Bolton Sixth Form College: The springboard project

Summary

Mishka Fielding, Learning Resources Manager with the help of Anthony Beal, e-Learning Adviser, RSC Northwest, created a one-hour interactive session to promote Learning Resources and Information Literacy to staff and students within the College. These sessions successfully promoted the department, increasing their stock circulation by 50% and their usage of e-books, putting them 1st out of 200 in the ‘Jisc Collections Project’.

About Bolton Sixth Form College

Bolton Sixth Form College has two campuses; one on Queen Street in Farnworth and the other on Deane Road in the town centre. They provide high quality education for 16-19 year olds.

The challenge

Mishka and Carole Smith, Student Supervisor, were asked to contribute to a ‘Skills Day’ for Level 1 and 2 students. This was a one day mandatory event for all students at the end of the academic year. Sessions were designed to help develop interviewing, literacy and research skills to ensure students had a good base knowledge of how to improve from one level to the next.

Mishka wanted to make the College aware of the impact Learning Resources could have on improving the quality of the learning experience. They delivered face-to-face workshops that engaged and informed learners.

The activity

Mishka attended a series of ‘Impact’ workshops run by RSC Northwest that prompted her to think about the impact Learning Resources and Information Literacy had on learning in the College. As a result she requested an opportunity to promote her materials and resources to staff and students. When Sandra McManus, Assistant Principal, was appointed she asked them to be involved in a ‘Skills Day’.

Lots of work had been done within the department, resulting in a need to re-educate staff and students about their services - what they could offer and what resources and materials were available. An Ofsted inspection gave the department the impetus to show the College everything they’d been working on and what impact they could have.
Sandra allocated the department six one-hour sessions to deliver a programme promoting their services, workshops and resources. They called this ‘The Springboard Project’.

A month was spent developing the project. Mishka condensed ‘The SCONUL Seven Pillars of Information Literacy’ into sections:

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<th>Section</th>
<th>Pillar</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Identify and assess</td>
<td>Sprint</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Plan and gather</td>
<td>Leap</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Evaluation and management of information</td>
<td>Soar</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Presentation of information</td>
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They took part of each section to create a mini ‘Springboard Project’ that could fit into one hour. They wanted this to be really interactive. It’s sometimes difficult to keep students’ attention, so they wanted the sessions to be less information and more activities.

Mishka had met Anthony through the Jisc workshops and thought he would be really useful to collaborate with on this project.

He provided a valuable activity. Students looked at web addresses of various websites and evaluated them just from the address. They then looked up the address and description via a search engine to see what they could devise from that. They compared this with their earlier notes and made notes on the actual website to assess whether the information was reliable. Finally, they gave feedback on what they had found.

It turned out that the websites were either fake, hoaxes or in one case, a racist hate site. No one had picked that up: they looked so professional and the information so accurate.

Mishka commented: “We didn’t have anything as informative as this to highlight the point that we wanted to make regarding the importance of evaluating information. Without Anthony and RSC Northwest it wouldn’t have been such an effective session with evident impact.”

Carole explains: “It helped having Anthony there. It gave me confidence having another pair of eyes and ears to chat to the group and give them ideas. The leaflets were brilliant. He was very supportive.”
Since the ‘Skills Day’ many additional opportunities have arisen. They now run an LRC induction to students at enrolment and other non-LRC related workshops. The ‘Skills Day’ is about to be repeated where they will deliver more sessions.

Mishka remarked: “This wouldn’t have happened if Anthony hadn’t supported us to deliver a successful workshop regarding Information Literacy. We have had numerous compliments from teaching staff and management regarding the content of the Springboard, particularly the ‘think before you click’ websites given to us by Anthony. Staff now ask us to offer advice and guidance with regards to research skills, referencing and bibliographies.”

Mishka also added that “when students start at College they don’t realise what a big gap there is between GCSEs and A-Levels. The sessions that we run help to bridge this gap”.

**The outcomes**

The students enjoyed the session and found it valuable. Another idea taken from Anthony was to provide post it notes for feedback at the end of the session. This gave valuable feedback which worked really well as it was anonymous.

“I've enjoyed it. You can't trust everything on the internet no matter how professional it looks.”

“It was really interesting - it will help me with my work and has made me feel much more confident.”

“I will ask LRC staff for help.”

[www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies](http://www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies)
Staff thought the Springboard was made up of relevant, informative and appropriate information. They now point students in the direction of the LRC as the sessions educated everyone about what help is available. Mishka now has requests from staff about workshops such as referencing and plagiarism. Previously they never received requests about their workshops and delivery of them.

Linda Stanley, Careers Advisor explained: “The Springboard Project was brilliant! Both delivery and content was applicable and fitting for the students taking part and the feedback indicated it was enjoyed by all participants. Every student progressed with improved competences in advanced information literacy skills. The presentation was imaginative, positive and relevant to the students’ needs and proved a beneficial prerequisite for their continuation.”

The sessions have given staff and students many benefits, more knowledge about the help available and where to go is just the start.

**The impact**

Carole Smith commented: “Mishka’s appointment was pivotal in bringing the department up-to-date. There was a lot to do to raise their level to that of other Colleges. It’s important to have that key person in place to drive a project like this forward.”

Stock circulation of books and resources has increased by about 50%. Usage of e-books went from 36th (out of 200) in the ‘Jisc Collections, e-books for FE project’ to 1st. The chance to inform students about the e-brary at ‘Skills Day’ was invaluable to showcase their information system and e-brary with 3000 e-books to the students. Before this people were unaware of what resources were available.

Mishka explains: “Teaching staff are far more complimentary about the department and now liaise with us regarding resources required for their teaching. Staff refer students to our service and resources much more now. This is reflected in the loans figures and coming top of the league table for the e-brary initiative. Colleagues appreciate our contributions to teaching and learning.”

Kathryn Edmondson, Learning Support Assistant commented: “I was impressed with The Springboard Project. The content and information delivered was hard hitting on the students. It was a great moment of realisation when they discovered you can’t believe everything you see and read on the internet. I’m looking forward to using this material with my students.”

The team now deliver numerous sessions. They produce monthly bulletins, a student handbook, display boards and weekly promotions. They have external speakers (guest rapper/local author), a book group and links with the public library. This raises the department’s profile and shows reading and writing isn’t boring and that students are interested.
The lessons learned

Mishka advises: “The LRC is an essential part of College life. It’s integral to students getting good results. We want to be at the forefront of learning and relied upon to help students and College achieve their potential.

Having Anthony was good for moral support; he was excellent with the students. I don’t think we could have made such impact without Anthony and RSC Northwest’s resources. We hadn’t anything like that. It made the point that students should use our resources as they have been vetted and are reliable.

I go to many Jisc events which are great in generating ideas about how to improve the LRC. I find them extremely useful in sharing ideas and improving our service.”

Useful links

Jisc RSC Northwest
Bolton Sixth Form College

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