Rotherham College of Arts and Technology - Interactive mirrors for a hair and beauty salon

Summary
Rotherham College of Arts and Technology (RCAT) used the refurbishment and relocation of the hair and beauty department as a springboard to install state-of-the-art interactive mirrors and mood lighting alongside flexible projectors in professional salon environments to enhance the learner and client experience. This has resulted in a better perception of the commercial salon and more realistic work experience and flexible learning opportunities for the students, which is likely to lead to heightened aspirations and increased employability.

About Rotherham College of Arts and Technology
Rotherham College of Arts and Technology offer a rich mix of full-time and part-time college courses; apprenticeships and degrees delivered in 2 campuses; and bespoke courses delivered in the community. They want to provide the people of South Yorkshire with the highest-quality education and training, and to ensure that all sections of the local community are represented there, encouraging all of their students, of every age, to achieve their full potential. Their goal is also to meet the training needs of local employers, and so continually develop their offering to address new industries and emerging needs in the workplace.

The challenge
With high competition for hair and beauty students in South Yorkshire, differentiation of experience was needed to increase student enrolments and also to attract clients to the commercial arm of the salon. Julia Arechiga, Head of Department for Creative Service Industries, wanted to be ahead of the competition from both other colleges and commercial salons within the city. She wanted to improve the learning opportunity and link the experience more with higher end salons. There was also a desire to increase the use of technology to support learning within the salon environment, not just in a classroom setting.

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**The activity**

The hair and beauty department and commercial salon were refurbished during the summer of 2012 with the aim of future proofing the hair and beauty salons and making them more fit for purpose. The refurbishment included some relocation to make the commercial salon (where the students also learn) more accessible and prominent within the city. Julia put together a technology wish list that she thought would enhance the learner experience, as well as reflecting the direction that many higher end salons are going.

The college bought interactive mirrors that can project images from a computer, sourced from a local company, Konnectiv Technology. A key aspect, highlighted by Julia, was to ensure that the ‘learning’ and ‘commercial’ salons had the same feel and so exactly the same furniture was used, though the additional technology was only installed in the commercial salon to ensure the refurbishment remained within budget.

The beauty salon has also installed a customisable mood lighting and sound system to enhance the client experience and provide a more realistic work experience for the students. Additional technologies, including flexible projectors that can display or be used as interactive whiteboards, have been installed in all learning spaces. The college is also in the early stages of distributing iPads that could be used in the same way as the interactive mirrors but also to capture evidence to be used in students’ e-Individual Learning Plans (eILPs) in Moodle, which had been used successfully the previous year.

![Interactive mirror used by students at Rotherham College of Arts and Technology](image)

**The outcomes**

The interactive mirrors can be used by:

- Students to watch training videos and develop their own skills when they are between clients;
- The tutor to share content from the main projection screen to individual interactive mirror screens;
- The college to highlight promotions to clients.
Students have created their own electronic file of different hairstyles that can be used with clients via the interactive mirrors to replace the old books and magazines.

Julia added that she aimed to be able to show that they had an outstanding learning environment that led to an outstanding learner experience.
The impact
Julia expects the impact to increase as time progresses but she has already seen:
- Increased visibility and awareness of the commercial salon;
- Increased accessibility to the commercial salon;
- Additional learning opportunities for students between clients when working and learning in the commercial salon.

The following impacts are expected as time progresses:
- Increased competitive edge will lead to higher numbers of applicants onto courses because of the availability of an enhanced learning and work based experience;
- Even better results from students supported by the technology within the salon environments;
- More realistic and genuine work based experience with opportunities to develop selling skills and improve their employability;
- Increased aspirations from students to work in high end salons and/or set up their own salons because they know what is possible;
- Increased numbers of new and returning clients to the commercial salons.

The lessons learned
- Make sure that the length of the project is achievable and that plans are signed off as early as possible to minimise disruption;
- Be fully aware of any limitations that may be caused by working within an existing building with existing services infrastructure that may not always be easily suited to the new plans;
- Allow enough time to train staff, especially when projects are completed over summer and may not be completed much before the start of the new academic year;
- Override IT timeout settings so that displays do not go into standby part way through a video because of perceived inactivity.
Future plans to exploit the full potential of the new technology include:
- Installing a database system to enable electronic files to be stored for each client and then using the interactive mirrors to conduct initial consultations;
- Adding additional functionality to take photos of clients to then be able to use the interactive mirrors during consultations to try out different hair styles and colours virtually;
- Enabling clients to use the PC / interactive mirrors to check emails to be a more inviting option to salons without that functionality;
- Using the salon environment to conduct online exams.

Useful links
- [Rotherham College of Arts and Technology](http://www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies)
- [Konnectiv Technology Limited](http://www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies)

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