Gloucester County Council Adult Education: Developing innovative resources through Xerte

Summary

Gloucester Council Adult Education have utilised Xerte to enhance their resources and access to learning materials for both staff and their learners. This has been a big challenge for the adult education team responsible for creating the resources and this case study aims to highlight their success, but to also recognise issues and how they have been resolved during the development.

About Gloucester County Council Adult Education

Adult Education aims to enable adults in Gloucestershire to use learning to improve their lives and those of their families through personal development and enhanced skills for employment, and to contribute to improvements in the quality of life of the communities in which they live.

The challenge

Gloucestershire Council Adult Education gained funding through the transformation fund to create 1 hour-long courses for carers.

Following on from this development the Adult Education team were assigned the task of setting up all their courses on Moodle, this would involve uploading a range of different resources using different programs like Microsoft Powerpoint, Word and also Video resources.

The Adult Education team soon realised that there were several issues with the development of Xerte within Moodle, these included:

- Incompatible file formats
- Issues with converting audio and video formats
- Limited help materials for practitioners with little or no experience of developing within Xerte
- Functionality issues of Xerte objects in relation to screen sizes
The activity

The Adult Education team came across Xerte by accident during a training session and they quickly realised that this could help them to overcome many of the issues they faced.

They also saw the potential for accessibility enhancements through using Xerte, as they found a series of very useful tools embedded within the program to help their learners. This inclusivity was something that appealed to them and they made the decision to invest in Xerte.

The Adult Education sought advice from the RSC South West, who provided them with a USB stick containing Xerte, which they used to install the program. The RSC South West also provided a useful hand-out to help explain how to upload Xerte to Moodle and using the basic functions. They also had help from the TechDis website, which had useful toolkits and a range of help materials for Xerte.

Some of the positive examples of how they are using Xerte include using the objects created within Moodle within a live teaching session. For example there is an Introduction to Chicken Keeping course, which involves an activity where the learners can interact with an image of a chickens head to correctly label the right attributes of the chicken, this involves moving the name of the part onto the head. If the answer is wrong it will flag this up and the learner can start again.

![Example of an interactive chicken](image)

They also have other activities for example a geneology object, which has a timeline of generations of family members and dates of birth. This activity involves the learner trying to work out which family members belong to a certain section of the timeline. So the learner can drag and drop the family members into the timeline, when they complete the timeline it will tell them how many are correct or incorrect and the learner can re-start the activity.
The outcomes

During development of the Xerte objects Amanda and Jane had several issues, which they struggled to resolve through the Xerte technical help lists, primarily due to the technical language used.

The main problems they faced were due to the fact that they simply had no idea that they would require a whole additional set of skills to create Xerte objects, these issues include:

- No information about converting the format of audio and video for uploading to Xerte
- They often worked from home to convert media
- A limited period of time on the project
- Training staff on producing resources through Xerte

“One of the problems with Xerte is that once you start developing resources and content, you need a range of additional skills that you had no idea you needed before you started in order to make it work” – Jane

“Depending on where you are coming from, if you already know HTML and have a good level of ability in using computers and online-based resources, then it is probably easy to use. But if you are not as skilled in these areas it can be very difficult and frustrating” - Amanda

In addition the problem with downloading a program that is only free for 30 days is that once it runs out you need to try and find another program that is able to do the same job as before, this comes with added issues such as:

- Finding another free, unrestricted program
- Learning completely new programs
- The time to learn a new program

“You could almost do with a USB stick, with all the necessary resources and programs to enable you to work with Xerte without having to worry about the network restrictions” – Jane

This case study has also identified a piece of software called WinFF, which will enable the conversion of file formats from WMA to MP3 and also to .FLV. This program is free to use and download and also easy to use. http://winff.org/html_new/

Looking at the benefits of Xerte, it is easy for the learners and staff to navigate around, it has intuitive buttons and information is not swamping the user. The colours are clear and text is easily visible on screen.

Another feature of the content developed in Xerte is that the pages and the layout are similar and the way in which the interactive elements are used. So once the learner has been able to immerse into a course, they will have the skills to know how the other courses function because all the resources have been created with the learner in mind. This encourages the learner to be more involved in the materials because they feel more comfortable about using a new system.
“The response from tutors has been excellent, when they see the Xerte objects that have been created they are really excited and can clearly see the benefits” – Amanda

“When you present the information on the screen in the learning object itself, Xerte does not allow you to clutter up the screen as there is only so much information you can display, so the learner is not overwhelmed by too much information” – Amanda

Another benefit of Xerte has been the orientation page, which has helped them to think about their aims and objectives and to then devise a clear picture for tutors, who have limited experience of delivering educational content online. It has enabled them to consider how to target their resources for their learners in the most effective way. So by identifying who the resources are for and also how they are going to use them.

“We found the orientation page very useful to help with our aims and objectives, this will have great benefits for tutors who did not have any prior experience of delivering educational materials online” – Jane

Xerte also has prompts within the templates for tutors to help them and guide them during the development of their courses. So it gives the tutor ideas about the next steps to take.
The impact

From the learners that have trialled Xerte they respond well and like the profession look and feel of the system. Some of their learners have not experienced using an online learning-based system before and enjoy the versatility of being able to work on their materials online and come back later.

Example of a photograph embedded into Xerte

In order to help their staff with creating Xerte objects the Adult Education team have created a course in Xerte for any new staff to use, this enables them to post any questions, which are answered by Jane or Amanda and posted back so that the whole community are able to access this area. This has had great benefits for them rather than answering the questions or issues individually they have created a resource that is continually being built on to help their staff.

“Don’t think it will be an easy ride, because you will have to up-skill your workforce and pick out people from the workforce that are willing to embrace it and devote their time and energy into it.” – Amanda

“I have being having to devote a lot of my own time into the project outside of work to make it successful, so we are almost victims of our own success. But we are happy because it is something that we have really enjoyed being a part of and also the knowledge we can give to help other providers may help ease the transition for them” – Jane

“We think that other councils should look into using Xerte, but be aware of the time needed to create content and the issues we have experienced. And also to look at how we have organised our project and managed to roll this out with Moodle successfully.” – Jane

“What needs to happen is for there to be another area for non-technical staff within the Xerte lists, so that people who are not technical can get advice and help from someone that is at a level that they understand” – Jane

“I think Xerte is a really brilliant tool, I would definitely recommend it” – Jane

“I can see that over the next year this will really take off, and we have everything in place in terms of building skills” – Jane
Useful links

- Xerte project
- Xerte Online toolkit
- Techdis and Xerte
- Xerte Friday's at Techdis
- Xerte toolkit sandpit

Disclaimer

Jisc Regional Support Centres work with more than 2,000 UK learning providers helping them to improve performance and efficiency through the use of technology. Case studies may refer to specific products, processes or services. Such references are examples and are not endorsements or recommendations and should not be used for product endorsement purposes.