New College Nottingham: Using MyStudyBar with learners

Summary

New College Nottingham has adopted the MyStudyBar package to help all of its learners with planning, reading, writing and additional visual support. It is a free and simple to use collection of tools that can be copied to a USB stick or placed on the desktop. Both staff and learners have shown great enthusiasm for this reliable and flexible software package and the College is looking at ways to ensure that it has the biggest impact possible across the whole organisation.

About New College Nottingham

New College Nottingham (ncn) is one of the largest Further Education colleges in the UK, with a wide range of full and part-time study programmes across Nottingham and the surrounding area.

Courses are offered at a variety of levels, from pre-entry right through to degree-level study. The choice of subjects and qualifications is extensive and subjects are grouped into 12 academic schools.

The challenge

The Additional Learning Support (ALS) team at ncn is one of the largest teams in the College with over 100 members of staff. To help the myriad of learners whom they support, staff were using a wide range of different software applications. Using multiple packages for different solutions was becoming unwieldy so greater standardisation was required.

Amongst the tools used by the team was the award winning AccessApps suite developed by JISC TechDis and JISC RSC Scotland North & East. The ALS team had bought a large stock of USB memory sticks, installed the software and then distributed these to ALS staff across all campus sites to use with students and staff.
The activity

Andrew Edis, one of the College's ILT co-ordinators, received notification through his Regional Support Centre in Spring 2010 of a new addition to the AccessApps family called MyStudyBar.

MyStudyBar is a floating toolbar that links to a suite of 15 learning support tools designed to help overcome problems students commonly experience when studying.

The main difference to AccessApps is that there are fewer programmes on MyStudyBar, making it simpler to get to grips with.

The applications have been put together to support the complete study cycle from research, planning and structuring to getting across a written or spoken message.

![MyStudyBar is a suite of 15 free learning support tools](image)

The software was downloaded and installed on memory sticks then given to appropriate people in the College to trial.

Michelle Iannantuono, Head of ALS, was one of those impressed with the new package. Following a very positive initial response from the Dyslexia team, it was passed on to the rest of the Literacy & Numeracy team, and is now being used by the entire ALS school.

Following this favourable initial feedback an informal working group was set up to look at how the whole College could make the most of MyStudyBar.

To gather more feedback from staff MyStudyBar was one of the new technologies featured in Staff Development week in July 2010. This included:
• Training workshops – MyStudyBar was installed in all staff training areas of the CPD Centre and a series of workshops were run during the week. Staff preferred to start by going through the set of tutorials that come with MyStudyBar themselves rather than a more formal demonstration.

• Technology Day - Learning Centre staff set up a series of stations for demonstrations, including MyStudyBar.

The feedback from teaching staff was overwhelmingly positive. Over 200 teaching staff were introduced to the software package and many of them left with their own copy on a USB drive.

MyStudyBar proved to be the most popular of the software applications on display, leading the team to put on further training sessions.

“There was lots of discussion and sharing of ideas across different curriculum areas. One of the most important things to come out was that it was seen as a tool for all learners not just the ones supported by the ALS team.”

Maria Nicholas – Head of Learning Centres and ICT

MyStudyBar helps learners with:

• personal choice and flexibility – as the software can be used anywhere;
• inclusion – as using the software doesn’t highlight that a learner needs additional help; and
• independent learning – as in some cases there is no longer a need to have a teaching assistant present.

**The outcomes**

The outcome of this activity was that the College decided that it wanted to roll-out the use of MyStudyBar on as wide a scale as possible.

Under consideration was:

• Giving students a memory stick with MyStudyBar and the College Handbook pre-installed; and
• Deployment to all local PC desktops.

Unfortunately, the first option was beyond the budget at the time so, instead, the ALS team bought a large batch of memory sticks and pre-installed the software using multi-burn USB drives that they now give to learners on request.

The Learning Centres are promoting MyStudyBar across the College using displays to stimulate interest. Additionally, some learners have even been requesting it directly, often after having used it previously in school. There are also anecdotes of
learners copying the application between themselves, clear evidence of the value of MyStudyBar.

MyStudyBar is promoted in the Learning Centres

For the longer term, Rachel Graham, ICT Programme Manager, is now co-ordinating the deployment of MyStudyBar to the desktops of all staff and learners.

**The impact**

MyStudyBar has had rapid take-up across the College and is being used across all types of provision, including Work Based Learning, Community learning, Higher Education and Pre-entry level. It is also being used across all the sites ncn operates on.

“We never anticipated the demand would be as much as it is. I initially thought that it would be of use for my ALS team, but the demand from across the College just keeps on rising.

“As it is easy-to-use and reliable, one of the consequences of using it is that ALS staff need to spend less time explaining how to use it. Another consequence is that we’ve had fewer requests for specialist software, which can be expensive. So overall the impact has been to make our budget stretch further.”

Michelle Iannantuono – Head of Additional Learning Support (ALS)

It is too early to assess the full impact of MyStudyBar at ncn but an early anecdote shows the potential.

One particular learner had been using the JAWS screen-reading software prior to attending the College. After being shown MyStudyBar she preferred the Magnifier application within it and started using it. As the software is on her USB stick it means that she is now not restricted to where she can go, for example she is now able to use the PCs in her local internet café.
“The tutorials and support available with MyStudyBar is excellent. Everything that you need is there, so there’s no need to re-invent the wheel, which saves ILT staff time.

Both teaching and support staff have found it incredibly easy to pick up and use. It has made learners feel comfortable and confident in their studies.”

Andrew Edis, ILT co-ordinator

The timing of the roll-out has not been ideal. Whilst developments happened very quickly over a four month period, the unexpected popularity of this package has meant that it was not possible to have everything set up in time for the new academic year. Instead, the College hopes to deploy the desktop during the Autumn 2010 term depending upon work commitments.

The College would also ideally like to have given all its learners a pre-loaded USB stick, and this option is under investigation for future intakes.

Useful links

New College Nottingham website

MyStudyBar

AccessApps

Jisc RSC East Midlands website

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