People and Business Development (PBD): learning to deliver learning effectively

Summary

In October 2010, PBD introduced its eQual Learning VLE to provide an online knowledge resource for its students. During the project, the company learnt many lessons about how to deliver learning effectively. In the course of a year researching VLE platforms, looking for material, and remapping NVQ courses for new QCF qualifications, the company realised that it was more important to deliver engaging and relevant content, rather than boasting the most innovative technology.

About People and Business Development

PBD is a training provider specialising in early years and playwork. Based in Haverhill, Suffolk, the company uses web-based evidence portfolios to help learners achieve their goals with minimal disruption to their jobs. Since 2007, the company has delivered level 2 and 3 NVQ qualifications to over 300 learners. Their clients range from village playgroups to major national chains and Sure Start centres.

The challenge

“The teaching and learning environment before the VLE was inconsistent. We wanted to provide a resource which addressed this gap but also made proper use of the potential of technology to improve learner outcomes.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

Before the VLE was implemented knowledge delivery was too reliant on individual assessors delivering one-to-one coaching in the workplace.

If a student needed to gain further knowledge on a subject, the assessor would take time to talk about subjects such as child development. Sometimes these ad-hoc sessions would encroach on the process of workplace observation.
PBD’s main motivation for setting up the VLE was to add more quality to training in the childcare sector. Directors, Ross and Alison Midgley spent three years running a small chain of nurseries.

“We had experienced a lot of really poor training provision when we were customers, and wanted to prove we could do a better job.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

Before the VLE, there was little structure to the delivery of knowledge, and students had a very limited choice of media from which to learn.

“The main problem was that the learning environment didn’t suit people who have difficulties absorbing information from the printed page. Some people might still prefer reading from books, but now we can support a broad spectrum of learners.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

The activity

After launching the training company in 2007 with a focus on managing courses efficiently through e-portfolios, PBD decided in 2009 that it was time to introduce a VLE.

When the company first started thinking about implementing an online learning resource they spent a lot of time looking at content creation tools and searching for engaging material.

“We discovered that it was less important to have specific software products than to have good quality material. At the beginning of 2010 we looked around for sources of external content, and eventually found the right material.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

PBD found relevant and engaging material for the early years sector from Learndirect, interactive content which had originally been developed for the earlier NVQ qualification.

“Learndirect had no plans to adapt their NVQ material to the new QCF qualification, so we asked if we could have it. We settled on a non-exclusive royalty based arrangement.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD
Finding the Learndirect flash animations has made the PBD learning experience more interactive

Apart from the Learndirect resources, the company found that much of the e-learning material available in the sector consisted of online textbooks.

“A lot of the material didn’t utilise the power of the medium, but just used it as a distribution mechanism. We found the Learndirect material engaging and decided to use this as one of the central features of our VLE.”

After finding the material, the company started to look at platforms in which they could deploy the content.

They received advice from Kineo, the developers of the original Learndirect material, and Ray Lawrence from the company, ‘How to Moodle’. PBD soon had a clear plan of action.

“We realised there would be a lot of standalone Learndirect modules, links to websites and videos, and then we would need to write the core of the material around all of that content to make the transition from the NVQ qualification to the new QCF one.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

The company had to undertake a detailed mapping between the new and old qualifications to determine what was new and how it should be deployed on the VLE.

PBD looked at how they could deliver the new qualification without repetition, as some of the content on the 19 different units overlapped.

“We came up with the idea of having five themed courses on the VLE that presented the material in a logical and concise way. We mapped the content to the 19 units to make sure that we were covering all of the learning outcomes.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD
The VLE now offers a variety of multimedia learning resources. Students can gain the necessary knowledge for their qualifications from:

- Short written passages
- Video talks, with written transcripts
- In-depth video documentaries
- Powerpoint summaries
- Podcasts
- Weblinks
- News feeds
- Quizzes
- Interactive animations

PBD offers a variety of multimedia learning resources.
Looking back, the company has been pleasantly surprised about how much the system has cost.

“We have paid for specialist content creation, invested in Articulate software, and we had to train four people. We also have ongoing costs in Moodle hosting and royalties.

