomes for students, providers and employers.

The role of digital learning fellow is commissioned and funded by the **Education and Training Foundation**. The lessons learned, methodologies, initiatives and techniques used will be analysed and reported upon for the use of other further education (FE) and skills sector providers.

A research-based approach

Research for the FELTAG inquiry, McLoughlin report and **157 group report: further education 2020**, has highlighted that whilst the FE sector has invested heavily in computing and has taught its use at elementary level, digital technology is not being widely used to change the nature of learning or radically enhance its accessibility.

A particular area that is being explored is the potential for student owned mobile technologies to enable much wider use and encouragement of independent learning, enabling learners to acquire knowledge at their own pace. Another is more widespread use of digital technology to enhance work-based learning, including employers having real-time access to their apprentices' progress, so that on-the-job and off-the-job curricula can be better coordinated.

"PROCAT is leading the development and use of digital learning technology to empower learners and their employers and to support new ways of delivering education and skills. We need to maximise the use of digital technologies, incorporating these into the curriculum to enrich and enliven learning and to encourage independent learning and research. We will enable employers to have real-time access to their apprentices' progress so that they can support them while on-the-job. The development of digital technology is intrinsically linked to the strategic goals of the college."

Katharine Jewitt, digital learning fellow, PROCAT

Enhancing the digital experience

The college has embarked on an ambitious programme of activity designed to enhance the digital experiences of students, led by Katharine Jewitt, the newly appointed digital learning fellow at PROCAT. Initial work was informed by participation in the Developing Leaders for a Digital Age course, run by the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development and commissioned by the Education and Training Foundation. Examples of activities at PROCAT include:

Deliver a relevant digital curriculum

Supported by Katharine, teaching staff are working through each course taught at the college to update course materials, using interactive formats to make them "lively, interactive, interesting and online". Examples of the formats being used include audio, video, animation, live streaming and sessions from workplaces.

Through the **Generation Z** initiative staff are supported and encouraged to develop interactive and engaging approaches to learning; using technology to personalise learning and to encourage students to collaborate and create their own resources.

Students are actively involved in producing materials as part of their learning and assessment. Resources created can also be added to the VLE for students to recap on their learning, use as revision tools and be available for future students.

Deliver an inclusive digital student experience

PROCAT acknowledge that providing an inclusive digital experience for all students is a key challenge and include assistive technology and a range of digital tools within their service provision.

Their digital learning strategy incorporates new ways for students to learn and present their work. For example, bricklaying students recently created storyboards and animations to demonstrate how to repair a cavity wall.

The format of learning and assessment resources has widened to provide flexible learning opportunities for all, incorporating audio, video, images, text to speech and the use of games. The college has a trolley of laptops available for students and staff to book for use in class. Learning resource centres are available at all campuses for students to have access to computing facilities for self-study.

Deliver a robust, flexible digital environment

PROCAT have held a series of workshops designed to find out more about the experiences and expectations of their students. Based on the Jisc digital student workshop approach, students completed a digital student questionnaire profile and then worked in groups to sort the digital student experience cards into priority. Focus groups were then held to discuss students' views with questions to prompt discussion. The workshops revealed that PROCAT were not fully meeting student expectations. The findings from the workshops and the improvements required are being fed into a digital learning strategy.

All new students will have an electronic portfolio from the new academic year.

A virtual learning environment (VLE) is being rolled out to enable the college to provide all courses with an element of digital learning and some will be 100% online.

The VLE is being utilised for employer engagement and work based learning.

Engage in dialogue with learners about their digital experience and empower them to develop their digital environment

Feedback from the digital student workshops revealed that in addition to polls using tools like **Padlet** or **Socrative**, learners wanted face-to-face group meetings. In response, a minimum of three feedback sessions a year will be embedded in scheduled lessons. Questions are also being posed to students through short animations played at the start of lessons to promote group discussions on particular subject areas that the college would like to receive feedback on. These are followed by online polls.

PROCAT is recruiting a team of student **digital learning ambassadors**. The digital ambassadors will support staff and learners to develop new skills, gain confidence and trial new approaches to teaching and learning as well as providing support and advice in the use of digital tools in the classroom. Those selected will receive scholarship funding of £1,200.

