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

Making it happen: embedding digital technologies in curriculum activities

"The key thing is that you need to show how you are addressing use of technology from every angle, be committed to it and be enthusiastic."

Dr Michael Malone, Director of Curriculum and Information Services, South Eastern Regional College (SERC)

A holistic strategy

South Eastern Regional College (SERC) takes a coherent and strategic approach to managing and developing digital technologies. The ILT strategy group is chaired by the director of curriculum and information services and includes representation from academic and corporate teams. This means that when an area is identified as having a problem or concern, it can be aired in a forum where all the key players are present and addressed in a timely manner. This facilitates a single college view focused on delivering the best solutions for students.

The ILT strategy group leads and monitors the strategic plan, focusing on priority areas and initiatives designed to achieve them. The scope is broad and includes every aspect of technology across the institution.

Deliver a relevant curriculum

SERC Moodle

All courses in SERC have an online presence on Moodle regardless of the level of the course. Tools and procedures have been developed to make it easy for staff to use the virtual learning environment (VLE). Customised Moodle templates for FE, HE and training for success (TfS) have been developed in consultation with staff and students, enabling them to feed forward on their preferred online learning experiences and advise on the information they would like available. Use of these templates has allowed rapid development of a rich learning environment. To ensure that the learner's interface with the VLE is not a passive experience SERC have focused on creating interactive learning opportunities enhanced by the growth of e-assessment, real time co-authoring opportunities and strategies such as game based learning.

In 2013-14 SERC Moodle was accessed over four million times, 25 % of which were from outside of the college. Student surveys have highlighted the value students place on having access to high quality resources to support learning outside of the classroom, thus developing their self-paced and independent learning skills.

Use of apps

Staff are using low-cost technology very effectively with students in real-life scenarios:

As part of a final year sports coaching module in the foundation degree sport, exercise and fitness, students use coaching analysis apps like **Hudl Technique** to help provide an in depth skill analysis of the performance of elite athletes for things like joint angulation and skill movement. The information is then used to produce an intervention training programme for the athlete to follow, identifying the different elements of skill that need improvement and to develop a plan as part of the coaching process. The development of the athlete is monitored and tracked via the app over the following weeks and is used to create an analytical video which is presented in class and assessed as part of their final assignment.

Level 2 and 3 programmes use **MyFitnessPal** with the sport students to develop their data collection and analysis skills and open source software such as **Kinovea** is being used with higher education sports students to slow down, study and comment on the technique of athletes eg completing Olympic lifts. This has helped improve the quality of their analytical skills.

Students enjoy using these apps and the freedom to use the technology outside of the classroom. The college has been exploring opportunities to use these and other technologies to support assessment, collaborative learning opportunities (online and peer-review) and to co-authoring content.

Deliver an inclusive digital student experience and engage in dialogue with students about their digital experience

Inclusive systems design

One of the key strengths of the college is the design and integration of systems with students and staff (eg the layout of Moodle through templates). The college is aware that one size doesn't fit all and so these systems are tailored to different levels and the needs of different user groups. Part of the design process involves student and staff focus groups where users are consulted on how systems will appear to ensure the final product design is user-friendly.

The systems must work across all campuses, be robust and multi-platform. Students need to be able to access any resource from anywhere via their phones and mobile devices.

An online enrolment system designed by the college and accessible from a range of devices was introduced in 2014. Students were asked whether it was aesthetically pleasing and easy to use, whether the jargon was acceptable etc. The online enrolment system was to be used by a very diverse student population in terms of both the level and area of study. Some staff were concerned that students may not be able to use it and so extra staff were provided on the college open day. In the event, very few people required support. It is important to bench-test new initiatives:

"Enrolment is the first experience a student has with the college and it should be a good and positive experience that sets the ethos and expectations."
Dr Michael Malone, director of curriculum and information services, South Eastern Regional College (SERC)

The system has also enabled students to research, apply and enrol on the courses of their choice. This has resulted in a range of benefits, not least the increased student awareness of the range of courses on offer. It has also empowered student choice. The implementation of a distributed approach to enrolment on results days greatly reduced waiting times and has improved customer satisfaction ratings as evidenced in our first impressions survey.

This system has since been implemented in other colleges across Northern Ireland.

Support students and staff to work successfully with digital technologies

'Get the Edge'

The get the edge programme is designed to develop employability skills and to give students as many opportunities as possible to gain from better skills and real life experiences. It is introduced during induction and nurtures innovation by challenging students to participate in enterprise and entrepreneurship events through a formalised programme.

The programme is designed to increase the enterprise skills of students and generate employment opportunities from its work with industry, creating entrepreneurs through student companies. Best practice examples of students working on real business problems and through student companies are then disseminated on the **SPICE web portal** (specialist provision for industry using college experience).

During induction week students complete an employability module, which enables them to develop their digital literacy skills from the outset of their course as they work collaboratively, completing weblogs and evidencing their problem solving skills. Over 9,000 SERC students (FE, HE and apprenticeship) successfully completed the City and Guilds qualification in employability skills in 2014-5. Materials to support get the edge are available online and use blended learning approaches.

