



READING COLLEGE

Case Study

Commissioned and funded by

The
Education
& Training
Foundation



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Summary

Reading College is a general Further Education College which is part of the Activate Learning group which also includes Banbury and Bicester College, City of Oxford College and Activate Enterprise. Activate Learning has a Chief Executive Officer; each college has a Principal and Activate Enterprise Director. The three colleges recruit around 14,500 learners, two thirds of whom are adults on part-time courses.

In September 2014 Reading turned off its Moodle VLE and relied upon a number of web-based products to deliver online and blended learning as it moved towards an organisation-wide FELTAG target.

Drivers for change

In 2011 senior managers at Reading College announced a strategic commitment to using new technologies to support students' learning. They instigated a revised curriculum delivery model with a core component of independent learning enabled by the innovative use of technology.

The Drivers

1. Create Independent Learners

Build students' independent learning skills in order to empower them to raise their aspirations and achieve what they want for their futures.

"Our mission has been to ensure our students 'go further' in learning and in life."

2. Improve the effectiveness and experience of learning and teaching

3. Improve Employability

The new programmes have used engagement with technology to develop 21st Century digital skills, together with communications, team working and employability.

"The main driver is to create an engaging curriculum that meets the needs of learners and prepares them for the real world in a digital future."

4. Cost

The need to cut costs has subsequently provided further impetus to the programme, but was not an initial driver.

"This was about student experience. Eventually it will return savings."

Contextual Information

The FELTAG initiative has been a catalyst for further development. College managers are working towards the initial 10% online learning target with effect from academic year 2015/16.

There is a push to reduce direct teaching hours across Activate Learning as a whole. This is driven by the Greater Executive Team which oversees all Activate Learning colleges and includes Reading College's Interim Principal.

Points to ponder

What are the particular strategic goals driving increasing use of technology for learning in your college?

How much interest is there is for increasing the use of technology

How else might these aims be achieved?

Do you feel there is a preference in your college for non-technology solutions and if so, why is this?

From Vision to Plan

Timeline

Reading College has a history of innovation in ILT and was an early adopter of VLE technology. The decision to implement institution-wide online learning was accompanied by a decision to close Moodle and rely upon wholly internet based Google tools and services.

2013/14 Development of project based learning.

Focus on staff skills development.

Decision taken to close Moodle when the external hosting contract terminates.

2014/15 College-wide pilot activity.

2015/16 Direct teaching hours reduction to 10% online learning target.

In 2014/15 there was no element of compulsion upon staff to join the pilot beyond insisting that all courses must have access to an online environment. This notwithstanding, voluntary levels of engagement have been very high. Each Department has been required to set up a Google community for its students.

September 2015 sees the reduction of taught hours and the move towards delivering 10% of learning online across the institution with all staff playing a part.

Stakeholder Consultation

Employers were invited to a series of curriculum transformation events just before Easter 2015 to discuss the planned reduction in face to face teaching and move towards the FELTAG 10% target for online learning. Each Department presented its plans for delivering the curriculum to a group of employers and other stakeholders, including governors and students, who were then asked for feedback.

The Engineering Department's presentation to employers can be found in the [Additional Resource](#) section together with an explanation of some of

the terms used. The presentations were well received, feedback was enthusiastic and the college is now confident that it has the support of all stakeholders.

Points to Ponder

How prepared is your college for a shift to increased reliance upon technology for learning?

You may find it helpful in answering this to look at the some self-assessment tools developed specifically for governors by projects in the Learning Futures programme delivered by following lead organisations:

1. Association of Colleges in the Eastern Region (ACER)
2. FE Sussex

These can be found on the Excellence Gateway website:

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/>

A more in-depth institutional self-assessment tool, *The Learning Technologies Self-Assessment Tool*, was commissioned by the Education and Training Foundation for leaders and managers.