“If you don’t cost my time, we’ve spent less than £10,000 in total to get two courses up, and we have already sold £5,000 worth of courses to external providers since October.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

The company has been helped along the way with funding from a TEN (Technology Exemplar Network) grant to assist with content creation.

The company also found the networking side of TEN very beneficial, as they were able to share information and ideas about their e-portfolio system and acquire information about Moodle.

Although the company has been very happy with the progress of the project, there have been obstacles along the way.

The main problem during the process was finding high-quality interactive material.

“We were quite lucky to find the Learndirect material. It would have cost a great deal of money for a company to develop the interactive material for us from scratch.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

They also had to find a cheap method of customising the VLE site for external providers, such as FE colleges and other training providers.

“We managed to establish two levels of customisation: one, for which we make a charge, reproduces the look and feel of the customer’s website. Alternatively, we offer free customisation where we simply add the customer’s name and logo at the top of the page.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

The outcomes

This VLE makes learning much more inclusive. It allows a wider range of people to acquire the underpinning knowledge of the course, which they can apply in their jobs.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

Although PBD prides itself on its use of e-portfolios, they wanted an equally innovative knowledge resource.

“We didn’t have a VLE before, and now we have one which is leading the way. So our teaching and learning environment is better.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD
Although the VLE is relatively new, the company is confident that learners are already seeing the benefits.

“The VLE equips learners to complete assignments, and demonstrate mastery of every knowledge-related assessment criterion across the units.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

PBD has found the most engaging external content available, including videos from Teachers TV

As well as the learners, the assessors and employers are also set to reap the rewards of the new learning environment.

“The assessors will benefit as they will have students who are producing more informed work and therefore needing less individual support. Employers will benefit as their staff will have more knowledge and are more likely to do a better job.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

Already the feedback from the learners and tutors has been very positive.

“This e-learning environment is relevant, easy to use and really engages the learners. This is definitely the way forward for early years training.” Melanie Lavergata, Level 3 Diploma Student, Suffolk

“The material on the website is current and matches to the content of the requirements of the Diploma course. The site is easy to navigate and provides excellent well researched resources to enhance the learners both in terms of further study about particular elements of the curriculum and as a tool to assess learning and understanding, both individually and as a whole tutor group.” Margaret Bamforth, Curriculum Manager, Blackpool & Fylde College
PBD has created its own video presentations to make complex subjects easier to understand

The impact

“The VLE project has had a massive impact on how we structure and deliver our teaching and learning. It has enabled us to think about what’s the most effective, holistic and efficient way of teaching the knowledge part of the course.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

Because of the introduction of the VLE and the new QCF qualification, the company has had to map all of the knowledge and observation outcomes from the 19 units of the QCF qualification into a concise format for the VLE.

“This need to take the qualification apart for designing the VLE has made us much more focused on efficient delivery of the whole qualification.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

Although it is too early to show any quantifiable impact, the company is confident that the VLE will have a positive effect on achievement, recruitment and retention.
“The VLE will certainly have an impact on our learners, employers and the sector as a whole. It will result in better informed people, getting through qualifications quicker and therefore more able to progress in their employment.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

The company also believes that with the e-learning and e-portfolio systems, PBD Development will raise standards in the sector.

“I think, more importantly, the VLE will raise the game as far as other providers are concerned. This development will force the larger training providers to improve their act.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

Over the past two years PBD has learnt some valuable lessons, and has some helpful hints and tips for other providers looking to implement a similar system.

“Start by focusing on the content, concentrate on making the material as engaging as possible, and don’t worry about all of the technological bells and whistles.

“Ensure that the material makes full use of the power of the medium rather than just using the computer as a cheap delivery mechanism.” Ross Midgley, Director, PBD

**Useful links**

http://www.pbdevelopment.co.uk/

http://elearning.pbdevelopment.co.uk/

**Disclaimer**

**Disclaimer:** Jisc Regional Support Centres work with more than 2,000 UK learning providers helping them to improve performance and efficiency through the use of technology. Case studies may refer to specific products, processes or services. Such references are examples and are not endorsements or recommendations and should not be used for product endorsement purposes.