Develop coherent 'bring your own' policies

PROCAT plan to introduce the ability to 'bring your own' (BYO) devices in September 2015 based on the **Jisc BYOD policy**. The college are installing Meraki wireless access points and setting up a BYOD network. Students will be able to bring their own device and use the college network to access the VLE as well as other learning resources and documents stored in the cloud. Students who do not have their own device will be able to book the use of a laptop or use machines within the learning resource zones based at each campus.

The BYOD policy is summarised in poster format around the college. Students wishing to use their own devices must first download software, so that college policies on internet safety and anti-virus can be followed. Download speeds will be controlled, to protect network performance.

The work is being informed by a working group comprising representatives from IT, senior management and teaching staff and with input from students through the digital student focus groups.

Support students and staff to work successfully with digital technologies

- » The digital learning fellow attends the last 10 minutes of staff meetings held each week by functional heads. The time is used to deliver bite-sized training sessions called **toolbox talks**. These sessions focus on effective use of technology to support teaching and learning practice by demonstrating online tools, giving advice, tips and tricks and mini training sessions on a variety of topics (eg flipped learning, three ways to take action for FELTAG and using digital technologies to support mathematics and English).
- » Support for specific activities within scheduled teaching time is also available. For example, students and staff are being taught how to create animations and then use the skills to complete an assignment.
- » IT clubs for students help them to discover new tools to support their learning.
- » Support sessions held in the learning resource centre during free study time provide a further support option for students wishing to develop their skills.
- » PROCAT are also developing their own digital literacy framework for implementation from September 2015. All staff will have access to CPD training through the VLE to improve their digital skills and progress to becoming recognised as a digital practitioner. The intention is that all staff will gain digital practitioner status by 2016 with 50% of staff achieving senior practitioner status and 10% becoming lead practitioners by March 2016.
- » The development of digital literacy skills for students is being incorporated into activities as courses are being redesigned for the VLE, for example, students are encouraged to learn how to work with audio, animation, video, create posters and use online quizzes and games.
- » LinkedIn is being used to help students develop their digital literacy skills and establish an online identity. Throughout their time with PROCAT, students will be encouraged to ask employers they are working with for endorsements for the work that they do. Students will follow companies within their trade and follow industry news and blogs and begin to develop and build their social network with colleagues and peers and within wider industry. LinkedIn will also be used to build relationships with employers as well as to share and collaborate on projects via the use of the VLE. Staff and students are able to access a wealth of digital learning resources, training materials and to share effective practice and ideas through an online hub which includes a blog to keep users up-to-date with digital initiatives at PROCAT as well as what else is happening on the wider digital learning landscape.
- » A series of visually appealing infographics to help to communicate key messages and engage students and staff:
 - › **Learner engagement roadmap**
 - › **Developing your college digital environment**
 - › **Build capacity to support new kinds of learning**
 - › **Understanding the digital landscape for FE**
 - › **Responding positively to change factors**

How does this meet the challenge?

The appointment of a senior member of staff specifically to lead the development of digital learning at PROCAT makes it possible to analyse and develop a comprehensive and coherent model, to align this with strategic priorities and to influence the wider environmental and cultural elements that are important in enhancing the student digital experience. At PROCAT, the challenges are being met by:

- » Curriculum teams exploring a range of ways in which technology can enhance learning and different modes of learning
- » Embedding digital activities in curriculum review and design processes
- » Empowering students to lead digital developments and act as co-producers
- » Engaging in meaningful dialogue with students about their experiences, needs and expectations and responding promptly to these
- » Developing and resourcing formal roles for students to participate in developing the digital environment
- » Supporting staff and students to develop their digital skills and capabilities
- » Engaging in further research and with the wider community to continue to develop the student digital experience
- » Engaging employers in digital skills development
- » Using social networking to improve collaborative learning and assessment in the workplace
- » Evaluating the quality and effectiveness of digital technologies in FE

Find out more:

[PROCAT digital fellowship website](#)

[Developing Leaders for a Digital Age website](#)

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