A documented version of the questions in this online tool can be found here: <http://rcultd.co.uk/survey/coralesce/Survey%20Questionnaire.pdf>

The Edtech Assess website <http://www.edtech-assess.com/> will take you to:

- The latest online version of the tool
- A separate Digital Literacy self-assessment tool for individuals to identify skill levels and training needs
- Details of benchmarking and other services

Implementation

What they did?

The Learning and Teaching Model

The concept of a study programme with a number of learning outcomes to be achieved provided a core and a guide. Learning outcomes were grouped together into projects rather than as discrete subjects.

The Challenge

SFA funding regulations require that all hours need to be part of the college's working pattern and attendance evidenced for a mandated number of Guided Learning Hours (GLH) e.g. a minimum of 540 hours for full time courses.

The Solution

Projects are delivered through a combination of scheduled classroom sessions and online projects. Online sessions, which can be carried out 'anytime, anywhere, on any device' are not timetabled and recorded in a register. The college uses ProMonitor Integrated Student Monitoring and Support. Learning outcomes are recorded by the teaching teams into its Markbook module and into each learner's Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and GLH calculated from this.

Project Based Learning

Curriculum delivery is based upon students completing projects or assignments which enable achievement of all of the required learning outcomes that make up a course. Whilst the majority are done in face to face classroom sessions, a number are delivered online. Learners work on these without direct input from the teaching team, developing and demonstrating independent learning skills. They are encouraged to collaborate with peers, to solve problems, to critique and provide feedback upon each other's work. The teaching team monitors online progress and promotes shared solutions.

The key features of Reading's delivery model are:

- Courses delivered around a core framework of projects. The full programme of projects encompasses all of the learning required by the syllabus.
- Projects designed with employer input and mapped against learning outcomes.
 - Projects are completed in two ways:
 - face to face classroom sessions of teaching and learning
 - wholly online independent learning
 - The use of technology is central to both classroom and online work.
 - Google Classroom is used as the platform for online learning, underpinned by a common core of complementary Google Education Apps, productivity tools and social media
 - Teachers are encouraged to supplement this with any appropriate software of their own choice that meets the learning need
 - Teachers and Student Coaches can look into learners accounts and access their progress by reading the work done to date and leave comments, but they do not teach or direct learning
 - Learners work independently online, but are encouraged to collaborate, share and work jointly as appropriate.

A description of how Project Based Learning works in Health and Social Care, together with outcomes and retention data can be found in the [Additional Resource](#) section. An example of an Early Years project referenced in the description can also be found here.

Delivery Model for Online Learning

Like the other model colleges, Reading had to address the question of what is a suitable amount of learning online for a learner.

In the first year, most Departments put one project online which has increased as staff have become used to working in this way and come to an understanding of what is appropriate for learners.

The focus in the delivery model is on learning activity and project outcomes, rather than hours. Each team sets its own programme of direct and online learning subject to:

- Creating and delivering learning opportunities to meet all of the required outcomes;
- Meeting the target of 10% of learning online in 2015/16 (with agreed exceptions).

BTEC Health and Social Care, for example may have 5 projects during the year, 2 of which are wholly online.

Level 1 learners are currently not involved in online programmes, though they still make good use of technology and build up excellent digital skills in preparation for progression.

Organisation and Staffing

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and the oversight of learning has been divided between teachers and the newly created role of Student Coaches.

Teachers take responsibility for:

The educational programme and its planning

Face to face delivery

Assessment of all learning

This involves a substantial burden of advance planning, together with regular oversight of online activity. This time is not remitted, but direct teaching contact hours have fallen to allow for it. Class sizes have risen. In Health and Social Care, for example a class of 30 students have digital instruction programme/orientation.

Student Coaches are responsible for working with learners as individuals or in a small group, supporting:

Study skills

Personal planning, target setting and achievement

Catch up

Recording of progress in ProMonitor

Learning Technology

In 2012, Technology and Learning were separate departments, before they were brought together.

"They were brought together and it transformed everything. Visiting colleges are amazed at how small the team who are leading these changes is."

