Otley College: An Online toolkit for tutorials in rural-based FE – meeting new funding needs

Summary

As part of an LSIS Regional Response Fund project, Otley College has developed an online toolkit for one-to-one tutorials, based on research undertaken with practitioners and learners. The toolkit has been developed to meet the needs of students and tutors, and attempts to fulfil the requirement for tutorials within a new straightened funding agreement. As a result of the toolkit, it has become easier for tutors to support and monitor learner outcomes whether students are moving into employment or progressing onto further courses.

About Otley College

Otley College is a land-based college in Suffolk that serves a large, predominantly rural catchment area. Nearly two thirds of its learners are aged 16 to 18 and follow full-time programmes, mostly at foundation and intermediate levels. The vast majority of part-time learners are adults, with two-thirds of these following distance learning programmes which do not require full attendance at the college. More than two hundred learners aged 14 to 16 attend the college as part of their school Key Stage 4 programme. The college's employer-responsive provision offers the Train to Gain programme and apprenticeships in construction, engineering, food technology, land-based industries, management, retail and sports.

Please note update 2012 – Since this case study was completed Otley College has merged with Easton College.
The challenge

The college surveyed both staff and students regarding the value of the one-to-one tutorials, and discovered that 60% of staff felt that some learners didn't value tutorials. There was a realisation by the project team of just how much work there was to be done to improve the tutorial experience.

The survey also showed that only 56% of staff had carried out tutorials with all their learners, when they were supposed to be mandatory. It was then realised that a rigorous approach to the tracking and auditing of tutorials needed to be put in place.

“We discovered that the students of most need were taking up a huge amount of tutorial time, and the quieter students were taking up less. They were being
slightly sidelined, so we needed to do more to standardise the tutorial process.” Caroline Briggs, Otley College

The project was submitted to LSIS as a result of a change in funding, which meant that students had lost an hour a week in enrichment.

“The reduction in funding necessitated the creation of an online student and staff tutorial support area. To be successful the online toolkit had to be interactive and easily utilised.” Caroline Briggs, Otley College

To find out more about the institutional understanding of tutorials, the college organised a meeting, with over 40 members of staff attending. The college asked students to give their feedback on what they thought a tutorial was and also asked them what they would like tutorials to cover.

This revealed:

- Level 1 students felt that a personal connection was most important to their learning;
- Level 2 students were focused on their vocational qualifications and entering the workplace;
- Level 3 students identified progression and career development as their key priorities.

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**Otley & Easton College - LSIS Tutorial Project 2011**

**Student Lunch**

**Wednesday 25th May 2011**

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**What makes a good Tutorial**

- **L1**
- **L2**
- **L3**

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**Level 2 students’ feedback on what makes a good tutorial**

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As a result of the surveys and discussions, the college discovered that many vocational tutors had struggled with the concept of supporting students with their pastoral side as well as their educational side.

“The plan was to create this online area that would clarify who all the signposting was for and to, and what their role was. We wanted to use videos that we made ourselves, and through videos we collated online.” Caroline Briggs, Otley College

The college aimed to work out how to deliver staff development on new policies, and how best to deliver and standardise tutorials, so every student would be experiencing the same process.

**The activity**

When implementing the online toolkit, the college carefully followed suggestions made in the staff and student surveys.

1. They identified the project team, appointed a project manager and set an action plan, which included a communication plan and project risk assessment;

2. Collated practitioners views across colleges;

3. Collated and reviewed all tutorial documents from both colleges with staff and student questionnaire and focus group;

4. Developed a revised tutorial handbook for Moodle site;

5. Identified best practitioners for uploading video best practice to Moodle;

6. Piloted new tutorial on Moodle to evaluate;

Welcome to the online Tutorial Support Area
Are you prepared for your Tutorial?
Do you know who to go to if you have a problem?
You’re in the right place

Learner Self Assessment
Assess your study skills as a student
This activity helps you think about your skills and your approach to learning. It should provide a good starting point for a first review session and could usefully be repeated later in the programme.

Image 4: The College placed the online toolkit on their Moodle site in September 2011

The online support areas were designed for staff delivering tutorials and students attending the college.

The staff area provides support and CPD opportunities on:

- Personal tutor self assessment tool;
- Videos of exemplar tutorials;
- Video interviews with staff and students reflecting on the 1:1 tutorial process;
- Student feedback on what tutorials mean to them, differentiated by levels 1, 2 and 3.
This Standards Unit exemplar video demonstrates how a member of staff would conduct a tutorial with a student

The student areas provide support on:
- Equality & Diversity;
- Revision techniques;
- Drugs awareness;
- Time management;
- Active listening;
- Learning style self assessment;
- Reflective thinking;
- Setting Smart Targets.
- One-to-one tutorials;
- Creating your CV;
- Getting the most out of lessons;
- Effective communication;
- Assignments;
- Revision;
- Road safety;
- Safeguarding;
- Anti-bullying.

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Learning styles

We all have different styles of learning and we all know we understand things better if we are taught them in certain ways. Knowing your style of learning can help you with your studies and help your tutor teach you in the best way to suit you.

Have a quick read of the descriptions below and see which one most sounds like you!

Listening / reading (auditory learners)
You like listening and are good at learning from talks. You are very likely to be well organised. You may remember information by using a checklist. You can often be thought of as a reliable worker. You may prefer to work on your own rather than in groups.

Seeing / visualising (visual learners)
You enjoy learning from images and are good at imagining situations. You can use visual ways to remember information and will like learning that involves visual and creative skills. You may also be able to see the whole picture when discussing or working on a problem or task.

