KEITS Training Services – Moving to Mobile - assessment with Blackberry devices

Summary

Work-based learning provider, KEITS has improved efficiencies and institutional effectiveness with the introduction of Blackberry mobile devices to all their assessors. They have saved time and money on paper and travel, diversified evidence capture and improved their overall engagement with learners.

About KEITS Training Services

KEITS specialises in Apprenticeships and NVQ provision throughout the land based industries and also delivers Business Service awards to all sectors.

KEITS works nationally with a large variety of businesses in the Horse Care, Animal Care, Floristry and Horticultural industries. They work with small businesses with one or two employees to large national, multi-centre organisations.

Since 1997, KEITS has offered full and dedicated support to over 3,000 learners.

The challenge

“We were using duplicate paper evidence records, which were costing a lot to produce and photocopy. The assessor was also spending a great deal of time writing when assessing, so we decided to diversify the evidence capture.” Rebecca Diamond, Director, KEITS

www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies
KEITS believed that using videos, photos and audio in the learners’ portfolios would allow assessors to spend less time writing and more time engaging with learners on visits.

Before the introduction of the Blackberry devices evidence capture was very inefficient. KEITS wanted to make the assessment process more streamlined, so assessors could spend more time supporting the learners’ development needs.

KEITS’ learners are never taken off the job as they are working to a true apprenticeship model.

“We wanted to use something that was flexible, that we could use literally in the field as we are primarily a land-based learning provider.”

Land-based assessment has historically been heavily paper-based, with lots of written accounts of what happens.

It was becoming increasingly expensive, as KEITS were producing five sheets for one assessment on duplicate paper.

KEITS also needed a way for their assessors to keep in touch with the office, to efficiently report back any of the learners’ issues, and to troubleshoot, as they are working all over the south and east.

As KEITS visit their learners for 2 to 2 and a half hours every four to six weeks, they also realised that achievement rates seemed to improve the more they were able to spend time engaging with their learners.

“So we aimed to encourage assessors and learners to capture feedback by talking into the audio recorder on the device. Assessors can then link feedback to the outcomes in the e-portfolio.” Rebecca Diamond, Director, KEITS

In 2010, learners’ portfolios were stolen, so the provider decided to always have duplicate paper records as a back-up, which increased costs.

Introducing a device which could diversify evidence capture, improve tutor engagement, save time and reduce costs seemed like the next logical step for the organisation.
The activity

“JISC RSC Eastern played a part in our development. We attended a variety of events where they showcased different mobile technologies. The events allowed us to see the latest mobile developments, and also let us network with other providers to see what they had been doing.” Rebecca Diamond, Director, KEITS

Being a relatively small company KEITS could be fairly responsive to the latest developments in technology.

“We trialled dictaphones and cameras, but realised that they could be easily lost or broken. Whereas with the phone, assessors have only one device to look after and manage.” Rebecca Diamond, Director, KEITS

Some of KEITS’ assessors might have to spend a night away if visiting learners a long way from home, which used to delay their response to emails. Giving them Blackberries meant that the team got a quicker response time.

Because of issues with mobile phone reception, KEITS have different members of staff on different network providers. Office Manager, Jean Williamson managed to find a good tariff to get free calls between all of the staff.

Rebecca and her team first started looking at using mobile devices around two years ago when they decided that they wanted their assessors to have an email function to speed up communication.

“We decided on Blackberries as they are easy to use, durable, and the QWERTY keyboard is also useful too. You can put diary entries in Outlook so we know where everyone is.

“Working with NVQ Now, our e-portfolio provider, they have created a system where we can send information straight from the Blackberry onto the e-portfolio.” Rebecca Diamond, Director, KEITS

Rebecca and her team did encounter some obstacles whilst implementing the new devices.

“We had some assessors that were less keen, but fortunately they were in the minority. Our assessors are really good at supporting each and network very effectively. They were able to support each other when they got stuck.”

KEITS decided to produce their own guides to the Blackberry and e-portfolios in Word with screenshots and text.

They preferred to put the guides into their own terminology and language so assessors were more comfortable. In the end, their e-portfolio provider, NVQ Now even wanted to use the guides.
KEITS’ assessors have also run training workshops for each other on how to use the mobile devices. They then produced a series of supporting worksheets, looking at issues such as:

- Evidence capture; Zipping files; Quicker uploading;
- How to tag evidence.