James Kieft, eLearning and Resources Manager, leads a small team (1.6 FTE) who work to empower Departments to take ownership of online learning. He has a teaching and learning background rather than technical one.

Preparing Staff

Staff appraisal and the CPD programme are aligned, so staff are aware that their performance appraisal will include the new skills.

Preparation of staff began from the very start of Project Based Learning and has had two dimensions

- a. Engaging volunteers rather than conscripts
- b. A clear narrative thread of bottom-up staff development that looked to build

Effective professional practice for online activities

Excellent digital skills

Application and enhancement of skills

Effective Professional Practice for Online Activities

CPD is determinedly:

"Credibility demands that teachers tell teachers, learners tell learners."

This has found form in events such as:

- Pass it On Friday: a virtual wall or online bulletin board for staff to share their successes from the week using Padlet (<https://padlet.com/>).
- Open classroom days: staff put door hangers outside rooms (green = come in; red = do not disturb) inviting other staff to come in and see our learning.

Just as important as the technical and pedagogical skills developed is the breaking down of the notion of teaching as a private activity behind closed doors. The CPD programme has encouraged a culture of sharing practice and shared development in which staff literally open the doors and let colleagues in.

"What has been particularly noticed has been the incredible speed of change encouraged by changes of practice and the culture of everyone working at the College. This in part is put down to the CPD program that aligns teacher CPD with this method of working. Teachers use the same Google Apps for their own development as they get students to use"
Geoff Rebbeck, Consultant

Excellent Digital Skills

The College created its CPD programme using Google Apps, media and tools so that teachers get hands-on experience of the challenges and opportunities their students will face. The insights, knowledge and understanding gained from this then informs curriculum design, community building and the use of collaborative learning. The College conducts so much of its professional practice on the web that the development of high levels of digital skills is not only desirable, it is unavoidable.

"I thought my digital skills were really good when I got here, but I can't believe how much better they are now after only three months here."
Staff new starter

Application and Enhancement of Skills

One outcome of this development has been the emergence of genuine professional communities. Teachers enthusiastically show and swap resources and tools with colleagues to develop content and learning activities, culture, thinking and practice. This has grown in parallel with significant improvements in the digital literacy and e-maturity of students as they in their turn learn to share and support each other.

"We have found that change happens better when teachers support and help each other rather than rely on external speakers and experts."

James Kieft publishes a blog ***James Thinks It's Worth A Look*** which he regularly updates with learning tools, content, ideas and information

sourced from membership of a worldwide Google+ community for education technology enthusiasts. This can be found in the [Additional Resource](#) section.

Voluntary engagement by staff is estimated to be in the range of 60-70%, i.e. around two out of three as the circle of enthusiasts who pioneered the programme has widened and been further swelled by new starter members of staff, all of whom have an induction programme which focuses on digital skills. Together they provide an informal support network within Departments to supplement formal training opportunities.

Preparing Learners

Project Based Learning is a very different approach and calls upon much greater levels of digital competence than most students encounter at school. Few have any significant experience of truly independent learning and a limited exposure to the opportunities of technology for learning. Expertise in social media and leisure activities online provides a starting point for the necessary skills, but no more than that.

Learners are not digital natives. "When it comes to learning they are very traditional in their approach." James Kieft

The delivery model begins from Day 1. To prepare for this learners have a digital instruction programme/orientation, open Google accounts and are then supported through their initial engagement with the platform and tools and they begin what the college refers to as their "Digital Learning Journey".

An animated presentation of the Digital Learning Journey can be found in the [Additional Resource](#) section.

The induction programme and support from the teaching team is supplemented by a group of Go Students, drawn from IT qualification courses, who are willing to share what they know with peers and show them how stuff works. This is part of the general 'Like speaks with Like' principle that underpins all development activities.

