The Grimsby Institute Group – E-Learning interns

Summary

The Grimsby Institute Group wanted more effective use of their Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The Institute began utilising existing Business and Computing students to support tutors as well as providing a work based learning opportunity. The initial results include improved VLE courses, both in terms of interactivity and design and also resources that support ongoing staff skills development.

About The Grimsby Institute Group

The Grimsby Institute Group (GIG) is one of the East Coast’s largest providers of Further and Higher education. The group comprises of the Grimsby Institute, University Centre Grimsby (UCG), and Yorkshire Coast College in Scarborough and Lincolnshire Regional College in Skegness. They aim to put learners first, and deliver excellent and accessible high-quality training and education, always focusing on the raising of standards. Meeting learner need and ensuring their success by being inspiring, creative and innovative in everything they do.

The challenge

The Grimsby Institute Group wanted more effective use of their VLE and saw contributing factors were tutor time, skill and confidence in developing their course areas. The Institute also saw that it is increasingly difficult to secure genuine work based learning opportunities for students. Therefore, a solution was sought to address these two issues.
The activity

Ross Anderson, Group Head of E-Learning, saw the opportunity to utilise the skill and enthusiasm of Business and Computing students to help drive VLE design and usage improvements. This would also provide useful and relevant experience that would help students find work more easily after completing their qualifications. The pilot was to run from February to July 2013. The internship was offered to existing level 1, 2 and 3 Business and Computing students. From 11 applications, five were appointed.

Ross wanted the students and staff to be more creative with course design and uploads, moving away from just creating repositories of PDFs to "e-learnify the pages."

Working with Ross, as well as heads of department, interns started working within a sandbox course as teachers, rather than students. This gave Ross the opportunity to gauge competencies and interests to best position individuals with tasks and departments. Each intern then began reviewing and improving online course areas as well as developing a staff training space which utilised ‘creative commons’ Moodle video resources developed by York St John University, rather than spending time (re)creating resources.

Weekly centralised meetings were scheduled for the interns to get together and talk about what they have been doing as well as identifying what needs to be done next.

Figure 1: The GCSE English VLE page before intern redesign
The outcomes

The areas that have been supported during the pilot are Work Based Learning, Functional Skills, Business and Computing, Catering and Health and Social Care. Initial outcomes include:

- Course pages that have been worked on are more interactive and supportive for students.
- A Staff VLE training page has been developed.
- Set resources have been created for Functional Skills to improve consistency and standardisation of staff support. These are then interpreted and delivered differently by different tutors and subject areas.

The project has identified the importance of student confidence and interview practice, as Ross felt that several ‘sold themselves short’ in the application process.

Staff have seen the student support and collaborative working as a positive step that helps the organisation.

Figure 2: The GCSE English VLE page after the intern redesign
The impact

It is expected that further impact will become visible but already within the pilot phase the following has been reported:

- Tutors have been reported to say things like “I didn’t know it could do that” after seeing the course area developments.
- The course areas are becoming more effective because they are utilising resources and collaboration better to achieve change. Tutors are contributing their skill in relation to the subject and content and the interns are contributing their understanding and perspective on how technology can be used to support delivery.
- Students are gaining realistic work experience.

Specifically individuals have commented:

- “The internship pilot has been a great way for our learners to experience real life industry expectations which are linked to the classroom.” (Curriculum Leader – Business & Computing)
- “The interns have been able to support our team with designing a new Moodle page for GCSE English and altering content to standardise the pages.” (GCSE English Tutor)

Ross concluded that “the interns have done a great job creating simple ‘How-to’ guides for staff relating to using e-learning tools such as Twitter, Google Docs and using Moodle features. This has helped support staff, who possibly for the first time are considering using these types of e-learning tools.”

The lessons learned

Ross saw that one of the early barriers to success was the lack of shared workspace for the interns to store resources they were creating. They overcame this by using ScreenR and Google Drive. Resources could be embedded within the VLE directly from Google Drive.

Ross is already planning how this project can be expanded and rolled out with more interns and curriculum areas. His ideal is to create a ‘genius bar’ approach where tutors could come to a specific room to get support directly from the student interns as they need it. He also expected more projects to be completed as the role expanded, with participants gaining valuable insights into managing their own time and resources in a way that would prepare them for work and help provide much needed work experience as part of the new study programmes.

Ross also expects the findings from this pilot to help develop the content of a level 3/4 E-Learning Apprenticeship that is being developed by Grimsby as part of an E-Learning Academy bid.
Useful links

The Grimsby Institute Group
Google Drive
Screenr

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