Myerscough College: MyApps - Improving inclusion brings benefits to all students

Summary

Rob Robinson saw the potential for using Access Apps to support learners but the college network identified it as a threat because it is a suite of applications. Individual applications could be run successfully however, so to get round the problem Rob decided to cherry pick the applications that he thought would provide most support to the students, and distributed it as MyApps. This was trialled with learners last year and is now being rolled out to all learners.

About Myerscough College

Myerscough College is a rurally based college which offers a wide range of courses specialising in land based and sports industries. It offers over 20 different subjects including; motorsports, golf, football, horticulture and landscaping, animal care and equine studies. The college offers both FE and HE with around 700 resident students on the campus.

It has centres in Manchester, Blackburn, Burnley and Liverpool all specialising in land based and sports courses. Another centre in Dorset specialises in veterinary nursing. All of the courses on offer have a hands-on approach and students may well spend time in a placement off site.

The challenge

After attending a workshop by RSC Northwest where Access Apps was showcased, Rob Robinson (Inclusive Learning Tutor) saw its potential for supporting students at Myerscough College. Rob saw it as a way of being able to provide an alternative to expensive commercial software with licenses which limited where the learners could access it. When he tried to run the application on the college network it would not run as it was identified as a suite of applications and a potential threat.

The activity

To get around the network issues Rob decided to pick a set of apps and put them together to form MyApps. As some of the apps enabled sound he decided to put the apps onto a memory stick with MP3 capabilities.
The first set of MyApps was trialled with a group of HE students who took to it immediately. The success was such that other students started asking for a copy too. The initial 100 sets were soon distributed on a year-long loan basis.

**The outcomes**

The apps that Rob decided to include for the first year were:

- DSpeech – text to speech
- X Mind – mind mapping software
- Hotnotes – on-screen post its
- SS Overlay – colour filter
- Rappid Set – change settings for PC display quickly
- View Bar – letterbox overlay which focuses reader on short area of text
- Sonar – highlights cursor location
- Magnifier

The success of MyApps is such that the college intends to distribute it to all students this year. This will bring other benefits too as the student handbook will be incorporated into the apps cutting down on printing costs. Rob is planning to have tutorials for the apps in video format where ever possible. He sees this will be a particular benefit to learners in Work Based Learning (WBL) as there is no funding to support them and they are geographically spread out, meaning that tutor time with them is limited. This will facilitate a good level of support at a low cost.

One of the major benefits identified is the range of support that has been enabled. Not only has it been beneficial for dyslexic and autistic learners, but it has also proven to be a valuable teaching resource for staff and a planning tool for senior management. Many students who do not qualify for, or need support, have found many ways to make use of the resource.

Rob Robinson tells us: "This software is perfect for students to plan assignments. It’s a great piece of free software that’s been used from level one to HE, with work submitted as mind maps or exported to MS Word so it can be used as a writing frame. I saw one HE student using green markers to show which parts he’d completed as he worked through an assignment."
The impact

The initial group of students who used MyApps had a highly motivational tutor. The group shared the way they were using the apps to inspire each other.

Val Senior (Learning Support Manager) told me how it had helped a student with Asperger’s syndrome who struggled to start assignments: “X-Mind helped the student break the assignment down into small chunks so it looked like a less daunting task. He said it was like having a light switched on for him.”

The mind mapping software allows students to capture ideas and then exported to present them as a writing frame.

Val has also presented ideas to the senior management team using X mind. They liked the way it provided an alternative, less linear way to communicate presentations.

Many of the teaching staff have found Sonar and the Magnifier useful tools in the classroom. They have also used View Bar to highlight specific areas of text on screen, and a similar product but with a vertical display has proved useful for a tutor teaching spreadsheets.

For the IS team it means that they do not constantly need to install and update software. MyApps runs from the memory stick. This brings another advantage in that
it is not limited in the same way as software with a commercial licence. Students can use the products in college, in halls of residence and at home, where ever they need the support.

**The lessons learned**

Rob has advice for anyone wanting to undertake a similar project:

- Check out what you can do on your network first and see what will run.

- Don’t put too much into the package, limiting what is there means students aren’t overwhelmed and will spend time learning to use it rather than jumping between apps.

- Listen to what students and staff feedback to you and learn from it.

- Don’t be afraid to just show the learners the basics and then leave them to experiment.

- Get learners to showcase to each other and share ideas for use.

- Keep good examples of work in X Mind to help inspire others with its possibilities.

- If you want to implement something similar get in touch with Myerscough so they can help you find suppliers for the MP3s

**Useful links**

- [Jisc RSC Northwest](#)
- [Myerscough College](#)

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