Essex ACL: PTLLS for distance and blended learning

Summary

Funded by the LSIS Excellence and Improvement Fund, Essex Adult Community Learning has produced a distance/blended learning resource on CD-ROM for tutors in the post-16 sector to achieve the City & Guilds PTLLS (7303 Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector) at Level 4.

The aim of the resource is to improve teaching and learning by providing a flexible way to access initial teacher training where candidates may otherwise find it difficult or impossible to attend a taught course. It is also intended to increase tutors’ own e-learning skills.

About Essex ACL

Adult Community Learning is a strong, innovative and high quality county wide service which plans and delivers a range of learning opportunities for adults in Essex. Their aim is to enable and provide a friendly environment and at a time, place and pace to suit the learners.

Their mission: To make Essex a better place to live and work by developing and providing high quality adult learning.

They offer hundreds of courses and training programmes at venues across Essex and some of which are free. For the past few years more than 30,000 learners have enrolled annually on courses or training programmes.

The challenge

The City & Guilds qualification, Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) is designed to equip tutors with a substantive qualification that will enable them to pass the necessary threshold to teach.
This is a requirement for tutors at Essex ACL. However, running only taught courses became an issue because:

1. There was a lack of demand for some courses which then had to close. Tutors were then required to travel further. Tutors found that the taught courses were often scheduled for days and times eg Saturdays which made it difficult to attend due to family commitments
2. They were sending tutors to other providers to complete the course, which was costly when the Service had the staff and skills to provide their own training.

Therefore, Essex ACL needed a solution that could enable them to deliver PTLLS for all tutors at a place and time that was convenient for them.

**The activity**

Nola Marshall, Curriculum Manager for Languages, liaised with the content developers, ANQ, who she met at an E Guides national event – they have created many of NIACE’s resources and are familiar with the needs of adult learners. As a result of a successful bid for the LSIS Excellence and Improvement Fund project, Essex ACL were able to contract the developers to produce a set of electronic, interactive learning materials that could help deliver the PTLLS course for teacher training.

**The outcomes**

With the funding from LSIS, Nola and her colleague Jackie Kingman, Curriculum Manager for Teacher Training, now have an e-Learning resource that they can distribute to tutors who are required to complete PTLLS. It is a Dreamweaver/Adobe Flash based resource, which is available on CD and can be complemented with access to a Virtual Learning Environment.

There is a blend of theory and practical tasks for the users to complete, which cover:

- Co-operative Learning.
- Differentiation.
- Embedding Literacy, Language and Numeracy.
- Experiential Learning.
- Learning conversations.
• Modelling.
• Multi-sensory learning.
• Relating theory to practice.
• Using e-learning and technology.
• Assessment for learning.

The resource looks and feels like a website but does not require an internet connection to run as it will do so straight from the disk. This means the resources can be accessed with a computer anywhere and at any time. Although the resource is quite simple in design, it is incredibly easy to navigate and the course materials are orientated in a logical, coherent fashion, thus making it easy to use. This is particularly important for those with a low level competency in IT. (See screenshots)

![Screen Shot of Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS)](image)

The resource looks and feels like a website and is simple to follow

There is also a series of links to external websites and resources including the City & Guilds’ Smartscreen facility which is an online system designed to support learners through their progress for those subscribed to this service.
The Smartscreen facility is an online system designed to support learners through their progress.

The impact

Essex ACL have run a pilot with 5 of their tutors to evaluate the effectiveness of using the CD-Rom based materials. Overall the feedback has been very positive as Nola explains

“Generally those on the pilot found the resource to fit in much better with their work and family commitments, with one tutor taking it on holiday with her! They liked to be able to work at their own pace and most said that it had improved their own e-learning skills and given them confidence to experiment further in their own teaching. Additionally it is important to include a number of face-to-face sessions such as induction and microteach and other opportunities to communicate with the tutor and each other are also essential.”

The course promotes a whole-organisation approach by standardising delivery and pedagogical content, to encourage independent learning and to help tutors develop their own skills in e-Learning and embed these skills into their own teaching.

The CD-Rom resources are due to be rolled out to tutors and partners in April 2010.

The early success of this project has inspired the use of electronic content as a platform for delivering blended/distance learning in situations where face-to-face sessions are impractical for learners.
Useful links

http://www.essexacl.ac.uk/

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