Apprentices in the office and learners out in the field have also been able to support assessors with the transition.

“Being a younger generation they are really good with mobile technology, and can usually help the assessors with any technical issues.” Rebecca Diamond, Director, KEITS

As KEITS has a small team made up of two directors, SMTs, area managers and line managers, there has always been a very open atmosphere.

KEITS usually troubleshoot internally when they decide to buy new kit, but after receiving support from RSC Eastern they were able to look over a shortlist of devices before they decided on the Blackberries.

“It’s been a general osmosis, and we’ve received lots of support from the likes of RSC Eastern, and also been able to share lots of ideas with our fellow providers at events.” Rebecca Diamond, Director, KEITS

Many of the assessors already had Blackberries of their own, which meant they were fairly comfortable when they were introduced.

“We are very lucky as we have a very good culture of adaptable and flexible people here at KEITS. We tend to encourage rather than coerce, so assessors and other staff are always ready for any developments or changes.” Rebecca Diamond, Director, KEITS

The outcomes

“As a result of the Blackberry devices assessors can communicate much quicker with head office or with the directors.” Rebecca Diamond, Director, KEITS

The use of the Blackberry devices has benefited KEITS in a number of ways:

- Reduced report writing time;
- Allowed for more face-to-face support for learners;
- Cut down costs on paper evidence;
• Streamlined the evidence capture;
• Better cross-referencing on evidence for different qualifications;
• Sped up communication times between assessors, students, employers and senior management;
• Improved and diversified methods of communication between all parties.

“We use a much broader range of evidence in portfolios now, and as a result the assessors and learners enjoy photographing, video recording and audio recording what they do.” Rebecca Diamond, Director, KEITS

Animal care assessors use lots of video evidence, voice clips, and photo stories. Floristry students and assessors are able to photograph displays, and arrangements for competition work and easily upload them to their e-portfolios.

When the assessors use the Blackberry sound recorders for professional discussion and evidence capture they have found that the

The assessor has used both video and photo evidence to show the learner cutting the dog’s hair.
sound quality is better and the files compress into a smaller size than with normal dictaphones.

The Horticulture assessors have said using the Blackberries with e-portfolios saves time for both them and the External Verifiers (EVs).

“We had our first EV visit for Horticulture at the end of last year with the new Blackberry and e-portfolio system in place. The EV was able to look at all of the e-portfolios at home, then we met in London at 9am, and by 12pm we were having lunch and the visit was done and dusted.” Rebecca Diamond, Director, KEITS

KEITS’ assessors have given their feedback on the benefits of the Blackberry devices.

“I have found my Blackberry very useful in videoing evidence for my learners which I either then use to write up my assessments onto the e-portfolio. They have made recording observations easy and I find using the device quicker than writing everything down.” Gemma Catling BHSAl, Senior Training & Assessment Consultant, KEITS

“It is instant and saves so much time. You can combine video, photos and voice together or use just one element. Whatever suits the subject matter.” Jacqueline Cheeseman, Assessor, KEITS
The impact

- Rebecca and her team believe the Blackberry devices have had a positive impact on achievement.
- It has improved the quality of the evidence, the range and the methods of assessment;
- The devices have made the learners’ portfolios more interesting;
- They have had an impact on remote sampling, which has sped up the time it takes to dip in and out of portfolios;
- Assessors can now sample more efficiently as they are not having to post portfolios backwards and forwards to IVs and assessors;
- Saved time and money for EVs as they can do more remote sampling, which allows them to spend more time providing support, and discussing quality and standards when visiting;
- Saved time and money on paper, photocopying and postage of paper portfolios.

The lessons learned

For other providers looking to implement a similar system, Rebecca has some helpful hints and tips.

“I would recommend that providers have a really good look at the different mobile devices that are around, shop about, and have thorough discussions with different providers who may have used the devices before you decide to invest time and money.

“Try to make use of the RSCs and their events, watch their show and tells, as they are very helpful.” Rebecca Diamond, Director, KEITS

Useful links

http://www.keits.co.uk/
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