

# **OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT TECHNICAL SKILLS NATIONAL PROGRAMME**

**Top Tips: Getting the most from your masterclass**  
**Created by: Blackburn College**

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## Getting the Most from your Masterclass

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**Masterclass:** *“A class taught by someone who has expert knowledge or skill in a particular area”*  
(Cambridge Dictionary)

### Project Overview:

Funded through the Association of College's Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment (OTLA) Phase 2 Programme, Blackburn College, Bolton College and Nelson and Colne College worked in collaboration to recruit ambassador's from industry to support Practitioners teaching digital curriculum to bring real world learning to the classroom and deliver employer-led curriculum.

This project was created in response to a number of factors:

- The digital industry is fast paced with new technology and practices constantly emerging. Following employer consultation it became apparent that whilst learners were leaving education with sound theoretical knowledge they were lacking skills and techniques using newer technology;
- Teachers and learners need a greater understanding about the changing digital sector and the types progression opportunities available; and
- Preparing our Practitioners and employers for T-Levels so that collaboratively we can offer learners good quality work experience opportunities as employees of the future.

Each Digital Ambassador will be matched with a Practitioner to deliver masterclass sessions. We define a masterclass as a session (delivered in the classroom or in a practical environment) delivered principally by the employer, it usually includes a practical element, showcases their expertise and brings learners closer to an employer promoting career opportunities and aspirations.

The best masterclasses have engaged learners in a new topic/technology or employer practice. They have included an interactive session and have added to the theory and knowledge already gained through their course. For example, one masterclass showed learners the latest Virtual Reality equipment and linked it to their skills in Games Design but also highlighted how these skills are being used by a wide range of industries broadening the learner's career options.

We identified what a poor masterclass would look like - one that was unable to directly engage the learners, lacked any interaction and relied on powerpoint.

We have worked hard throughout this project to ensure that the right masterclass is delivered to the right learners and avoid a 'poor masterclass'. Therefore the masterclasses delivered have been successful in engaging learners, they have been pitched at the right level and with the right content to match existing skills and knowledge.

Some quotes from learners attending one of the masterclasses:

*"You can pursue your business aspirations"*

*"I have learnt ways to start and expand your own business"*

*"If you have an idea you can pursue it and become an entrepreneur"*

*"I've learnt what employees are looking for when applying for a job."*

*"I have learnt how employers want people to act when applying for a job."*

As with any project, not everything went according to plan! We have experienced a number of challenges in setting up our masterclasses. The main challenge has been the scheduling of the masterclasses to suit both the Digital Ambassadors, their work commitments and to include the right Practitioners and their learners. Particular issues have included employer's competing and changing work schedules, contracts and deadlines as well as delays to an office relocation.

Based on our experience we have compiled these top tips to help you to get the best out of your masterclasses. We have drawn on evaluation and feedback from all the stakeholders involved (Practitioners, Digital Ambassadors, learners, Project Managers and Peer Advisors). We hope you find it useful.

## TOP TIPS

### ➤ Start with your key performance indicators.

These may be from your original project plan or quality improvement plan or both. Use these to set your objectives for the masterclasses. Be really clear about these and what you mean by outstanding teaching and learning. How will the masterclasses help you to achieve your KPIs? How will you know?

*"We established a definition of outstanding for this project which linked to each of our College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategies. The masterclasses were designed with this in mind and how they can support this and the project KPIs. Our masterclasses were designed to be supportive for our Practitioners and add additional value to our curriculum enabling learners to look beyond and challenge their aspirations and inspire them."*

**Assistant Principal STEM**

### ➤ Set a shared standard for the masterclasses.

What are the intended benefits to staff? students? and employers?  
To what extent were these achieved?

