

# Basingstoke College of Technology

## Closing the feedback loop with social media (May 2016)

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### Summary

Social media tools are bringing a new dimension to dialogue and feedback for learners on a level 3 BTEC extended diploma in creative media production at Basingstoke College of Technology. Not only do blogging, networking and video-sharing tools engage their attention, learners find sharing their work on a public platform helps them achieve a higher standard of work through the continuous engagement with feedback from peers and industry professionals made possible by social media.

### Organisation

Basingstoke College of Technology is a general further education college in Hampshire. Senior managers place emphasis on employability skills and links with industry in teaching and learning and encourage learner involvement in shaping the future of the college through an active student union and learner parliament. The college was rated good by Ofsted in 2016.

### Challenge

Many further education and training providers find challenges in improving achievement and completion on vocational courses. In addition, providers need to ensure that learners' chances of sustained employment in their chosen career are enhanced by the courses they follow.

The college has had very positive outcomes in recent years in terms of learner destinations (96% of learners progressed on to another course or into employment in 2014-2015), but raising standards in teaching, learning and assessment remains a strategic priority for the college.

### Making it happen

At the start of the course, BTEC media learners are given accounts for social media tools so that they begin immediately to set targets for themselves, discuss, share and critically evaluate their own and others' work using platforms such as Twitter, Tumblr or WordPress blogging tools or a closed group on Facebook.

Before they get underway, teachers stress the importance of building and maintaining a positive digital reputation; what you do or say online is visible to everyone. But contrary to expectations, the public nature of the tools can instil mature attitudes:

*"Using Twitter, my students can tweet in 140 characters a response to a question using a hashtag that enables their peers to see/respond to the points shared, whilst encouraging a succinct, articulate, mature and literate dialectic."*

Scott Hayden, specialist practitioner of social media and educational technology, Basingstoke College of Technology

The emphasis on dialogue in the early days of the course prepares learners to use social media in more advanced ways. For example, learners may take over the role of curator on a weekly basis to post links to resources they have found and want to share, an activity which brings critical judgements into play as links may be made to examples of bad media practice, such as gender stereotyping, as well as something that is valued or admired. Followers of the college media hashtag then join in the debate, introducing a wide range of perspectives, sometimes from abroad.

Social media can raise the stakes still further when it comes to production work as it is not only peers and teachers who respond to messages. Tweets of links to completed production work, such as videos on YouTube, attract comments from industry professionals giving learners the chance to make a good impression on employers before they leave college.

Of course, the reverse can also be true. Learners can damage their future employability by using social media to share personal, often indiscreet material with friends, unaware that postings can be seen by future employers. Scott Hayden argues that teachers have a duty to use social media with their learners, if nothing else to prevent them from these pitfalls. But even more important is the capacity these tools offer to engage learners in a continuous professional dialogue about their work, as would occur in the industry.

## Outcomes

The college's media production learners are passionate advocates of the immediacy and flexibility of social media as communication tools:

*"It's quicker and you can then move on."*

*"It just makes everything easier. Everyone is on some sort of social media."*

Creative media production learners, Basingstoke College of Technology

Nonetheless, there are some do's and don'ts about adopting social media in the classroom which have evolved from five years of use by the college's media department. A set of [10 commandments](#) for new users starts with amendments, where necessary, to the organisation's acceptable usage policy. Then teachers must be aware of established protocols among users of the platform if they are to use social media successfully for an educational purpose:

*"Students will not check your groups, inbox messages or interact with you online if they associate it with being nagged."*

If learners are reticent about allowing teachers on to their social media platforms, explaining why this is important to their future employability can help. But it is still vital that teachers respect learners' privacy by "unfollowing" their posts on Facebook and only participating in the group set up for college work. An enforceable code of conduct in turn sets out the behaviours expected of learners.

## Impact

The college view social media as a great way to establish a learning community in which feedback is generally supportive and encouraging. Most importantly, feedback is received rapidly and from a range of different viewpoints:

*"Up to the point of submitting their e-portfolios, our learners are engaged in an endless loop of dialogue which gives them a far better opportunity to evidence their understanding."*

Scott Hayden, specialist practitioner of social media and educational technology, Basingstoke College of Technology

Learners have progressed successfully into employment on the strength of work shared on their personal websites and on social media such as Facebook and Twitter. They leave the course with knowledge of the communication technologies used in the industry, and have learnt to navigate the pitfalls to use social media to better effect in the workplace. For their part, teachers keep abreast of emerging technologies which can benefit their practice:

*"Ask your students what they are into. It might be Facebook or Tumblr, or tools you have never heard of like Vine. I learned some of these from my students. The result is that I am more aligned not just with them, but also with the industry I am preparing them to enter."*

Scott Hayden, specialist practitioner of social media and educational technology, Basingstoke College of Technology

As a result, the college's media department may also give formative feedback as video blogs (vlogs) or podcasts that learners can store on their blogs or on Google Drive to help them prepare for submitting work for summative assessment.

The department shares these and other technology-enhanced approaches with other departments via teacher briefings, **quick-win videos** of new techniques, inset days and via postings on social media platforms such as Facebook. Many of the strategies shared, such as getting learners to publish and review their learning objectives on Twitter, have first been tried and tested with the department's learners.

*"I think those of us working in technological subjects like the media and IT, I think we should be the first, the guinea-pigs as it were, to test it out to see if it works."*

Scott Hayden, specialist practitioner of social media and educational technology, Basingstoke College of Technology

Media production learners are also active as communicators, passing on what they have learned to teachers as well as peers through the college's digital leaders project. The project aims to upskill all staff and learners at Basingstoke College of Technology to meet industry demands for improved digital literacy, creative problem solving, and collaborative teamwork via new and emerging communication technologies.

## Benefits of the technology

- » Increases the potential for continuous dialogue and feedback on developing work
- » Readily accessible and familiar to learners; learners see social media use as “normal”
- » Raises the stakes by enabling contact with industry professionals, learners in other colleges and staff and learners in other countries
- » The public nature of the medium builds commitment and ambition

*"Social media help you communicate with your teacher. Everyone is on some sort of social media so they are quite reachable if you have any problems or you want to ask them questions."*

BTEC media learner, Basingstoke College of Technology

## Tips for effective practice

- » Before introducing social media, educate learners in the far-reaching importance of their digital reputations on social media
- » Involve your organisation in a dialogue about its acceptable usage policy if this prevents use of social media. Have examples prepared to illustrate the benefits
- » Once enabled, be on social media with your learners to establish a learning community but take care to protect their privacy, and your own
- » Exploit short messaging platforms such as Twitter to bring in perspectives from outside the peer group and extend the range of feedback learners can receive

## Find out more

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**Additional resources:** [Inspiration 4 Teachers' Podcast: Episode 20 - Scott Hayden](#)