Pick and Mix Skills at Sixth Form College
Worcester Sixth Form College

Project Synopsis

For our Level two Vocational Students we developed a Personal and Social Development (PSD) level one course. We developed the PSD course to allow students to select a flexible and blended learning programme using interactive assessments, assignments and workshop sessions. Language, Literacy and Numeracy were embedded within the course. Electronic Individual Learning Plans were used to enable teachers/tutors to keep up to date and students to have the opportunity to discuss their progress and inform this ILP.

Project Aims

Within a paperless environment we were able to create a programme of study that enabled students to become more involved within the choice of units to study and electronic discussions with staff regarding progress and individual needs.

The variety of units offered the students the opportunity to work in groups or individually to develop problem solving skills to respond to the syllabus and equipping them to be independent enquirers, creative thinkers, reflective learners, team workers, self- managers and effective participators.

Through practical teacher led activities embedding of language, literacy and numeracy was ensured. Qualified level 5 Diploma Skills for Life teachers helped to create schemes of work and lesson plans to aid this process.

Vocational subject teachers were kept informed of the programme and invited to meetings to discuss 'best practice' with regard embedding Language, literacy and numeracy skills.

The project was considered innovative in terms of sector practice through provision of assessment through electronic means including the college's virtual learning environment (Moodle) and students and staff accessing documentation through the college intranet and email systems. This process has developed staff knowledge and understanding of how to create an interactive electronic study programme which responds to the learning preferences of this cohort of students**.**

Through inter-department collaboration this has further strengthened working relationships with other department within the college.

Project delivery

The team met to discuss delivery and how best to develop the scheme of work and assessment tools used. Individual teachers then created resources and assessment tools which were then further developed into electronic documents to be incorporated into the virtual learning environment. Many members of the team had not been involved within electronic

documentation and hence this responded to CPD development. The Academic and Learning Support Department was also able to increase the availability of electronic documentation owing to the team's new skills.

The college IT support team were also involved within this process and aided the team to understand how the college systems worked to enable progress.

Once the schemes of work had been developed and the team aware of how the electronic virtual learning environment would work within the programme, students were asked for their input regarding choosing units to study and how to develop our Moodle pages to allow for easy access and assessment responses. Emails and the use of USB memory sticks were also discussed and students and staff were keen to have all options to allow for ease of use, especially when off site. Indeed staff were concerned that in case of any system failure we had a backup system and this is how the email and memory sticks was developed for use within the programme.

The course was developed as a two lesson per week programme with the opportunity for students to access learning support. To ensure that all assessment tools met with the exam board requirement (Edexcel) the team worked closely with the work skills level three team, in terms of internal verification of tools used and documentation consistency.

Edexcel curriculum co-ordinator was involved in the process for development of assessment tools within a paperless environment as she felt this was 'Best practice' and could be cascaded to other centres within her remit.

Adults within the programme had a reduced involvement owing to the reduced funding of Skills for Life programmes. We eventually had to stop teaching Skills for Life within the community and our 'Return to Learn' programme within college was also affected by the funding crisis and with much sadness also had to be closed at the end of the academic year 2010-2011.

Teaching staff became aware during year one of the project that the use of memory sticks for saving students work was very time consuming and made it difficult to track students submissions and achievement. Therefore during year two of the project the Moodle system was developed further to allow students to submit work through Moodle. This created a backup system for all work completed and enabled staff to assess work electronically and offer feedback within an electronic field. This also ensured that accurate records of submissions made, teacher feedback and grades awarded were created.

If we were to respond to a project with this scope again we would ensure that our virtual learning environment was fully operational to allow for the creation of a backup system for all work completed and enabled staff to assess work electronically and offer feedback within an electronic field. This also ensured that accurate records of submissions made, teacher feedback and grades awarded were created.

Furthermore it would have assisted the team if we had accessed off site training within the Moodle system and its capabilities to aid development of a paperless programme.

Project Outcomes

By quantitative data we had improvements in:

- Success rates: - 100% students (42) fully completed the PSD award. One student was not successful in any other aspects of her learning and therefore the only qualification she gained in academic year 2010/11 was the PSD award.

- Progression rates from level two to level three have improved from 10/11 - 42 Level 2 students in total. 19 of them returned in 11/12 to complete a level three course (45.2% progression rate) and students have also developed transferable skills to support their level three aspirations.
- Retention has improved for level two vocational students from 89% to 92%

By qualitative data we reviewed progress and improvements through:

- Student voice – discussion groups, electronic questionnaires which were used throughout the programme and students were positive with the feedback they offered.
- Teaching and Learning group within college when discussing flexible and blended learning within all academic courses were reviewed and teachers involved within the level two vocational programmes stated that students were more able to complete assignments and aiming for merit and distinction rather than being satisfied with a pass grade.
- Electronic assessments and assignments were made available for all departments within college to access through the virtual learning environment (Moodle). It is hoped through college CPD activities to further expand this system to all departments.

We were delighted that the project achieved its original aims

- We produced a blended, flexible, electronic, personal development course within the Foundation Learning Framework.
- Through the development of the programme we ensure our students were more able to deal with problems in daily life by equipping them to be independent enquirers, creative thinkers, reflective learners, team workers, self- managers and effective participators
- We did embed language, literacy and numeracy skills within the programme.
- We offered training, advice and guidance to vocational teachers to enable embedding of language, literacy and numeracy within course
- All our Skills for Life qualified teachers had the opportunity to become mentors to vocational teachers to allow progress with embedding.

The impact of the project is that students have become more aware of how to develop skills for employability and are more able to present work to achieve higher grades. The vocational teachers were impressed with the improvement of language and literacy skills gained by the students. Retention rate improvement and progress of students have interested the senior management team and governing body and hence the programme is to remain within the level two vocational programme and we are developing the system to aid our level three vocational learners for academic year 2012 – 2013. We will also be looking at work skills to see how we can develop this programme to assist all level three vocational and A level students to gain improved employability and progression skills for work and Higher Education.

Sharing of Project Findings

We will be available to attend a dissemination event were we can present our project to the sector. We will offer an open invitation for colleagues to come and observe the project in action and a PowerPoint presentation with interactive resources will be made available for interested parties that cannot travel to Worcester, contact details will be made available to allow further discussion.

An electronic version of the project can be made available containing all our resources for colleagues to access through the Excellence Gateway website. We will include schemes of work and lesson plans and examples of electronic individual learning plans. To ensure our project can be transferable we will also give details regarding how we ran the programme including the challenges, successes, and value of the project.