Barnsley College

Rethinking assessment of work-based learning (May 2016)

Summary

Barnsley College's level 3 and 4 diplomas in digital learning design are delivered in one year, enabling apprentices to be employed alongside their studies in the college's innovative learning design company, **Elephant Learning Designs**. The limited time this allows for delivery and assessment has prompted course leaders to rethink their approach to course structure, assessment and feedback design, and the role of technology in evidence collection.

Organisation

Barnsley College is a large general further education college serving Barnsley and the surrounding area in South Yorkshire. The college offers apprenticeships across a wide range of sectors and industries, including digital learning design at levels 3 and 4. At its last inspection, the college was rated outstanding by Ofsted.

Barnsley College's learning technologies unit was a finalist in the 2016 Outstanding Use of Technology for Improving Teaching and Learning category at the TES FE Awards for its work with learners in the college's own learning design company, Elephant Learning Designs. Elephant Learning Designs supports the college's strategic priority for online learning in line with the FELTAG initiative by producing engaging digital content for learning and teaching.

Challenge

Having set up its own learning design company, the college is in a position to offer apprenticeships in a year for those wishing to take this career pathway. This innovative approach means that apprentices would have to complete their training and their studies within one year, leaving little time for staff to deliver and assess learning. Apprentices employed full-time in the company would find it equally challenging to complete additional assignments after a day's work. The solution lay in enabling learners to use naturally occurring evidence from the workplace in a time-efficient way to meet the learning objectives of the diploma courses.

Both level 3 and 4 courses run over 12 months (a year and a day for apprenticeships). The level 3 diploma has 13 units but the 18 units of the level 4 extended diploma are particularly challenging to complete in 12 months. A

robust, holistic assessment plan built around apprentices' in-work role was the only way to make delivery within a year achievable.

Making it happen

The course, which has been running for two years, was designed in house as a project-based model of learning, enabling apprentices to provide evidence from a wide range of sources including their employed work and their own creative work. To avoid inducting apprentices into college-owned systems, Google Sites was selected as a web-based e-portfolio for capturing evidence of achievement combined with a business networking tool, Yammer, for dialogue and networking. Microsoft OneDrive, as a business-oriented collaborative platform, is used for formative feedback.

The course leader opted for a bespoke approach to learning technologies to meet the specific needs of the compressed level 4 diploma course, and to better enable evidence to be gathered from the workplace at both levels. In this case, a college-owned e-portfolio system was eschewed in favour of technologies used in industry and in day-to-day life. Barnsley College enables departments to use any tools they see fit that benefit learners and their teaching practice, with the proviso that if this comes at a cost, its use needs to be agreed by management.

Apprentices upload hyperlinks to their Google Site of items of evidence wherever these are located. Having access via Google Sites throughout their working day to the criteria against which their work is to be assessed, they can make their own decisions, in line with the guidance provided, about what to submit as evidence. This approach avoids having to reassemble items of evidence into a college-based e-portfolio system and is seen at Barnsley College as making working towards a qualification more achievable for full-time, work-based learners:

> *"Work-based learning should be about naturally occurring evidence so qualification units should be assessed holistically to reflect the diversity and complexity of the job."*
>
> Daniel Scott, course leader, lead internal verifier and assessor

Having ownership of the evidence and of the process prompts apprentices to focus more closely on the criteria so that they come to understand better how they are assessed. An additional advantage is that learning criteria, course information and evidence of achievement on Google Sites can be easily retrieved by learners, assessors and internal verifiers anywhere, anytime via a range of devices.

The awarding body's documentation uploaded to Microsoft OneDrive provides a platform for interactive, formative feedback. The assessor adds comments and related web links to help the learner before signing the feedback form and sending to the learner. The learner then reviews the feedback and completes actions

according to the feedback received before countersigning the form. If learners need to ask questions, they can add comments on the feedback form using track changes and a version history is enabled.

Yammer widens apprentices' networking potential from college peers and tutors to alumni and potential employers. Using a networking tool widely adopted by business raises the apprentices' professional awareness and enables them to share and develop design ideas with others working in the industry. It is also used on a routine basis for sharing work and project updates, communicating over group work and networking with peers:

> *"I get learners to keep sharing their learning, for example new online tools and websites, techniques in designing and working in software, work-arounds to software."*
>
> Daniel Scott, course leader, lead internal verifier and assessor

Outcomes

All assessment and feedback processes for the digital learning design diplomas are now paperless, except for one-to-one reviews which are still required by the awarding organisation to be paper-based. Apprentices have quickly acquired familiarity with the chosen digital technologies and appreciate the simplicity and flexibility in the way evidence is compiled. The external verifier notes the approach to technology is improving the transparency of assessment processes and increasing learners' ownership and responsibility for their learning:

> *"Barnsley College makes excellent use of Google Sites for the learners to take ownership in the development of their own e-portfolios. This is combined with very effective use of Microsoft OneDrive for feedback from the assessors and Yammer for community communication. I particularly like the way in which the use of Microsoft OneDrive and Google Sites supports a transparent IQA process."*
>
> External verifier, Ascentis

Impact

Learners are prepared effectively for the world of work, acquiring familiarity with software and communication technologies and ways of working used in the industry. They undertake real-world projects with clients, including

developing a wide range of online learning content for Barnsley College staff who do not have the time or skills to create their own.

The bespoke approach to assessment and feedback benefits the teachers delivering and assessing such compressed courses. With little time available for inducting apprentices into a college-owned e-portfolio system, evidence gathering and verification can occur with minimal additional effort. Verifiers, staff and learners can access all that they require from any location without logging on to college systems: this includes criteria and evidence on Google Sites, feedback forms on OneDrive and communication and networking opportunities on Yammer. Learners appreciate the feeling of being "at work" and managing their own e-portfolio evidence:

"Taking part in the level 4 extended diploma in digital learning design has… given me important experience in project management, as well as helping me to learn more skills and advance previously learned skills in digital learning design."

Level 4 extended diploma in digital learning design apprentice, Barnsley College

Benefits of the technology

» Independence over what is submitted and how

» Simple, time-efficient evidence-gathering techniques

» Anytime, anywhere access to course information and feedback

» Transparent tracking of achievement against criteria

» Interactivity and collaboration with a wider community for workplace learners

Tips for effective practice

» Work-based learners benefit from time-efficient approaches to assessment; they appreciate processes and systems that are as far as possible instant, simple, flexible and accessible anywhere, any time

» Paperwork and duplicated effort, for example, locating evidence on different platforms, should be kept to the minimum for full-time apprentices and work-based learners

» Industry-standard software and tools can provide important networking and practical preparation for those preparing for employment

» Learners with advanced IT skills may not have equivalent digital literacy skills and it is important to provide guidance for use of platforms for evidence gathering that are not college owned and managed

Find out more

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Additional information: http://danielscott86.blogspot.com/2016/01/improving-work-based-learning.html