North Lindsey College:
Digital ‘missions’ and digital teams

Background
North Lindsey College (northlindsey.ac.uk) is the largest provider of post-16 education and training in north Lincolnshire, offering 350 different vocational and academic programmes including HNCs, HNDs, foundation degrees and degrees, and over 800 apprenticeship courses.

North Lindsey previously undertook a Skillscan, supported by their Jisc regional support network (RSC), which gave them a clear view of current capabilities and priorities for developing staff digital skills. They are a leading member of the Hull Digital Technologies Network (digitaltechnologiesnetwork.co.uk).

Strategic priorities
The college vision gives a role to digital technologies in supporting the priorities for learning and teaching. Some of these priorities have been defined by national agendas, such as:

» The FELTAG report (http://feltag.org.uk), which asks for the entire workforce in further education (FE) and skills to be ‘brought up to speed to fully understand the potential of learning technology’

» The current round of government area reviews (http://jisc/NCL-education-and-training-institutions), which are assessing (among many other factors) how technology can ‘support improved delivery and efficiency’

» The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) for HE (hefce.ac.uk/lt/tef), which includes ‘physical and digital resources’ in its assessment of the learning environment

Other priorities have been established through internal consultation and reviews such as the Skillscan. These include:

» Safeguarding and promoting social values (including respect and tolerance) - in digital as well as real-world spaces

» Supporting staff skills for blended learning

» Developing/adopting a digital capabilities framework for staff and students

Leadership of change
There are staff with special responsibility for digital literacy, such as the e-learning ambassador, who is supported by curriculum leaders and support managers from across the college. However, the culture at North Lindsey is that everyone should be responsible for their own and their team’s development.

We want staff to take responsibility and initiative… staff through their own professional development review (PDR) process identify with their manager what they need. A curriculum leader needs to ensure [digital literacy] is included among their delivery team.

In 2016 a digital literacy working group was established to support initiatives across the college. This comprised academic and student-facing staff, and initially set about consulting with the staff body about what kinds of development they would find useful. This has identified that - in addition to one-off training and recognition - digital issues have to be integrated into teaching staff development.
We are trying to get across the idea that it’s an integral part of the modern teaching role. Whilst there are some examples, it isn’t properly integrated into teacher education. With the current generation of learners we need to be on top of technology they are using and the technology in society that they are dealing with. Although we say digital capability, it is really just capability to teach in a digital environment.

**Actions for digital capability**

In the past, the college has run several initiatives to equip staff with digital tools and approaches. Some teaching staff had taken the the Blended online learning development (BOLD) course at the Heart of Worcestershire College, for example, though attempts to cascade these skills to other staff were not entirely successful, partly because the materials were not locally available. In late 2015 the new e-learning team decided to take a more strategic approach. They used the Jisc Digital capability framework as a guide to planning which areas of development would have the most impact at college level. After that it was a question of trying different kinds of development and seeing which were most popular.

A lunch and learn drop-in session was launched, where staff could bring tech and chat informally. Several digital ‘cue cards’ were produced with bite-sized information and guidance on different topics. These were distributed in a variety of informal spaces to encourage staff to just pick them up and talk. Online courses in key topics were offered through Moodle and iTunesU, for staff to work through in their own time. While face-to-face training was consolidated into ‘digital toolkits’ that could be contextualised for one-to-one training, small groups, or departmental team sessions. A digital learning blog was launched with updates, tools, ideas, and best practice examples.

In February 2016, in collaboration with the Hull Digital Technologies Network (DTN) (digitaltechnologiesnetwork.co.uk), the college used the Periscope app (https://youtu.be/jeuRQJDVYU0) to share online discussions with staff using technology for personal development. This was followed by a Going mobile workshop (https://padlet.com/ross_anderson/goingmobile) as part of a Flipped learning conference (http://ji.sc/flipped-learning-conf) (June 2016) with other members of the DTN. Jisc’s Scott Hibberson came to deliver a number of sessions on digital identity and footprint, and helped the team to develop a new policy on online safety and established benchmarks for staff training.

