Eastleigh College: Qwizdom gets the vote for engaging revision sessions

Summary

Teaching theory to vocational learners can often be a struggle, particularly when it is time to consolidate and revise for tests and exams. One Plumbing and Gas tutor at Eastleigh College is spearheading the use of Qwizdom to improve engagement and consequent test results. The impact of using this interactive classroom voting system has been very encouraging, with improved module completion rate and the ability to objectively evaluate strengths and weaknesses of both course delivery and student understanding.

About Eastleigh College

Eastleigh College is in the top 10% of general Further Education colleges nationally, and is recognised for its high standards of teaching and achievement with Beacon Status. The College is also recognised as a Centre of Vocational Excellence for Refrigeration, Electrical Installation, Air Conditioning, Retail and Logistics, and Leisure Marine Industries. Eastleigh offers a range of nationally recognised vocational qualifications highly respected by employers preparing learners for employment or Higher Education.

The challenge

As an experienced Plumbing and Gas tutor at Eastleigh College, Alan Head understands only too well the challenge of preparing his students for the numerous theory tests that punctuate all the courses he delivers. A combination of disengagement, low academic self-esteem and the ‘fear of failure in front of friends’ often conspire to reduce learners’ attention in class, diminish their revision efforts before a test and, inevitably, undermine their examination performance. As a result, Alan has always been on the lookout for anything that helps to overcome these significant obstacles.
Alan first came across Qwizdom (see panel below) during his CertEd training, when it was introduced as a teaching aid. He could see the potential of this e-learning tool straightaway: “The hardest thing is to get my students to answer questions in front of their peers in a classroom setting. Qwizdom allows privacy and saves face. It is a physical action and the students love the competitive aspect – both against each other and the clock. It creates a completely different dynamic and gets them totally involved.”

The Qwizdom Interactive Learning System uses two-way infra-red communications to provide instant assessment and feedback to every participant in a classroom. Using individual handsets linked to a host PC running the bundled ActionPoint software, class and individual response data can be captured, displayed and printed out in reports or exported for use in other programs.

So 18 months ago, with the help of e-Learning Facilitator Emma Dollery, Alan set about spearheading the use of Qwizdom into his classrooms.

The activity

Now he uses Qwizdom and its associated software (ActionPoint) as a revision and assessment tool on a regular basis to engage his learners. ActionPoint integrates tightly with PowerPoint, allowing him to import existing presentations so they can be used with the Qwizdom remote handset units, making revision interactive and more enjoyable.

Buzzers at the ready...Qwizdom in action

The process of producing a Qwizdom test session is fairly straightforward. The latest versions of ActionPoint use an ‘Add In’ within PowerPoint. The tutor creates a normal PowerPoint Presentation but uses the ActionPoint tools to add question slides and set the correct answers for each question (options can include multiple corrects answers, correct sequence, single choice and yes/no responses). The questions can be set to advance when everyone has answered and/or after a pre-set time. ActionPoint can even be programmed to randomly select a particular student...
(in terms of a handset number) to answer a specific question. The question slides can be edited and formatted like a normal PowerPoint Presentation.

The outcomes

Alan observes: “After three or four revision sessions, my students lose the will to live. So I now use Qwizdom for a single 30-question final revision test before each end-of-module exam, and it seems to have made a real difference.” Alan has also used his Qwizdom tests at the beginning and end of each module to evaluate progression.

Quizzes can be displayed as a normal PowerPoint presentation or interspersed with ActionPoint games – such as Baseball, Fast Track and Mars Mission - to create a bit of competition within the group. The remote handheld units are assigned to each student; which means reports from ActionPoint can be created for the entire class or for individual students to compare previous attempts and view improvements or gaps in knowledge.

Report types generated using the ActionPoint Reporting Wizard include:

- Answer
- Answer Distribution
- Score
- Participant Detail
- Participant Group

The impact

In terms of impact, Alan is unequivocal: “Students look forward to it and the information sticks, despite it appearing to them as a game. I can measure the improvement Qwizdom has made by inspecting the rate that students complete their modules. The earlier they finish the whole course, the quicker and more effectively
they have completed each module. This year, all my students using Qwizdom tests (bar one) had finished by April, which is much earlier than the parallel course which made no use of this technology."

Through the use of Qwizdom, Alan now has a complete set of student results produced by the ActionPoint reports and can keep a record of how well individuals are progressing. The results by question number also provide Alan with a way of identifying areas that the class as a whole may need to revisit before an exam, or areas in which individuals may be struggling. Alan adds: “Qwizdom has made revision sessions a lot more engaging for the students. They are practical learners and really put their knowledge into action during the quizzes, usually just to beat the others in the games. The reports are very beneficial to me as a tutor. I can instantly see which areas I may need to revisit and if any students are struggling in a particular area.”

So what do the learners think of Qwizdom? Ben, one of Alan’s students observes: “I don’t usually like revision sessions, just in case I’m the only one in the class that doesn’t understand a concept. But using Qwizdom brings the group together. Revision is more interesting and I’ve realised I’m probably not the only one who doesn’t understand a question. The class discussions help us all.”

For Emma Dollery, Alan’s use of Qwizdom is paving the way for others. “This is the most successful implementation of Qwizdom in the College. Others try it sporadically but can be put off easily when things go wrong. Alan has persevered and has now become the lead tutor with this e-learning tool. As a result of the success that he has demonstrated, other departments such as Mathematics and Sports are beginning to make their own inroads.”

Looking to develop the deployment of Qwizdom further, Emma would like to replicate the model of using a Qwizdom test at the beginning and end of each module in a
wider variety of subjects – not only to evaluate student progress in other curriculum areas but to collate some objective data on the impact of using this e-learning tool.

**The lessons learned**

Highlighting some of the problems encountered Emma states: “The most frequent issue we come across is handsets not communicating with the host. Downloading the appropriate drivers minimises the frequency of this occurrence. However, when it does happen, the only thing the tutor or technician can do is to reboot the system and individual handsets.

![Emma Dollery demonstrating Qwizdom in the classroom](image)

“The other consideration is version control. There have been several upgrades to the ActionPoint software, so it can be quite a task to ensure that specific individual machines have the correct version installed before running a Qwizdom session in that classroom.”

For other practitioners considering using Qwizdom as part of their delivery, Emma offers these tips:

- Train staff on both the ActionPoint software and set-up procedure
- Depending on the size and type of class, provide some technical assistance to the tutor (particularly during early runs)
- Once a questionnaire has been prepared and converted, perform a trial run on the machine you will be using every time
- Go for the larger handsets if you can afford them as they are rechargeable
- Create your own guides

From the tutor’s point of view, Alan suggests: “It’s all about engagement and trying to keep their attention. So introduce some deliberate wrong answers to keep them on their toes; illustrate your PowerPoint questions with some humorous or gimmicky imagery; and use the ActionPoint games to create animations in between questions to make a real race of it. My personal favourite is Fast Track, which really grabs the students’ attention as they try to get their racing car in the lead and cross the finishing line first.”

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Qwizdom
Turning Point
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Electronic voting systems JiscMail List

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