Cornwall College Bite-size online staff development sessions improving organisational efficiency

Summary

Bex Ferriday, Learning Technologist and VLE Administrator, has developed a series of online baseline briefings for staff CPD (Continued Professional Development). These briefings have not only helped to reduce costs and save time for staff, but have also streamlined access to resources, providing a fantastic and much more versatile system than before. Online training is now available 24 hours a day through the college VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) and communication has been enhanced considerably.

About Cornwall College

In August 2001 Cornwall College (in Camborne) merged with St.Austell College, creating cross-county coverage focussing on a wide range of vocational subjects and A-levels, making it a major player on the national scene. Saltash College, Duchy College and Falmouth Marine School, smaller but more specialised colleges, also became part of the Cornwall College Group at the same time.

The challenge

The college already have in place many very good systems to help students, such as their Moodle VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) and Second Life virtual world platform. After careful research it became apparent to Bex that provision for staff was not as effective, particularly for their CPD.

Bex was tasked with providing a potential cost-saving solution. She came up with the idea of providing online staff CPD training as a complete alternative to face to face training.

Before Bex introduced the online training, the previous system involved hosting specific training on set days. This would mean that the college would employ the services of a consultant trainer to attend the college. Whilst face- to-face
training was an effective medium to offer staff, it was not always convenient for them. This invariably created several issues, such as:

- Staff would often spend considerable time travelling between campuses throughout Cornwall
- The college was having to pay for consultants to attend the college at high costs, providing accommodation and lunch in many cases
- Due to staff CPD training taking place intermittently throughout the year, some staff would miss sessions due to illness, changes to their teaching rota or travel difficulties

Staff had no way of re-visiting training to ‘brush up’ their knowledge.

The activity

Bex was asked to create a series of online bite-size sessions, called ‘baseline briefings’, which staff could access through the College Moodle. These baseline briefings would aim to bridge the gap in staff training and also solve the issues they had.

In order to create the baseline briefings Bex used Adobe Presenter, as this program enables the user to:

- Create presentations
- Embed video/audio content
- Add quizzes/questions
- Add interactive functionality
- Embed into Moodle

Screen shot of the Facebook baseline briefing

Bex wanted to make the baseline briefings concise, visual and easy to navigate, to provide the user with a good experience. It was an important factor to make the content easy to understand.
Bex noted, “The beauty of using Adobe Presenter is that you can add quizzes and questions, which is important for consolidating people’s knowledge during the courses.”

The baseline briefings are now available for staff at the college and operate as follows:

- Staff login to Moodle to access the course
- They are then presented with slides, which are played through like a video, which Bex narrates over the top
- Each slide can be paused at any time and slides run through a series of chapters
- At specific points in the course there are questions that staff must complete with a score of 80% or higher in order to continue
- If they fail they can revisit the chapter until they get it right
- When they complete each course they can claim 30 minutes towards their CPD

In order to make the online courses available to staff through the college VLE, Bex exports the baseline briefings as SCORMs (Sharable Content Object Reference Model) – this is the required file type that is needed in order for the courses to work in Moodle.

**The outcomes**

The main outcomes of the project as a whole are:

- Considerable paper savings
- Staff travel time has been cut down
- Consultancy cost savings
- Staff are better informed about technology
- Carbon savings
Bex is now in a position to provide continued development of the baseline briefings and staff have already approached her to request additional content for new courses. This has resulted in the development of an autism awareness and Facebook baseline briefing.

Bex explained, “We are potentially making significant savings of up to a £1000 per physical training session, if you take into consideration accommodation, lunch, travel and consultant costs”

Staff are being encouraged to work through a baseline briefing about Facebook as more and more pages and groups are being created by college staff on the popular social networking site. The briefing is providing them with the knowledge and instruction on safeguarding issues to help them protect their students.

The impact

The baseline briefings are providing staff with a one-stop-shop for their CPD, but not only that, they have enhanced communication and access to resources. It is also a great way of introducing more blended learning into the college for staff. As this is often an area that is not specifically taught and as e-learning is ever evolving it is even more important that staff have the opportunity to explore how to best use technology effectively. That is something that Bex has really helped to push at the college and is continuing to do so through her baseline briefings.

In order to quantify whether the baseline briefings have been of use to staff, Bex has put up a survey through Survey Monkey. So far 12 members of staff have completed the survey, which has shown a positive response to every question. Here are some of the key findings:
“The online sessions have really helped me to save time”

- Strongly agree 16.7%
- Somewhat agree 50%
- Agree 16.7%
- Disagree 8.3%
- Strongly disagree 8.3%

“The online sessions have really cut travelling costs and difficulties attending”

- Strongly agree 50%
- Somewhat agree 16.7%
- Agree 20%
- Disagree 8.3%

“The sessions are really valuable”

- Strongly agree 36.4%
- Somewhat agree 36.4%
- Agree 27.3%

Most staff agreed that they prefer online sessions to face-to-face and that the sessions have opened them up to a more blended learning approach. Bex explained, “I think this is the way forward for a lot of colleges because time is at a premium for teaching staff, a lot of them are teaching 8 hours and day 5 days a week and they need to find time outside of this for lesson preparation.” He then added, “Making training available at a time that suits staff is fundamental, offering them the flexibility to gain CPD when their personal time is often taken up with marking and lesson preparation”

The lessons learned

The ethos at Cornwall College is very much about learner led learning and communication and collaboration with students. Through the baseline briefings Bex has helped to instil the same level of support for staff.

In terms of lessons learnt during this project, there have not really been any major issues. Bex has had to teach herself how to use Adobe Presenter, which has not been particularly challenging for her as she is already proficient at developing many platforms and systems to aid students at the college.
A good example of how visually appealing the baseline briefing is

What is apparent is that the briefings have been created with a lot of attention to detail, the style of the presentations and the way they have been created is visually appealing. The courses really do work and because Bex has experience of producing presentations using the ‘Pecha Kucha’ style, she is very aware of how to engage with an audience and the key factor of being able to maintain interest.

Regarding sustainability the project is clearly very sustainable, as it can be exported and copied. As long as the college have a VLE or web-based system for students and staff they will be able to continue using the baseline briefings. In fact these materials are only going to improve and increase, so overall they represent a fantastic resource.

Bex noted, “I think the project is sustainable, I can’t see any reason it’s not and every time I produce one of these training sessions, we could in theory be saving that £1000 I was talking about earlier.” He then added, “Online delivery is just the way to go for staff CPD, it’s a no brainer”

**Useful links**

- [Cornwall College website](#)
- [Jisc RSC South West website](#)
- [Facebook as a tool for improving student outcomes](#)
- [Facing up to Facebook: A guide for FE and HE](#)
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