Points to ponder

What information would you like to see as a Governor about each of the following groups?:

- learners
- teaching staff
- employers
- other stakeholders

- a. during implementation of college-wide increase in the use of technology for learning
- b. after implementation

Cost Model

The Elements of Cost

The shift to Project Based Learning has resulted in fewer GLH delivered by direct contact and proportionately more delivered by online learning. The delivery model differs from those used at Kirklees and Heart of Worcestershire College insofar as it is not characterised by a simple hourly calculation of taught hours and remission around standard class sizes, so it is more helpful to talk in terms of areas where savings have been, or are being made as follows:

Elements of the Cost Model

1. Reduction in teacher contact hours
2. Offset by increased class sizes - in some departments minimum class sizes of 24 with a maximum of 34 and still maintaining a positive learning experience
3. Delivery of classroom and learner support activities by Student Coaches in place of qualified status teachers

Further Savings:

The shift of activity online has delivered further savings to the college in the form of:

- a. Virtually paperless organisation
- b. Book content in library gradually replaced by e-books
- c. Use of free Google services, productivity tools and media, including free hosting, back up and management of data

Points to Ponder

What are your expectations or concerns about the impact on costs?
Where will costs be incurred, where will savings come from, and over what timescale?

Quality

Reading's innovative programme of independent learning enabled by the use of technology was created specifically to improve the quality of learning. It aimed to:

Create a high quality experience for learners

Produce better outcomes than were achieved before the Project Based Learning programme

Raise the levels of digital skills and employability

It has succeeded measurably on all counts.

Assuring Quality

The staff reorganisation supported quality in two ways:

- Teachers were not only trained but given time through the reduction of direct contact hours to produce effective and engaging online learning programmes, together with the skills and tools necessary to deliver, review and improve them;
- The creation of the Student Coach role introduced a post that provided support at the level of the individual learner, together with progress tracking and reporting.

The involvement of employers in project creation led to them being identified by learners as 'real life' projects.

"They have been successful in raising motivation, achievement, retention and employability."

Monitoring, Reporting and Feedback

Reading use Google Classroom, rather than Moodle or another VLE, as their online learning platform. Unlike Moodle, there is no management back end tracking and reporting of individual activity. Google Classroom does, however, allow a tutor to go into the system and access learners work directly, so whilst there is no automatic reporting function, the College can monitor and provide feedback by direct intervention as follows:

- a. Tutors and Coaches have access to each student's work files in Google Classroom, so they can see if progress is on target, or going off track. The

role of the tutor then focuses on the guiding progress, identifying problems, keeping learners up to speed, stimulating collaboration, sharing and good practice rather than imparting knowledge.

b. Details of each learner's progress after completing projects is entered in ProMonitor eILR by Student Coaches.

This enables early intervention to support those who are wavering and risk falling behind, which can be the cause of failure to complete. It also provides reassurance and support, building confidence and motivation.

Outcomes

Ofsted awarded Activate Learning a Grade 2 at inspection in 2013, singling out Reading's innovative web development in its Report (published January 2014).

Information technology (IT) resources are plentiful and exceptionally well used in many curriculum areas. A small, but growing, number of course teams, particularly at Reading, are using web technologies to encourage learners to share documents, ideas and resources with their teachers and each other. This leads to learners having good discussions online and quickly sharing recent and relevant resources they have found or created. Learners enjoy this and many take greater responsibility for their own learning by completing activities, formulating ideas and carrying out research outside lessons.

Subsequently the Project Based Learning programme bedded in and the results fed through into improved outcomes.

"Our pass rates were around the national average before we began project based learning; now they in the top 10%".

"The improvement is phenomenal. Students thrive on it, they are more motivated and retention rates have rocketed up, feedback from employers is positive - all of the elements have come together." Cheryl Pennington, Assistant Principal Teaching and Learning

The data from Health and Social Care Levels 2 and 3 courses illustrate the improvement in both retention and success rates.

