Bradford College
Differentiated learning for accounting technicians and apprentices using online video tutorials
(October 2016)

Summary
Students studying for the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) qualifications and apprenticeships at Bradford College are using online video tutorials created by their tutor to ensure they are proficient in use of Excel™ spreadsheets. With accompanying online practice activities, individual support and small-group tutorials the college is able to provide differentiated learning and is improving success rates, with some students completing their qualifications ahead of schedule.

The challenge
AAT students typically combine paid employment with part-time study, attending college just once-a-week. Tutor Mark Owen noted that there was a wide variation in the experience of his AAT students’ ability to use spreadsheets – from those with no knowledge of the software whatsoever to those who used it every day of their working lives. He identified a need to provide individual and small-group support to address this differentiated need.

The solution
The college uses the Moodle™ virtual learning environment (VLE) so Mark used the Moodle questionnaire tool to create an initial skills check. The skills check lists all the tasks AAT students will need to be able to do to complete the spreadsheet unit and asks students to rate their level of proficiency in terms of:

» I have never done this
On completion of the skills check, the tutor is able to use Moodle’s questionnaire statistics report to obtain a profiled analysis of both the group and individual proficiency levels.

It is quite common to find that while many students have done things like making data bold and underlined, not many of them have had experience of pivot tables, making graphs and charts or using ‘if’ statements. The skills check and resulting analysis allows the tutor to quickly diagnose the starting point for each learner and work out how best to support both individuals and the group.

Each of the different areas of the spreadsheet module has a separate section on the VLE, mapped to the qualification specification, for example:

- Entering data
- Using formulae
- Using charts
- Printing
- Saving work

Every section includes an instructional video created by the tutor using Screencast-O-Matic™. This allows the tutor to record demonstrations and talk students through each function or skill. Students can watch the videos at any time and as many times as they want. They can also watch the videos and practice on the computer at the same time. The videos are accompanied by handouts, worksheets and a supporting series of tasks that range in complexity to encourage those further ahead to take on a higher challenge.

Students can access the video tutorials at work, at home or can work through them in the classroom. The flexibility of the overall resource means that the tutor can also work with individuals or small groups to address a particular need for those who are less confident.

Moodle also allows the tutor to see when and how frequently students are logging onto the VLE and accessing the resources.

The AAT qualification is examination based but throughout the spreadsheet module, student work is assessed using both formative and summative assessment strategies:

- Formative assessment – each student contributes to an individual blog which acts as an ePortfolio. At the end of the session they upload their work to the Moodle blog, ensuring a record of their work is saved. The blog post also acts as a private discussion space between tutor and student where
their work can be checked and where they can receive individual feedback in a responsive and timely manner.

» The Moodle assignment tool is used to set more formal pieces of work and to give more formal summative feedback.

Mark has found that using video feedback to talk students through the work that they have done has worked well. In particular, Mark has found it easier and more efficient to provide video rather than typed feedback, using examples from students’ own work to illustrate and highlight specific points.

The context and content differs according to level of study (AAT has 3 levels) but the blended approach used is the same across all levels.

Impact

While it is difficult to attribute success to any one aspect of the course, previous experience indicates that the video tutorials are contributing to high and early success rates. Some students studying for level 3 qualifications when the video tutorials were introduced were able to finish earlier than previous years, take the examination and refocus on their employment sooner. ‘Stretch yourself’ tasks introduced for level 1 students, where students were asked to explain the processes back to themselves have also proved effective, contributing to the most recent cohort achieving a 100% pass rate.

Key points

» The creation and use of video tutorials has enhanced the tutor’s ability to meet the differentiated needs of both individual students and the whole group.

» The video tutorials effectively mean that despite the broad range of needs, the tutor is able to provide ‘on demand’ support as tutor input is reproduced by as many students as there are, on multiple topics, at the same time and in varying locations.

» The initial skills check is key – it allows the tutor and students to work out how best to manage the learning time available and ensures students are aware of what they need to be able to do.

» Having the resources mapped to the qualification specification is very important and ensures all the requirements are comprehensively addressed.

» Structured tasks that can be conducted on the computer while viewing the video tutorials allow students to practice the skills and develop their proficiency and confidence.
Building in opportunities for both formative and summative feedback at structured points along the way extends support to part-time and work-based students who only see their tutor face-to-face once a week. This also helps to mitigate against the risk that learners who are working independently may assume they have a higher level of skill than is actually the case.

More information

Contact: Mark Owen, teaching and learning development coach and lecturer in business and accounting, Bradford College M.Owen@bradfordcollege.ac.uk