

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

**Case study on project led by: Blackburn College**  
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NELSON AND COLNE  
COLLEGE



# 1. BACKGROUND

## Project Overview

Blackburn College, Bolton College and Nelson and Colne College have worked in collaboration to trial an employer engagement model which supports Practitioners to bring real world learning to the classroom, deliver employer-led curriculum and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in digital curriculum.

This project was devised in response to:

- A changing Further Education sector;
- A fast paced digital industry with constantly evolving technology;
- Skills gaps within the sector and ensuring that learners are prepared well for a career in their chosen industry through the best possible teaching; and
- The needs to ensure that learners can apply their learning to real industry.

This project builds on a model piloted with Blackburn College's Motor Vehicle department and allowed this model to be trialled in a new curriculum area (digital) as one of the 15 technical routes recommended in the Sainsbury Review.

Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has identified Creative and Digital as one of seven key business sectors in Lancashire and as future driver of jobs and wealth. The extent and pace of change is leading to recruitment challenges and skills gaps in the sector. The LEP Sector Skills Baseline report 2015, states:

*"Skills gaps are more prevalent in the digital sub-sector with 7% of employees not fully proficient in their role (compared to 5% in the economy as a whole)"*

*"There are recruitment challenges within the digital sub-sector which has a much higher incidence of skills shortage vacancies – the skills reported as hard to obtain by employers were advanced IT or software skills of a technical nature such as cyber skills or PHP programming."*

Our discussions with employers echoed this. Employers told us that the curriculum doesn't always reflect industry practice or their skills requirements. The very fast pace of change within the sector means that Practitioners are less familiar with latest employer practices and that knowledge is inconsistent across Practitioners. A meeting with Modern English highlighted this when discussing different types of computer coding, Practitioners were unfamiliar with the PHP coding commonly used by industry.



"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, 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."

**COLIN STOTT**  
**ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL**  
**BLACKBURN COLLEGE**



"Employers are increasingly seeking individuals who possess a fusion of technological, business, creative and interpersonal skills and there are concerns about the ability of the education sector to generate sufficient quality and quantity, in particular those with digital skills, to fulfil future demand."

**SECTOR SKILLS BASELINE**  
**STUDY REPORT 2015**  
**LANCASHIRE ENTERPRISE**  
**PARTNERSHIP**

In addition, colleges have limited funds to update their technology and resources in line with the sector. Partnership working with employers may potentially open up new opportunities for learners to access resources, enabling Practitioners and curriculum to be at the forefront of technology.

Initial discussions with partners identified that they had similar issues with ensuring their digital curriculum reflected latest technology and employer's skills gaps and that links between curriculum staff and employers needed to be improved to support professional development.

The partners decided that this project would enable each institution to align technical qualifications with the Post-16 Skills Plan, support their teaching staff to improve the innovation, approach and delivery methods of sessions linking with quality strategies and improvement plans.

## Collaboration

Blackburn College as lead college approached Bolton College and Nelson and Colne College as partners for this project. We have well established collaborative relationships with both of these colleges which we have developed further through this project.

All partners deliver an extensive digital curriculum and have a wide range of staff expertise which would not be available at one college. This expertise has provided a strong platform on which to build this project.

Blackburn College's Industry Links Manager for STEM which includes the College's digital curriculum has built up a strong knowledge of the digital sector across Lancashire. He has established links with Digital Lancashire who are the voice for digital employers in Lancashire. He has productive and well established working relationships with digital employers who from the start took a keen interest in development of the project to support and enhance local skills in the sector.

One of these employers has a dual role as an employer and an ESFA funded training provider of Apprenticeships. The White Room have an understanding of the needs of the sector as an employer and as a provider of Apprenticeships understand the context of what is delivered and how it aligns to an employers' needs.