*"We wanted an insight from employers into the real word of digital skills industry as it is now. With the best will in the world it's hard for teachers to keep up to date."*

**Bolton College Head of Innovations and Learning**

*"The masterclass was genuinely interesting and different, showing students what you can do with social media, not getting bogged down with how to do it. You don't often see our students so interested they ignore lunchtime and keep on asking questions."*

**Bolton College tutor**

*"It's a good idea to think about how you will evaluate the masterclasses well before you deliver them. You want to know whether the participants enjoyed the session, but you will also want to know about the longer-term impact. How have teachers changed their teaching as a result of the insights from the masterclass? How has it changed students' experience?"*

**Peer Advisor**

### ➤ Plan for evaluation.

How will you know if the masterclasses have achieved their objectives? What questions will you ask and of who? Have you allocated time for evaluation? How will you know about the impact on learning and performance?

➤ **Select your contributors with care.**

What will they contribute? How will their contribution add value? Have they got good presentation and facilitation skills? Are they approachable? Do they want to be involved or have they been “volunteered”?

*“We established strong relationships with the employers, so we were able to bring the best people in to deliver the masterclasses. People who know their subject and who can bring it to life for teachers and students”*

**Blackburn College Industry Links Manager  
- STEM**

*“We had a lot of discussions before the session and it was good to talk to the teacher beforehand. It can be a tricky role, and I don’t want to duplicate what the teacher is doing anyway. We made assumptions but we checked them out first.”*

**Digital Ambassador**

➤ **Provide briefing and support for contributors.**

Exactly what are you asking them to do? Do they know who their audience is? Do they know the objectives of the masterclasses? The standards expected? What, if any records do you need them to keep? How will you support them?

An example Roles and Responsibilities resource has been created for Digital Ambassadors.

➤ **Provide a briefing for teachers.**

Do they know why they are involved? The purpose of the project? What is expected of them?

*“Initially I was unsure about the project as I was given only the basic information and it seemed to imply that I needed to be involved in this project because I needed to improve my teaching. I started out with a negative view of the project but once I spoke to the right people and I began working with the employer I realised that this was a great opportunity to establish employer partnerships and that it would provide new opportunities for me and my learners. I am now working with my Digital Ambassador to create a student project brief that we will deliver in partnership to the learners.”*

**Blackburn College tutor**

*"Scheduling the masterclasses was a real challenge, despite checking timetables and agreeing dates with employers there were a number of classes that we had to change. This was mostly down employers changing business priorities, new large contacts and a delay in office relocation. We persevered and made allowances where we could."*

**Blackburn College UK Projects / Bid Co-ordinator**

➤ **Schedule very carefully.**

Remember that pressures from the curriculum and business priorities will combine to derail your schedules. Give yourself room for slippage but do everything you possibly can to stick to your planned dates.

➤ **Share the learning.**

Act quickly to capture the outcomes and feedback from each masterclass and use it to inform the subsequent ones of any learning points and also to inform relevant provider practice, covering delivery staff, managers and students.

Resources created so far include:

- Digital Ambassador Roles and Responsibilities to help shape your employer roles
- A Practitioner briefing template and example taking lessons learnt from our project to help you make sure your Practitioners have the right information
- A Masterclass Top Tips guide building on our experiences to get the best out of your sessions

➤ **Evaluate, reflect, re-evaluate.**

How well did the masterclasses achieve their objectives? Did they enjoy them? Did they benefit? How? What was the impact on teachers? On learners? What went well and what went less well? How did the project contribute to the key performance indicators?

*"The project has shown that curriculum isn't always aligned to industry standards. It has enthused teaching staff to link with industry and opened their eyes to the different career pathways available to their learners."*

**Bolton College, Excellence and Innovation Manager**

*"The masterclass was an eye opener for me into the career pathways available. I'd always associated virtual reality with games design and the entertainment industry but it has such a wide range of applications and is in demand by a lot of different industries. This knowledge will help me to improve the careers guidance I provide both to my learners and their parents."*  
**Nelson and Colne College, tutor**

➤ **Plan for the future.**

What do you want to do next? How will you build on this project? How will it bring teaching practice to the next stage? What impact will it have on work - experience and employer support? How will you use the work from the masterclass to prepare for t levels? How will you share practice? Is it included in self-assessment and improvement planning?