
Summary

At stage 4 ICT apprenticeship training, Functional skills requires that students complete an Employability module as key elements. Given the diverse mix of students on the course, from those yet to start work, those on day release and those undertaking retraining, the employability module is in the words of Dominic Thompson lecturer at Highbury College “Is a bit of a dry subject”. So he decided to combine an ICT web site design project with this subject area to improve interest and engagement. The result was a series of excellent websites, far better engagement by the students, better results than the year before and completion by the whole class of the employability module.

About Highbury College, Portsmouth

Highbury is a general further education college with over 45 years teaching and learning experience and takes pride in its commitment to equality and diversity, supporting students of all abilities and from all backgrounds.

In 2011 the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) judged Highbury to be a Grade 1 outstanding College. No.1 for student success Highbury outperforms all colleges, both general further education and sixth form in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Students at Highbury College benefit from first-class facilities and the support they need to succeed. A multi-million pound redevelopment incorporates the latest sustainable technology and improved accessibility, underpinning their vision to be a world-class college.

The challenge

The key challenge was to improve engagement with the employability module of stage 4 apprenticeship training for ICT students. This is a compulsory topic for all students, even though many will have visited the employability module at
stage 2 and or 3.

Dominic commented “The students were on this module primarily for ICT training and development, so all had some basic computer and web knowledge. My challenge was to cover the employability module in a new way so that the students would enjoy the subject area. I decided to find a suitable web design programme that the students had not used before but could get to grips with quickly. After looking at several options I decided on WordPress a Content management system”

**The activity**

Dominic explained “The first stage was to become familiar with WordPress myself. After being shown the system by a friend I was soon able to get to grips with the various elements, and design my first basic website in just a couple of hours. “

Next Dominic ran a one and a half training session with the students on WordPress. After which he set them the following challenge:

To create a “job site” website that demonstrates the necessary professional development and employability skills that employer’s desire.

Dominic outlined “As a means of demonstrating the software I created the assignment using WordPress (www.blogs.hcprojects.co.uk/cpd) showing the students how important not just the content, but the overall layout, colour scheme and ease of use is. The websites that the students are creating are being assessed against the learning outcomes (and the merits/distinctions) so that all the students will be submitting is the link to their website.”

Students are able to upload documents, videos and images to the website to make the website more dynamic. The focus of this assignment is threefold:

- **Making sure the assessment criteria are met is paramount;**
- **Promoting the use of ELT in this manner so the students can use this software again is extremely useful;**
- **Thirdly, getting students to think about the target audience when creating materials further prepares them for the world of work**
The outcomes

All students completed the employability module at a higher standard than the previous year.

The innovative approach came second in a strong assessment category at the JISC RSC Hi 5 awards in 2012

Here are the judges comments:

“This was a good example of an innovative solution to engaging learners in a traditionally unpopular unit on employability. The nominee decided to let students use WordPress to create websites within the context of employability. The evidence submitted, was of a high calibre,. We look forward to seeing several more examples of students work.”

“The nominee provided high-quality ‘how to’ documentation to support learners who were new to the blogging tool. The example of a student’s work provided showed a high level of engagement with the subject matter. The quantitative data on achievement rates provided additional evidence on the effectiveness of the solution.”

“This application showed innovation and creativity and is a worthy runner up in the Assessment category at Beginner level.”

The impact

Dominic commented “Comparing this year (using WordPress) with last year; the quality of work submitted has increased greatly, the students really take pride in their website and will actively compete with each other to make theirs the best. This healthy peer assessment that naturally occurs within the class is a result of the method of assessment being used. Taking a subject that, if we are honest, the students don’t like doing and using ELT as a means of
making the knowledge being learnt more valid has really made this subject a pleasure to teach rather than a chore.
Using WordPress as a means of assessment, and cascading this success to colleagues, has given Highbury College another dimension when assessing student work”

Highbury College prides itself in being at the forefront of developing new ELT solutions for teaching and learning and this is just another example of this being done. The innovative nature of the technology being used and its application allow Highbury College to pursue avenues that further personalise learning such as blended learning opportunities. In addition, some students who have excelled when using WordPress have created basic websites for external companies. This further promotes the excellence of Highbury Students and increases Highbury’s brand awareness in the local area.

**The lessons learned**

The college started with an advantage using this approach as the students were on an ICT course, so had some basic web and computer skills. This made training in the WordPress CMS quite easy. If this approach was to be adopted in other apprenticeship streams, more time in basic computer training would be required.

Overall, the key lesson was that even unpopular topics can be delivered when combined with a popular one. The learning of the subject area is delivered almost unconsciously as the students competed to have the best site.

**Useful links**

[Highbury College](#)

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