During the project we collaborated with seven employers. They were selected to provide a range of new expertise for Practitioners and already have experience of sharing their skills so have strong communication and presentation skills. Each employer brought their own expertise and specialisms to the project:



"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"

**JON LOMAS**  
**INDUSTRY LINKS MANAGER**  
**(STEM)**  
**BLACKBURN COLLEGE**

- JP74 (Lancashire SME specialising in the diagnosis, strategic consultancy and considered implementation of technology to improve businesses, enabling them to be more efficient, productive and profitable) specialists in developing software solutions linking to customer relationship management and traditional web, social and digital marketing;

Digital Lancashire (a not-for-profit Community Interest Company that's has been established to shine a light on the digital sector,

## Project Reach

The project has reached the following stakeholder groups:

|                        |     |
|------------------------|-----|
| Educational Providers  | 4   |
| Direct Practitioners   | 15  |
| Indirect Practitioners | 0   |
| Employers involved     | 7   |
| Students impacted on   | 435 |

## Project Aims

This project aims to prepare learners for successful careers in a fast moving and growing industry by providing them with the best possible teaching and learning, through:

- Providing inspiring, employer-led masterclasses which gives learners an insight into the real world of employment, bringing the industry to life;
- Organising relevant and useful industry placements for staff which enable them to enhance their technical knowledge and skills; and
- Collaboration with employers to develop new curriculum which reflects current industry practices and technology that addresses local skills gaps.

The project will boost the skills of the staff delivering digital curriculum to become digital champions through partnerships with their employer ambassadors. In turn digital curriculum staff will support fellow Practitioners to enhance their digital skills through Communities of Practice and Continuous Professional Development.

## Project Methodology

A project launch meeting was held to bring all partners together and meet our Peer Advisor to discuss the main project objectives, activities



"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."

**DAVINA POLDING  
EXCELLENCE AND  
INNOVATION MANAGER  
BOLTON COLLEGE**

and areas of focus.

Practitioners were identified by their Head of Studies in each College and they were invited to participate in the project. All Practitioners completed a Skills Scan to self-reflect on their existing digital skills and strengths and identify those skills gaps that they would like to develop. The main skills gaps identified across the Practitioners were:

- Employability skills;
- Programming;
- Networking; and
- Industry links – using live briefs and including employers in the assessment process.

The scans enabled the Practitioners to be matched with a Digital Ambassador who could support their skills development. It also identified any specific areas where additional employers and expertise were needed.

Seven Digital Ambassadors were recruited direct from industry. Employers were approached by Blackburn College's Industry Links Manager for STEM who had existing relationships with a range of digital employers across Lancashire. The Industry Links Manager had initial meetings with those employers who showed an interest in the project. The meetings discussed the employers' key strengths and the skills that they could bring to the project; their reasons and how they envisaged their involvement as well as the College's expectations and what the project entailed. The employer skills were then cross referenced with subject areas and the results from the Practitioners' skills scan to match the Ambassadors to the Practitioners.

Providers worked with Blackburn College's Industry Links Manager to identify suitable dates for the masterclasses who liaised with employers and Digital Ambassadors. A schedule was created to ensure that the masterclasses were delivered across the Colleges and enabled employers to plan their time and delivery.

Each Practitioner was given time away from the classroom to enable them to develop a partnership with their Digital Ambassador. Practitioners worked with their Ambassador to develop the masterclass content, resources and delivery style before the session. Resources were developed collaboratively and the Practitioner ensured that the Ambassador was comfortable with the class, facilities and equipment ahead of the session.

Masterclasses were delivered in partnership between the Ambassador and Practitioner. Masterclasses were followed by a wider staff CPD session which enabled more Practitioners to increase their knowledge in a specific subject and widen the reach and impact of the Programme.



"Gaining an insight to apps and social media will help us to keep one step ahead in relation to recruitment and skills we can offer the learners."

**NICOLA KARWAT, TUTOR  
BOLTON COLLEGE**



"Using live briefs would give assessment a greater sense of meaning, the learners would gain experience in the world of employment and liaising with employers would be invaluable experience for them. Assessment would become authentic and realistic."