Experiencing / hands-on (kinaesthetic learners)
You enjoy learning through doing. This active learning style is useful for making things. You may find it easy to show others how to do something. You are likely to be able to enjoy the actual experience of learning. You may find it difficult to pay attention to detail if it is in a written form.

Still not sure???
Why not take the Brainboxx learning styles quiz? Just follow the link or click on the yellow picture above.

“The student self-assessment area has 20 questions, the results of which enable learners to reflect on their strengths and areas for development.

“At the moment, the students and tutors can go into the online toolkit at any time to find resources and information that might be relevant to them. The use of the online toolkit isn’t structured to 32 weeks, so the students can dip in and out.” Caroline Briggs, Otley College
The college has utilised a QIA quiz for the staff self-assessment

In the staff self-assessment area there is advice and guidance on being a personal tutor. The tutor area has 27 questions asking how well tutors understand students’ personal aspirations and circumstances, focusing on both their learning and personal needs.

The LSIS Regional Response Fund project lasted for around 6 months, but the college had to prepare and trial the toolkit from around February 2011.

As well as being funded by LSIS through the Regional Response Fund, Otley College received regular support at monthly meetings from ACER (Association of Colleges in the Eastern Region) and LSIS.

“We tried to get team members from different job roles and curriculum areas together, and we were happy to get buy-in from staff, senior management and students for the tutorial toolkit.” Caroline Briggs, Otley College

For Caroline and her team, the production of the exemplar videos was probably the biggest obstacle that they faced during the project.
“If we had had more money we would have attempted to produce more professional videos. However, because of time, money, skills and equipment it wasn’t easy to do.” Caroline Briggs, Otley College

When creating the toolkit, the college found inspiration from the LSIS safeguarding toolkit and from http://www.leadershiplearning.org.uk. For their quizzes they sourced material from the QIA and NLN Materials.

The outcomes

With the introduction of the toolkit, the college has started to follow a consistent approach to tutorials and pastoral care, and is able to cascade and share information in a much more standardised manner.

As a result of the online toolkit staff and students have benefited in a variety of ways:

- Staff confidence has increased in the delivery of one-to-one and group tutorials;
- The online support has increased staff morale;
- Staff know their boundaries, they know where their role ends and where another member of staff’s role starts;
- There has been increased communication between personal tutors and students;
- This has resulted in a more tailored approach to staff development and CPD.

Because of a reduction in funding and enrichment hours, the tutors have been able to use the student area for covering subjects which previously they would have had more time to cover in enrichment.

“Once you know what is expected of you, you can be confident in dealing with any difficulties you face when approached by different students.” Caroline Briggs, Otley College

The online toolkit provides consistent delivery that is responsive to the individual’s needs. If a student gets something wrong, for example, the self-assessment test, they can go back and do it again.

“An initial assessment of the toolkit shows there is improved understanding of what a tutorial covers. Students using the site will ensure they meet their targets more effectively, reducing the number of students at risk of not succeeding.
“The staff also identified that the site enables CPD to be undertaken more accessibly and this in turn can be rolled out to other regional colleges through ACER and JISC.” Caroline Briggs, Otley College

Students have given their feedback on the online toolkit.

“Really good for checking your learning style.”
“I enjoyed the self-assessment task.”
“Good layout and easy to access.”
“Really helpful information.”

Further feedback from staff has stated:

“The exemplar videos are very useful.”
“The self-assessment tasks enabled me to identify my areas for development.”
“The group tasks are really useful, I’ve facilitated sessions which I wouldn’t normally feel confident with but the resources provided that extra bit of support.”

**The impact**

31 out of 36 students said opportunities for independent learning were ‘good’ or ‘excellent’

Survey results show that the online toolkit has been received very well by students:

- Content and tutorial support - 27 out of 36 said it was either ‘good' or ‘excellent’;
- Level of interactivity – 33 out of 36 said it was ‘good’ or ‘excellent’;
- Opportunities for independent learning – 31 out of 36 said it was either ‘good’ or ‘excellent’;
- Opportunities for group learning – 27 out of 36 said it was either ‘good’
or ‘excellent’.

Survey results also reveal that the online toolkit has been received very well by staff:

- Page layout – 25 out of 30 said it was either ‘good’ or ‘excellent’;
- Content for tutorial support – 27 out of 30 said it was either ‘good’ or ‘excellent’;
- Support for Equality and Diversity - 30 out of 32 said it was either ‘good’ or ‘excellent’;
- Embedding of Every Child Matters – 32 out of 32 said it was either ‘good’ or ‘excellent’;
- Levels of independent learning – 32 out of 33 said it was either ‘good’ or ‘excellent’.

“As staff are more confident in delivering tutorials this is resulting in tutorials being delivered correctly, and the support being there regularly. Tutorials are key to achievement and retention, so hopefully the online toolkit can make an impact.” Caroline Briggs, Otley College

**The lessons learned**

Caroline and her team have a number of hints and tips for other providers who might want to implement a similar system.

- Plan the project to follow key objectives in order to complete key outcomes;
- Look at keeping content interactive and engaging;
• Review content and examine how content will be accessed.

“The information isn’t everything, you have to look at how people will interact. The online toolkit needs to enthuse and motivate, which means high quality stuff, which takes time.” Caroline Briggs, Otley College

In the future the college hopes to communicate staff development, new policies and procedures and lesson plan templates through a mixture of face-to-face and online methods.

“I think the project has been very positive. We’ve learnt a lot and now know what else we need to do. It’s a journey, and we are just at the start.” Caroline Briggs, Otley College

Useful links

Moodle at Otley

Equality and Diversity web page on the Excellence Gateway

Otley College website

Supporting videos

Learners views of the tutorial process

Understanding learners

Meeting the challenges of tutorials

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