The FutureLearn Blended learning essentials course (http://bit.ly/NCL-blended-learning-essentials) was promoted via the blog and 11 staff members completed it in their own time. They came from a range of disciplines and roles, and as enthusiasts they have been effective at promoting and sharing what they learned. All staff are now eligible to enter for an individual or team e-learning award.

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Moving ahead

Equipped with the data from the tracker, the e-Learning team is looking now to formalise staff development with a qualification. They have taken the Jisc six elements of digital capability and created four levels of achievement within each one (http://content.northlindsey.ac.uk/dpdgo/dpdgo.pdf), from ‘beginner’ through to ‘expert’. Each level is associated with a number of brief statements or ‘missions’, and a digital badge will be awarded for completion of all the missions at each level. This accreditation framework they are calling DPDGo! (https://youtu.be/cv6yEIwlNHY)

The first Monday in every month is now designated an ‘app club’. Like a book club, staff meet to talk about what they’ve been using and to pick a couple of apps to trial for the following meeting.

Staff digital champions have been established in each subject area, with a modest hour of remission a week. This is to champion and promote digital technologies, and ensure good communication between the e-learning team and staff in departments. The Jisc Digital capability discovery tool (http://bit.ly/digcapdiscovery) will be offered to the Digital champions to trial before being rolled out more widely. Student digital leaders are in the process of being launched. They will focus on live practical projects which will allow them to develop their skills, partner with teaching staff, and improve the digital learning experience for their peers.

Opportunities and challenges for the future

The challenges remain much the same from year to year:

- Staff buy in and confidence, making sure the technology works, demystifying the technology and getting across the idea that it’s a core part of our business.
- This year, however, there are real opportunities opening up through the appointment of staff and student digital champions. The college has also recognised the value of networking and getting an external perspective. This has meant a ramping up of engagement with Jisc, from inviting Jisc subject specialists to give workshops, through involvement in the Mapping course data information (http://ji.sc/NCL-course-related-info) project, to presenting at the Jisc Digifest conference. (http://digitaltechnologiesnetwork.co.uk/?p=488).
- It might be things like creating learning objects or campaigns or social media information... I think some of [what is required] will come through the Tracker as well, picking up on issues like poor access.
- So that is another thing for us going forward... [Jisc] subject experts actually coming in and delivering to us when we have a key focus on a particular area. Also linking with other colleges that have done good practice. I think it’s when people share their best practice but also their struggles, their failures and what didn’t work – that’s when you learn, and stop just reinventing the wheel.

Finally, this year’s action plan will be revisited but with the emphasis on developing teams. Teaching and professional teams will put in offers to develop digital capabilities in their area, using whatever tools and approaches are relevant to them, and drawing on the resources of the e-learning team to help them achieve their goals.
Lessons learned

» Digital badges are a simple and effective way of encouraging staff to engage with a digital skills framework. In this case, individuals achieve accreditation by achieving ‘missions’, which are mapped to the Jisc Digital capabilities framework at four levels. Other approaches are possible eg see the case study from Anglia Ruskin University.

» It is challenging to devise digital capability statements and levels that work across a wide variety of settings. The North Lindsey approach has been to offer generic ‘missions’ that individuals can make relevant to their role and subject specialism.

» The North Lindsey culture is all about teams, and this is reflected in the approach to digital development.

» While a framework provides coherence to development, it’s still important to have a wide variety of tools and materials available, especially at a small scale that staff can easily pick up and try. These could include cue cards, toolkits, quizzes, bite-sized online resources and live app-shares.

» The external perspective is really important for sharing experience and gaining confidence.

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Any unattributed quotes in the text were provided and have been approved by the contacts above.

For more information
on all related resources please see the Building digital capability project page:
http://ji.sc/building-digicap