**SHARON HARGREAVES,  
TUTOR  
BLACKBURN COLLEGE**

The Digital Ambassadors delivered 19 masterclasses across the Providers to learners studying a range of courses:

- Level 2 in Information and Creative Technology;
- Level 2 in ICT;
- Networking and Systems Support;
- Software development;
- Level 3 Diploma and Extended Diploma in Computing; and
- HND in Computing Systems with Gaming.

The masterclasses were not optional they were embedded into timetabled sessions either as part of a subject theory or tutorial session. Learners were briefed before the sessions and it was explained how the masterclass would link to current and previous learning and their course outcomes.

The project aimed to bring Practitioners together into Communities of Practice to share learning across the partner Providers. This has proved challenging to schedule but we aim to hold 1 Community of Practice before the end of March.

Evaluation took place throughout the project and included:

- Recording the number masterclasses delivered;
- Number of masterclass attendees and their course;
- Learner demographics and widening participation data for each course was reviewed;
- Practitioners and learners completing evaluation forms after each masterclass to determine initial impact;
- Follow up interviews were held with each Practitioner to discuss ongoing impact and next steps;
- Tutorial feedback from learners to understand how their perceptions have changed as a result of the masterclasses; and
- Digital Ambassadors provided informal feedback via telephone calls and emails after each masterclass which informed future sessions.

Evaluation and project data was collated by the project monitoring team to capture the impact of each masterclass on Practitioners teaching practice and learners' career aspirations and skills development.

Practitioners repeated the digital skills scan at the end of the project to re-evaluate their skills and knowledge, assess learning gains and identify any impact on their teaching, learning and assessment.



"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**



"The learners were told what the session was and how it could benefit them in terms of employability which was linked to the tutorials and employability skills in which we have been nurturing over the last 18 months of the course in preparation for employment."

**MICHAEL KNIVETON  
LECTURER  
BOLTON COLLEGE**

## 2. RESULTS



### Project Outputs

- The development of a model for employer engagement which can be shared more widely across the three colleges, other Providers and subject specialisms;
- The recruitment, deployment, briefing and support of seven Digital Ambassadors who have delivered 19 masterclasses to 435 learners;
- The creation of a Digital Ambassador Roles and Responsibilities resource which can assist Providers in their employer engagement activities;
- The development of a Masterclass Top Tips document to support Providers in their implementation of a masterclass programme;
- The design of a Teaching Practitioner Briefing template that helps Providers to structure a full briefing for teaching staff;
- A Dragon's Den Student briefing teaching resource which has been created in collaboration with the Practitioner and their Digital Ambassador;
- The creation of a webspace to share resources and teaching practice.



### Project Outcomes: Employers

- Digital Ambassadors understand their role, feel supported and know what is expected of them;
- The Ambassadors deliver more relevant masterclasses that links to the curriculum and previous learning;
- Employers have an increased role in curriculum development;
- Increased communication between employers and learners.



### Project Outcomes: Practitioners

- Teaching Practitioners understand their role and that of the Ambassador so that more effective partnerships can be established and are more likely to fully engage and collaborate;
- Enhancement of Practitioners' technical knowledge and skills to support their continuous professional development;
- Practitioners have gained a greater understanding of the career pathways available within the sector;
- Masterclasses are relevant to both Teaching Practitioners and business support staff which increases their collaboration and enables knowledge to be applied in other areas;



