Provider Name: TeesValley VLE Partnership: Collaboration Success Story

Summary

The Adult Education Services from six local authorities in the North East joined forces to set up a shared Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) called TeesLearn. It provides their learners with new and inspiring learning opportunities and supports them across a rural and wide geographical area.

About TeesLearn Partnership

The Tees Valley VLE Partnership was originally made up of the Adult Education services from five local authorities: Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton on Tees. The sixth partner, County Durham, has joined more recently.

The original Tees Valley partners had collaborated on projects before and realised that they would have a bigger chance of securing a substantial amount of funding for a VLE by a joint bid, rather than applying for funding separately.
The TeesValley VLE Partnership has won numerous awards; most recently the RSC Northern Star Award and the Adult and Community Learning Next Generation Learning Award.

The challenge

The project objective was to develop a shared VLE, as well as improve communication between staff and learners. The VLE would also make it easier to reach learners who work in shifts or live further away.

The activity

The partnership successfully secured funding for implementing VLEs from the National Institute for Adult continuing Education (NIACE) to set up and develop TeesLearn.

The result is a comprehensive VLE in Moodle with significant numbers of learning opportunities in all curriculum areas. TeesLearn consists of three ‘zones’:

- A learner zone with podcasts, videos, blogs, wikis as well as complete courses and course material. They can also easily contact their tutor and others in their group by email, chat, forums and instant messaging.

- A staff zone with a virtual staff room with access to central documents, staff development, chat rooms, shared resources and lesson plans.

- A visitor zone where potential learners can have a look around and do a ‘taster’ course.

To make sure the VLE is an inspiring learning environment, staff received substantial training on how to use the VLE and create resources specific to their subject areas available.

To maintain TeesLearn, Middlesbrough provides technical and managerial input and hosts the server through the JANET connection, Redcar and Cleveland provides the overall leadership and the remaining four partners provide at least one manager for steering group development work. This project is also supported by the JISC RSC Northern e-Learning Advisor Paul Miller, who advises on further development.

The outcomes

The project is now self-funded and each partner contributes an annual sum for continuing maintenance and development.
TeesLearn is a huge success with collectively more than 600 staff and 30,000 learners potentially involved within the partnership.

Learners:

Learner retention rates in several learning groups have increased as well as the volume and frequency of learner activity. Learners actually actively encourage tutors to use the VLE and have been actively involved in developing resources. The learner survey also shows evidence of a positive impact on the learner experience. In classes for traditional subjects like arts and languages the tutors are reporting that learners are becoming more ICT confident because of the increased use of the VLE to support learning.

Staff:

Communication has improved between managers and staff through forums and blogs and managers use the VLE to make sure lesson planning and documentation are of consistent quality.

Organisation:

Collaboration between the partners has increased significantly on a range of projects including peer review groups, funding applications and quality assurance projects. Some online resources are also shared between tutors in different local authorities.

The impact

Key issues which have made this project successful:

- The partners are willing to collaborate, help each other and share best practice;
- The RSC helped initiate the project and has provided guidance and support throughout its life cycle;
- An external consultant was used in the initial stages to help move the partnership through the difficult issues of design and resource sharing;
- The ethos was to let people have a go rather than restricting access through bureaucracy.

Chris Kemp, ICT coordinator at TeesLearn advises:

“If you are considering such a technology partnership, think about using a consultant in the early stages of development. A consultant doesn’t have your history or culture, so they will work with your ideas in an objective way. Don’t stifle creativity; let the staff and learners run with it. Bring in controls later, once you have people who want to use the technology”.
Useful links

TeesLearn

TeesLearn Moodle

Jisc RSC Northern

Case Study ‘International Language Project on Moodle’ (TeesLearn)

Ofsted Good Practice database

Video of TeesLearn Project

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