Level 2 HSC	Starters	Retained	Retention	Success rate
2012-13	36	29	83.3%	80.5 %
Utilising Project-Based Learning				
2013-14	33	32	97%	97%
2014-15	34	33	97%	97% (predicted success rate)

HSC L3	Starters	Retained	Retention	Success Rate
2013 - 2014	60	40	66%	66%
Utilising Project Based Learning & Me, Myself and I				
2014 - 2015	67	67	100%	100% (predicted success rate)

A Note

The current programme is all about genuine differentiation that recognises the needs of individual learners. The basic principle and tools have been extended to a group of LDDD learners. In the view of staff, this group would not have coped with Moodle, but they are using Google communities, which provides a 'walled garden" – a safe, private, moderated online space where they can make mistakes without being exposed. They can connect with peers and with tutors. The tutor 'Pass It On' facility allows tutors to share what others are doing, so they can also see what is happening outside of their own area, which would not be possible to the same extent offline. The students enjoy and are motivated by the experience and have developed their skills and capabilities accordingly.

Points to ponder

How will the quality of learning be maintained and improved if your college shifts to increasing use of technology to deliver learning programmes:

- in terms of learning outcomes
- in terms of learner experience

IT and Learning Infrastructure

IT Infrastructure

The college has invested heavily in IT infrastructure to support online learning. With all learners on the cloud - working with tools and data on the internet rather than on a local network or machine - there has been a need to invest in technical infrastructure, including wifi and broadband. When the programme was developed in 2012/13, Reading spent £500,000 on installing a robust wifi network.

The network can be accessed by students' own devices. To supplement this and to accommodate those who do not own – or do not wish to use – their own equipment it has spent around £60,000 in each year since the programme began on mobile technology for staff and student use, such as class sets of mini ipads. Learning Zones around the college are well resourced with chrome books and a further 100 Chrome books are available to borrow to take to classrooms.

"This was about student experience. Eventually it will return savings."

Learning Infrastructure: Google

From the outset, Reading adopted Google Drive across the college. It allows users to store files in the cloud, share files, and edit documents, spreadsheets, and presentations with collaborators. This was followed by Google+, a social network facility like Facebook. It enables the setting up of communities, which can be open to all or restricted to selected users. These are private in the college implementation, which allows staff to share good practice. An unexpected benefit has been a reduction in staff email: they use Google+ to share information and resources and it has become a de facto intranet. Both services are free to use.

The college now uses Google products for most online activities, including Gmail, Google Docs and Forms for authoring and Google hangouts. The last is a feature of Google+ akin to Skype, which allows chat or video calls and conferencing within communities. Staff uses it as part of the support

for online learning, gathering students together to facilitate discussion and comment.

In summer 2014 the college still had Moodle, with a hosting contract that was coming to an end. It was clear that all of the traffic was going to Google+. In September 2014 the decision was taken to turn Moodle off rather than find a new host. In the process content that had previously been purchased was lost, but it turned out that nobody really used what was there.

Google Classroom was launched in August 2014 as part of the Google Education Apps suite of tools, restricted to bona fide educational institutions and free to use. It is a VLE but without a management back end. Google provide unlimited storage space online for the College's users, with the maximum individual file size capped to 10TB.

It is very easy to use. A tutor can upload content including YouTube and other videos and web links plus assignments and link to it by a unique code – which is then shared with course members. Its core use at Reading is for managing the assignments and projects around which the online learning programme is based.

All of these services are free to use and all are cloud based, i.e. managed by Google, with all data stored externally rather than on college hardware. Data can be archived locally at the end of the year.

You can find James Kieft's introduction to Google Classroom in the [Additional Resource](#) section.

Resources

The following additional resources link to this case study:

Selected Documents

Curriculum Consultation event

Engineering Department presentation to stakeholders

Case study

Project based learning, outcomes and retention rates

Activate Learner Journey: diagram

Online Resources

Activate Learner Journey Animation

<https://magic.piktochart.com/output/5783036-activate-learner-journey>

Example of an Early Years project

<https://www.smores.com/hps22>

Google classroom demonstration

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KzwoU1e9v4I>

Online Learning software: James Kieft's blog

<http://james-thinks-its-worth-a-look.blogspot.co.uk/>