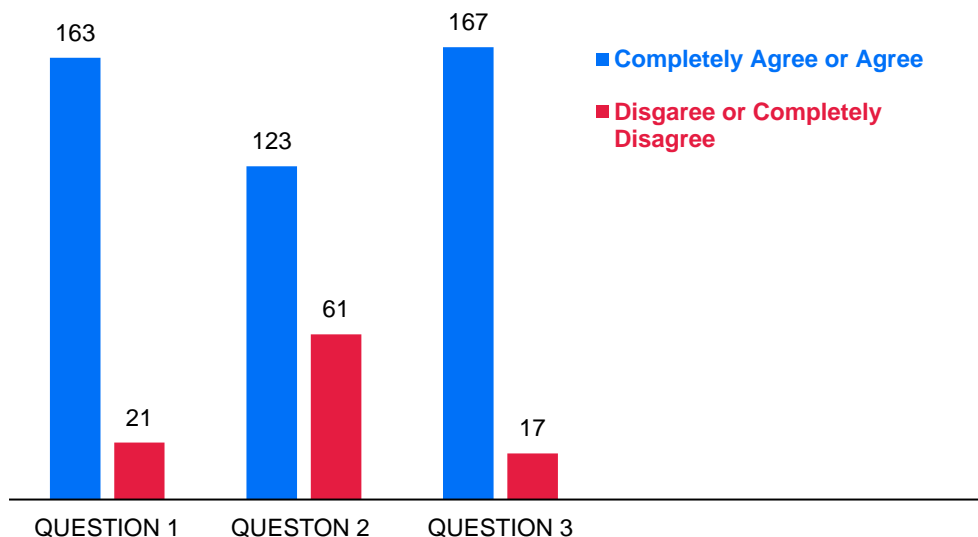
- An increase in peer-to-peer learning which facilitates collaboration and provides more opportunities for shared learning.



## Project Outcomes: Learners

- Learners have more frequent and direct access to employers from their chosen sector;
- Relevant and targeted careers advice and guidance which informs learners' future careers decisions and pathways;
- Learners have increased their knowledge of the use of social media and how to promote themselves for employment;
- A greater understanding of self-resilience and self-belief;

### Learner Feedback



Source: Learner Evaluation Questionnaires

- 163 learners out of the 114 evaluation questionnaires completed either Completely Agreed or Agreed to Question 1 that 'the masterclass was relevant to their course';
  - 123 learners out either Completely Agreed or Agreed with Question 2 that 'the masterclass and the employer made a difference to their career aspirations'. In contrast 61 learners either Disagreed or Completely Disagreed with the question which could be due to the subjective nature of the question and the difference in an individuals' career aspirations;
- 167 learners either Completely Agreed or Agreed to Question 3 that 'listening to an employer deliver a masterclass is useful to their studies';



"The masterclass on VR Safety was brilliant. Steve gave a great insight into the skills needed for the industry. Computer Science is a current skills gap and Steve explained that Engineering students could study this at degree level providing them with alternative career options."

**GIBSON JEREMIE, TUTOR  
BOLTON COLLEGE**



"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."

**TUTOR  
BOLTON COLLEGE**

## Project Impact: Employers

- Increased employer engagement leads to employers feeling more valued, with a more employer focused curriculum that meets their needs and skills gaps; and
- The increased promotion of the sector and potential career pathways helps to address recruitment shortages within the sector.

## Project Impact: Practitioners

- Changes to teaching content and style based on new knowledge, for example learners understand more about virtual reality software and its applications across industry;
- Indirect impact as new digital knowledge and skills supports enhanced teaching and learning across different subject areas. For example, a Blackburn College Practitioner is working with their Ambassador to create a project brief for their Business and IT Career Academy learners who have not received the initial masterclass;
- Teaching Practitioners have increased confidence in providing careers advice and guidance to learners and their parents;
- Increased and more frequent discussions with employers enables Practitioners to ensure their teaching and learning reflects current industry practices and addresses skills gaps;
- An increase in peer-to-peer learning which facilitates collaboration and provides more opportunities for shared learning;

## Project Impact: Learners

- Learners' communication skills have increased which improves their confidence and initial impression given when meeting with employers;
- Learners' have gained an increased belief in their own skills and abilities which leads to more positive aspirations and career goals;
- An increase in the practical digital skills learners have gained which improves their employability;
- Learners are receiving improved quality of and access to impartial careers advice and guidance direct from industry experts which has widened their career aspirations and is enabling them to make more informed career choices;
- Learners are making more informed choices about their social media presence and how they present themselves; and
- Improved and consistent careers advice and guidance across all areas of the College. For example, Bolton College are ILT Team also sat in the masterclass and as a result can ensure the careers advice news and information given via Moodle and website can reflect wider industries.

