Yeovil College: Realising the benefits of a full digital literacy organisational review

Summary

Through the direct advice and support from Jisc RSC South West, Yeovil College have reaped the benefits from a full DLOR (digital literacy organisational review) and this has provided a real framework for the development and enhancement of their organisation.

Students are better informed about important areas such as eSafety and the Colleges’ use of Skills Scan, provided by Jisc RSC South West has helped the college to produce more focussed approaches to assessing staff skills.

Example screenshot of the research page in the college Moodle site
About Yeovil College

Yeovil College has been serving the community in and around Yeovil for more than 125 years.

The College was first formed in 1887 when Somerset County Council began formally organising Science and Art classes in Yeovil. In 1947, the first Principal was appointed to lead Yeovil Technical College and when secondary education in the Yeovil Borough was reorganised in 1974, Yeovil College became one of the early tertiary colleges to be formed in England.

Today, Yeovil College remains passionate about its role as a key provider of education and training in South Somerset and North and West Dorset. It remains committed to its role as a tertiary college for the whole community and currently supports around 9000 full and part-time students.

The challenge

In a continually evolving and technology-enhanced world, providing students with the necessary support systems and digital literacy support is ever challenging. This is of particular importance regarding sensitive areas such as eSafety and copyright.

One of the main challenges for the college was not only to identify what their digital literacy infrastructure was, but how they could make improvements cross-college. This included providing both students and staff with the knowledge and support required about what digital literacy is because many staff and students were not aware of what it meant.

Strategically the DLOR represented a challenge in terms of engaging a wide selection of staff across the college, so that it could be developed in a systematic way, providing a consistent approach.

Due to the fact that the college had not undertaken a Skills Scan for around 5-6 years, it was an additional challenge for the college to undertake, considering how technology and e-learning has advanced during this period. Therefore a whole strategy digital literacy approach was potentially quite a large and demanding scope of work to undertake.

The college additionally had the challenge of ensuring that they addressed the balance between informing students what they were not allowed to do online and what they were allowed to do. The main issue was that the college wanted to encourage students to create a more positive digital identity, rather than concentrate on the restrictions of what they were not allowed to post on social media.

The activity

During one of the Jisc RSC South West events, Karen Foster, Head of Learning Centres at Yeovil College saw a presentation about digital literacy conducted by Lyn Bender, then e-Learning Adviser of Jisc RSC South West and this sparked her...
interest in how they could potentially help their students to create a positive digital identity at the college.

This led Karen to talk to the senior leadership team at Yeovil College, who felt that the digital literacy audit would be an excellent idea in terms of gauging where the college was in terms of digital literacy.

Following several meetings with Jisc RSC South West, Karen arranged for Lyn to visit the college to conduct a full digital literacy audit with the college.

In terms of the audit, Karen gathered many staff from different areas of the college to attend the audit. This included staff from teams across Senior Learning Technologies, Information Learning Technologies and Information Technology as well as a member of staff from additional learning support and a curriculum representative with the Head of Quality also in attendance.

“It was interesting because we booked the four hours that was recommended for the audit and we thought ‘are we going to be here for four hours’, but we were and we could have had longer. We found that having Lyn there really made us think about each answer and really push what we thought was good about our current practice and where we could make improvements.” - Karen Foster, Head of Learning Centres at Yeovil College

Once the DLOR report had been sent back to Karen and her team with the recommendations provided by Jisc RSC South West, Karen reviewed the report and developed an action plan, which was distributed throughout all the teams involved in the project and saved in the staff portal.

There were many further additional activities involved in the project, including:

- Support provided by a local police youth worker, who visits the college to work with learners regarding safeguarding issues and being eResponsible online
- A competition for students to help them to create a positive identity online, with the aim to help them with any future transitions into University or job interviews
- A show and tell digital literacy event held in the learning centre, which has enabled staff to try out a range of e-learning tools, such as apps, QR codes and technology kits
- Setup of the Yeovil Reading Room blog space, which is about reading activities and also around literacy and writing
- Compulsory full digital literacy sessions provided for Level 1 and 2 students at induction, including sessions for HE students
- The creation of Informative videos about what digital literacy is and how it can benefit students, with access provided from the learning centre
- Prezi, YouTube and supporting resources made available for students
The outcomes

The DLOR has helped to raise the profile of digital literacies for both staff and students at the college. It has also enabled Karen and the team to research the ethical use of information and enhance the digital identity of their students.

“It has been a really positive thing to do the digital literacies audit. I think that everybody agreed that at the end of the audit we’ve got a real framework now to take us forward.” - Karen Foster, Head of Learning Centres at Yeovil College

The DLOR has really put into context the importance of having a good strategy to push forwards in the up-scaling of support systems as well as providing quality advice and support for important areas such as accessibility and eSafety.
One of the main factors for the success of the project has been the importance of having the Senior Leadership Team on-board throughout the project as well as staff responsible for different areas of the college, such as IT and quality. This has helped to reinforce the project and action plan by having a core group of key staff engaged and actively involved.

“Everybody had a hand in actually developing this action plan and an ownership for it and I think that’s been quite important.” - Karen Foster, Head of Learning Centres at Yeovil College

By having curriculum staff and teachers involved this has provided a platform for those staff to showcase the development of digital literacies to other staff and lead by example.

“I think the other thing about a digital literacy strategy and how you’re going to implement it in a college is making sure that you do have those staff who want to take it forward and have lots of ideas, so it’s finding the key staff and hopefully they can disseminate their ideas to other people.” - Karen Foster, Head of Learning Centres at Yeovil College
The impact

The college have had positive feedback from students with regard to the eSafety sessions that they have run in the learning centre. Whilst the team expected the students to report that they already knew about the issues around eSafety many students said that they learnt something new from the sessions.

Having the local police force run sessions on eSafety has been a real hit with staff in particular because the police have a real presence and a direct link with community issues, which means that they are well placed to offer sound advice and support for young people.

The Yeovil Reading Room blog has been popular with students since its launch following the successful DLOR and has had over 1500 visits.
“It just shows that if you do put something out there on social media, which does appeal to students they will go and use it, so we are very pleased with that.” - Karen Foster, Head of Learning Centres at Yeovil College

The digital literacy videos in the learning centre are enabling students to re-visit content at their own pace and provide them with a resource to refresh their knowledge.
In terms of the DLOR and its impact on the college, Karen Foster explains what it has meant for her and the team:

“I was really engrossed, I actually felt like I had a lot to say and this could make a real difference, so overall I think that the help and advice that we have had from the Jisc RSC has been invaluable.” - Karen Foster, Head of Learning Centres at Yeovil College

The lessons learned

The only real lessons learned would be that the college would have liked to have had a skills scan and DLOR earlier as it has been such a positive and engaging project and although in its early stages, has already helped to extend the scope of digital literacies throughout the college.

Useful links

- Yeovil College website
- Jisc support for digital literacies
- Jisc digital literacies group on Twitter

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