Hair-Net: Learning together through collaboration

Summary

A group of learning providers providing work-based hairdressing training in the East Midlands has formed a Joint Practice Development network in order to improve the use of technology in learning. The ability to share experiences amongst colleagues has increased confidence and motivation of staff, which has led to new technologies being used by learners on their programmes.

About Hair-Net

Hair-Net is a network of learning providers involved in work-based hairdressing, predominantly in the East Midlands region.

Founding members are:

- Alfreton Vocational Academy
- Alternative Hair
- Central Training Group
- Derby College
- GeTaHead Training
- Kieran Mullin
- KM Training
- NHTA (Nottingham Hairdressing Training Agency)
- Strategic Training Solutions

The challenge

Amongst learning providers offering work-based hairdressing training in the East Midlands there was a general consensus that e-learning was being underused in the training process within hairdressing salons. Unlocking its full potential would allow more expansive opportunities for their apprentices.
At the same time whilst attending provider training meetings, many hairdressing trainers were finding e-learning issues too general and not always applicable to their sector.

It was therefore felt that a network specifically for the hairdressing industry would be more sensitive to the particularities of their industry. In this way good sector practice could be developed from ground level.

**The activity**

The concept of Hair-Net was devised by Teresa Mullin, Director of KM Training Ltd, and a project bid created for the Regional Responsiveness Fund run by the Learning & Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).

Hair-Net was devised around three interlinked prongs:

- Sharing of **knowledge** between colleagues;
- Sharing of **resources** between colleagues;
- Further **research** into the use of e-learning in the hairdressing sector.

**A Joint Practice Development network** was formed, initially consisting of ten member organisations that have connections with hairdressing work-based learning. Members represent both colleges and independent training providers.

The emphasis on this approach is about **collaborative working** and sharing, rather than a cascade-style approach in which a single best way to do things is shown. It also allows the participants to give a more **realistic** picture of how e-learning is being used (or not) in their own organisations.

During the seven months duration of the project the contributors met on a monthly basis with a rota of different topics being presented by different members of the network.

**Topics covered include:**

- Accessibility
- e-Portfolios
- Electronic signatures
- Employers views on technology
- Guided Learning Hours - how e-learning can be captured as part of them
- The changing role of the teacher - including a look at CPD
- Tools and resources
- Safeguarding
- Webinar tools

The knowledge of the group has been supplemented by bringing in external speakers on some topics.
One of the successes of the network was when they ran one of their meetings online using a webinar tool. This was the first time for most of the group in using such technology and opened their eyes to new possibilities of using it with their learners.

Although there are excellent online resources for hairdressers, the majority of these require regular subscriptions and in the current climate, these fees may prevent employers and learners from accessing hairdressing resources online.

The network therefore created their own online site, www.hair-net.co.uk, bringing together free resources that are available for educators and all personnel in the industry to access. The site also allows resources to be uploaded subject to a vetting process.

**The outcomes**

The network has flourished with knowledge being shared around it and the motivation of all hairdressing sector participants to use IT with their learners increasing.

There is evidence of members applying ideas in their teaching, their assessment as well as in communication and administration.

The Hair-Net website has had a good launch with 8,000 visits in the first 6 months.
Feedback from the members has been overwhelmingly positive:

“The contact with others has been very important. It’s given us the opportunity to dip our toe in. I didn’t really know which direction to go. I now think it’s not such a big mountain to climb and I know I’ve got to tackle it.”

“The communication together has been so important. Before I wasn’t sure how to ask my employers what I need from them to get learners on board. I felt I would ask a stupid question so I wouldn’t ask it. I felt bogged down.”

“I feel much more motivated in using IT with learners and am in meetings with City & Guilds to use their e-volve system to assess my learners, something which I had shied away from before these meetings.”

(Hair-Net project final evaluation report)

“I found it beneficial because I am a new programme leader and benefited from more experienced colleagues in the network.

“The Hair-Net website is a good, valuable resource for my learners to be able to access and they have said they find it useful. It’s great for support when they are not at college and also for our work-based learners too.”

(Chris Bond, Strategic Training Solutions Ltd)

“Hair-Net produced an e-learning consultation activity and this has been very useful for the enhancement of learners understanding of consultation, product development and services. I have been able to brand this for our company usage and upload it to our company computers.”

(Jasmin Skaife, Head of Hairdressing/ London, Central Training Group)

**The impact**

Stan Unwin, Work Based Learning Advisor at the Jisc Regional Support Centre for the East Midlands helped support the project and has seen the following impact.

- Raised **awareness** of those organisations taking part as to the range of technology available and how it can be used;
- Greater **confidence** in accessing and using e-resources as a result of work done by the group to identify and make available a range of existing resources;
- Introduction to and use of free tools, webinars and video conferencing enabling **more efficient communication** across workplaces and providers;
- A **positive attitude** to the use of technology and an increased level of curiosity from providers.

**The lessons learned**
Whilst the initial start-up of Hair-Net was helped by a project bid the intention was always that it would continue after the end of the funding from LSIS.

The Joint Practice Development network continues, with meetings scheduled on a quarterly basis via a mixture of face-to-face and online.

Teresa Mullin, from KM Training, offers the following simple tips on creating a Joint Practice Development for your organisation or area:

- Ensure the network has a specific **focus**;
- Make it **accessible** to all;
- Encourage everyone to **share** no matter what their level of knowledge is.

The Hair-Net resource website continues to expand and a series of vocational websites including Beauty Therapy, Holistic Therapy and Child Care, have been developed under the umbrella site Education-Net.org, with more vocational areas to come in 2012.

Some of the original representatives of member organisations left their employers during the course of the project but momentum was maintained by bringing in new representatives from the member organisations, thereby showing the vitality of the network.

The East Midlands network hopes to support the development of other regional Hair-Net Joint Practice Developments. If you would be interested in hosting one in your region, please contact them on **lsisHair-Net@yahoo.co.uk**.

**Useful links**

- Hair-Net
- Education Net
- East Midlands Work Based Learning forum

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