“

Lets hope we can keep the momentum going and get you guys started, including elements of virtual reality and augmented reality within the curriculum content.”

**STEVE HOGAN**  
VR SAFETY

In order to support the development of Practitioners' teaching practice towards outstanding, the project has been linked to each Providers' Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy.

Blackburn College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy focuses on our ethos and that teaching, learning and assessment should:

- be of the highest quality;
- increase employment and job readiness; and
- prepare students for the challenges of the wider world.

The project echoes this ethos by supporting Practitioners to develop their practice through employer engagement to increase the quality of their teaching, its relevancy to the real world of work and learners' employability skills.

Bolton College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy is based on the Education and Training Foundation's Professional Standards with 15 teaching, learning and assessment standards, which Practitioners reflect and are able to meet.

As the project is linked to the Professional Standards this makes it easier for Practitioners to self-reflect and assess themselves against both Standards and to see how the project supports the development of their teaching practice and continuous professional development.

The project has begun to explore with the Practitioners their role not only as a 'dual professional' – experts in their subject knowledge as well as teaching and learning – but as a 'triple professional'. Practitioners need to not only have excellent industry knowledge of their subject and pedagogy but also skills to engage learners and build their confidence.

All partners are located in areas of deprivation and work with harder to reach learners. Practitioners need to be able to build the confidence of their learners, raise their aspirations and link them to opportunities in new industries.

Changes to teaching practice as a result of this project:

- Elements of virtual reality technology are incorporated into curriculum using smart phone applications and more easily accessible technology;
- The knowledge gained through masterclasses is being applied and embedded into other subject areas which didn't participate in the masterclass. For example, a project brief created by Practitioner and Digital Ambassador has been set for Career Academy students; and

Inspired Practitioners to think beyond their immediate subject specialism and digital sector to provide broader careers advice and guidance to both

“

“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.”

**ANDREW ASHWORTH  
TUTOR  
NELSON AND COLNE  
COLLEGE**

“

“Her presentation skills were great and they will help me with my own.”

**LEARNER  
BOLTON COLLEGE**

“

“I have learnt to never give up on something that you love doing.”

**LEARNER  
BOLTON COLLEGE**

“

“It is easier than I originally thought to set up a business.”

**LEARNER  
BLACKBURN COLLEGE**

learners and their parents to increase and widen their career aspirations.

## Upskilling the Workforce

This project has enabled Practitioners to gain new skills and knowledge:

- Learnt more about the applications of different types of digital technology and how it can be used across a range of industries through established partnerships with employers in supportive Digital Ambassador roles;
- Gained a greater understanding of the career pathways available to their learners and widened their knowledge of the skills that industry and employers are looking for. Computer Science is a particular skills gap identified and Engineering students can study this at Degree level which would enable them to enter the industry.  
Business support staff attended the CPD sessions and can now offer additional advice and guidance support through the online Advice and Guidance and News Feeds.
- new Practitioners have been empowered to change curriculum with support from their Digital Ambassador to embed new technology into their teaching despite limited resources and lack of technology; Whilst virtual reality technology is expensive and is beyond their current budgets the Digital Ambassador has shown Practitioners examples of how elements can be incorporated into curriculum using commonly used technology such as smart phones.

Enabled Practitioners to share learning and practice amongst their peers through establishment of peer to peer links;

## Wider FE Sector

The employer engagement model which has been created in this project has the potential to be replicated across the sector but it must be planned well to make sure the benefits are maximised.