Students across a range of vocational areas are provided with a platform to present research findings to senior curriculum managers and peers in a professional setting at the conference for the advancement of science and technology (CAST) and the conference for the advancement of professional studies (CAPS). Student presentations are videoed for broadcast on the college website with reports published on the SPICE web portal.

Workforce development

"Having a professional and capable team is vital, whose teaching exemplifies the good practice we promote."
Paula Philpott, ILT pedagogy manager, South Eastern Regional College (SERC)

At SERC there are a range of formal and informal learning opportunities for all staff as part of the Learning Academy. These include:

» Flipped induction (where the training is provided online prior to meeting staff face to face)

» Online learning modules through the learning engine portal for staff who would like to refresh their teaching practice and new teachers, looking at a range of pedagogical strategies

» ILT pedagogy mentoring programme (see below)

» Moodle Monday (online webinars, every Monday, focussed on developing blended learning skills of teaching staff) and webinar Wednesdays ('live' recorded webinars, each Wednesday, where staff share good practice and social learning via Yammer to provide 'just in time' training) – these are popular with staff, are located on easy-to-locate channels on the VLE

The importance of this approach should not be underestimated, as it has helped develop the digital capabilities of staff, impacting positively on the digital learning experience of students. Requests for support and training have been facilitated in Ireland, Japan and Singapore.

ILT pedagogy mentoring programme

SERC has taken a deliberate and strategic approach to provide CPD from induction and to continue to support it throughout the career of the 600 teaching staff working at the college. The aim is to signify that blended learning is an approach the college wants staff to adopt and continue to develop.

The ILT pedagogy mentoring programme, introduced in 2008, focuses on how pedagogy should drive the use of technology and judging the impact on learners, by supporting staff to develop their own pedagogical and digital literacy skills. The programme provides bespoke support, tailored to the needs of each individual mentee (tutor or teacher). It identifies the digital literacy skills of a mentee and provides training on a range of technologies and learning and teaching strategies, specific to the needs of both the mentee and the learners they teach.

Each mentee receives six hours of training, usually delivered over three two-hour blocks. Mentee and mentor then discuss examples of good practice in teaching and learning and identify a taught session, during which the mentee wants to introduce the technology and associated teaching and learning strategies. The mentor will then teach their class while the mentee observes. The students are invited to give feedback. Further training is offered as a result of feedback and post-observation reflection. Following the second session of training, the mentor and mentee team teach and after the final training session, the last classroom session is peer observed.

Mentors are seconded for a set proportion of their timetable. They have a range of targets in terms of the number of mentees they are supporting. In the five years that the scheme has been running there have been over 1,500 classroom observations and 480 mentoring relationships – a significant number for a college of this size.

SERC feels that there have been so many gains from the ILT pedagogy mentoring programme and in addition to positive feedback from tutors, reference to the quality of teaching and learning has also been noted in reports from the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education (QAA) and Northern Ireland Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and the scheme has won and been shortlisted for a number of awards.

The ongoing commitment to staff CPD by the college through programmes such as the ILT pedagogy mentoring programme is seen as very important and a key contributor to embedding use of digital technologies in curriculum activities and creating learning agility. It is a whole college approach that is significant in terms of size and scope.

How do teachers use ILT in the classroom?

The college has been conducting a review and critique of learning materials used in the classroom to find out:

» Is the learning material going to engage students?

» Is it interesting and attractive in terms of presentation?

» Does it create collaborative learning opportunities?

» How does it help learners to learn?

» Does it inform students about their progress?

To fast-track better quality materials, curriculum managers have audited VLE content and e-authors have worked with tutors lecturers to transform and adapt existing content, ensuring it is optimised for VLE use.

Staff and college software developers are also producing apps to support learning.

The college holds 'know and show' events which provide an opportunity for schools to show off their best practice and to share this knowledge more widely across the college so that good ideas from one school can be applied to others.

The college has also worked specifically with curriculum managers to try increase the use of technology enhanced learning, supporting these managers to lead by example.

How does this meet the challenges?

» Professional and contextual use of technology is embedded in curriculum delivery and in employability-focused activities

» Introducing use of technology at induction sets the scene for how technology is used to support learning and future employment throughout the whole learning experience

» Consideration has been given to ensuring that students can easily access the college network, systems and resources via their own devices as well as those provided by the college

» Technology is enabling students to make more informed choices in terms of the courses and modules they elect to study

» Students are given opportunities to develop digital literacies and to build a professional digital footprint as well as to build links beyond their course

» Use of technology is facilitating student self-assessment, reflective practice and independent learning

» A range of staff-focused initiatives encourage and support staff to explore effective use of technology to enhance the learner experience and to participate in curriculum development initiatives

» A whole-institution approach is increasing the organisational efficiency and capacity of the college

Contact:

Paula Philpott, ILT pedagogy manager: **PPhilpott@serc.ac.uk**

Dr Michael Malone, director of curriculum and information services: **MMalone@serc.ac.uk**