Our aim was to create a transferable model of employer engagement and collaboration which enables tutors to develop their pedagogy and progress towards Outstanding Teaching Learning and Assessment in line with the requirements of post 16 Skills Plan.

Whilst our project delivery focused on the digital curriculum the model could be adapted to any curriculum area. The model requires the early engagement of industry partners who are willing to work with academia in order to develop curriculum. This is an opportunity for industry partners to ensure that potential future job applicants leave FE with the required industry qualifications and behaviours. It is an opportunity for the employer and provider to inspire learners, raise their aspirations and raise their understanding of the job opportunities available to them. In

the case of digital curriculum this has meant encouraging learners to think about potential job opportunities at local, regional, national and global level i.e. not to be constrained by their locale. Furthermore, the importance of digital capabilities across all industries has been highlighted along with self-employment being an option. For the FE sector, this approach to engaging and teaching learners should translate to improved aspirations, retention, achievements and progressions e.g. positive job outcomes.

The project has given us the opportunity to work with employers and build long-term working relationships that will have positive impacts on the learner experience and curriculum delivery. Work with employers has included: shared delivery; development of new delivery formats and approaches; curriculum review and mapping of industry needs within curriculum requirements and access to industry specific equipment and resources.

## Lessons Learnt

All partners have learnt from the delivery of this project, in particular:

- Ensure that all project stakeholders are given a careful briefing that is appropriate for their involvement, this supports engagement into the project. During in the delivery of this project we experienced challenges in ensuring that all parties were properly briefed about their role and involvement. It is important to have clear role descriptions, clear boundaries and ensure the right people are involved in briefing stakeholders. As a result we have compiled two resources:
  - Digital Ambassador Roles and Responsibilities; and
  - A Practitioner briefing template and example.
- The need to schedule and have a 'Plan B' to allow for slippage. Scheduling the masterclasses around timetables and employer commitments has proved to be challenging. We have created a Masterclass Top Tips document which helps to address some of the issues we had and help Providers mitigations;
- Ensure that you have right people to help you deliver the project. We worked with employers to ensure that the Digital Ambassadors were the right person for the role – those that knew the business, who could present well and had communication skills that could engage learners;
- Establish clear outcomes for people to work towards so that they know what they should be producing and when. This ensures that evaluation data is collected as the project progresses and can inform project delivery as it progresses;



“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 are available for their learners.”

**DAVINA POLDING  
EXCELLENCE AND  
INNOVATION MANAGER  
BOLTON COLLEGE**

- Allow time for Practitioners and learners to reflect on their involvement and how they will use it. Build this into your evaluation plan;
- Senior management and curriculum management buy-in to the project is key to the project's success. Allow time for planning and management of the project to ensure it is prioritised; and
- Ensure that the project has clear links to a college's Quality Improvement Plan. This will support senior and curriculum management buy-in and enable Practitioners to see how involvement can link to key college outcomes and improvements.

### 3. THE FUTURE

#### Moving Forward

All partners have valued the opportunity the project has given to establish links with employers and strengthen collaborative working amongst local Providers and Practitioners.

The relationships forged with employers are in the initial stages but all partners agree that the partnerships will be strengthened post project. The Digital Ambassadors will continue to engage and meet with their Practitioners and learners. Discussions have taken place to understand the commitment employers can contribute post project and how the relationship is of mutual benefit for all stakeholders.

All partners are continuing to deliver masterclasses up to April and staff industry visits are being scheduled in over summer.

The masterclasses delivered through the project have been embedded into existing timetables which supports a sustainable model that can be continued.

The lessons learnt from the project will help each Provider to improve their employer engagement and look at widening the model across other curriculum areas as Providers look to implement the T-Levels.

Dissemination activity will continue beyond the end of the project through employer and Provider networks and forums. The webspace will be kept up to date with relevant resources and shared learning opportunities.



“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.”  
**SUE BRADLEY, TUTOR**  
**BLACKBURN COLLEGE**