E-portfolio and e-learning resources improve timeliness of achievement

Didac Ltd is a specialist training provider that delivers bespoke training and support programmes to industry. Much of the training is delivered in the workplace. Use of digital technology enables the company to provide a modern friendly way of delivering specialist underpinning knowledge, enabling learners to progress at their own pace. The company uses a bespoke learning platform and e-portfolio system to record and monitor learner progress, freeing up time for practical training and other support interventions at the monthly tutor visits. Clients acknowledge the benefits of more tailored support for learners with less time off site.

The challenge

Learning in the workplace is the primary delivery model used by Didac and while this benefits both learners and employers, delivering underpinning knowledge can be a challenge. Work-based learning needs to be responsive to industry standards and traditional classroom methods are not appropriate. Some of the resources historically used to support training are out of date and do not always reflect the specialist tools and equipment used. Appropriate e-learning materials are not readily available for most of the subjects and qualifications that Didac offer.

The solution

“E-learning offers a modern and friendly way of delivering the specialist underpinning knowledge that Didac regards as critical.”

Jon Gibson, managing director, Didac Ltd
Learners are able to use online resources and training modules developed by Didac which are delivered through a bespoke delivery platform. This allows them to carry on learning at their own pace between monthly assessor visits and to record their learning achievements using the Pellcomp PICS eAssessor, e-portfolio system. This allows Didac to provide cost-effective, remote training with progress monitoring and personalised feedback to hard-to-reach learners, including learners based in secure environments.

The delivery platform has been designed to be easy to use for learners, staff and administrators and can be tailored to meet the specific needs of different curricula. The PICS system also facilitates data transfer to the Skills Funding Agency.

Didac work with industry experts to develop interactive training materials and online modules using articulate e-learning software and authoring tools. Initially these were developed for wood machine training qualifications but the model has been expanded to other qualifications including, timber, furniture, business management, customer services and industrial plant training.

Online assessment has been introduced to help take the pressure off individual staff. A variety of assessment formats are possible and mandatory questions can easily be accommodated. The ability to randomise questions makes it possible to vary assessments. Electronic marking and management makes the assessment process more independent and removes potential bias. Didac now also use professional discussions and recorded oral question and answer sessions to further extend the range of assessment tools.

The e-portfolio system makes it easy for video evidence of practical skills to be captured and cross-referenced to qualification criteria. Visit reports and progress reviews are all stored on the system to facilitate progress monitoring by learners and employers. One learner uses his own GoPro camera worn on his head to film evidence which is uploaded to the e-portfolio and reviewed by the assessor.

Another useful feature of the online system is that learners can message other learners, increasing the dialogue and opportunities for collaborative learning between learners in the same cohort but based in different locations who may otherwise not meet.

The enhanced quality assurance features within the integrated system generate an audit trail that proves learners are engaged in learning. Assessors complete visit report forms, indicating whether the visit was for training, assessment or support and advising learners what they need to do to prepare for the next visit. Once the visit report forms are uploaded to the system learners use the system to formally accept the report creating an electronic signature that acts as a record of learning engagement. Progress reviews are also recorded in this way.

Staff receive training in how to use the e-portfolio and other online systems. Short video sessions were also created using the Captivate authoring tool to support staff beyond formal training on topics such as how to do an assessment plan on the e-portfolio system or how to upload a visit report form. Although time-consuming, it was vital that staff training was built into the implementation plan. The fact that the system is easy to use and that the dedicated staff trainer knew how to make the system work effectively helped to build staff confidence and overcome resistance.
Impact

One of the biggest changes that Didac has noted since the introduction of online learning and the e-portfolio system is a small but growing trend of improvement in timeliness of achievement. Ofsted view what the company are doing very favourably. Employers like the up-to-date delivery model and appreciate the benefits of more tailored support and of learners spending less time off site.

The e-learning and e-portfolio systems are changing the way valuable one-to-one visit time is used.

“The more we can get learners to do using the e-learning resources and digital tools the more time it gives us for training and support rather than paperwork when we visit the learners in their workplace.”

Jon Gibson, managing director, Didac Ltd

The majority of learners have some experience of using technology and find the online aspects more engaging than a traditional written portfolio. Being able to access training material and to review it on-demand is encouraging independent learning. Learners benefit from being able to submit evidence as it naturally occurs in their workplace and are able to monitor their progress through the e-portfolio and more easily see what they need to do between visits.

Cost benefits for the company include a reduction in tutor/assessor time, additional revenue from increased capacity and from applying the model to other training courses and qualifications.

Key points

» The initial investment can seem off-putting but this approach has proved to be cost-effective and has contributed to quality improvements and increased capacity.

» Be prepared to persevere – employers may be familiar with more traditional approaches to learning but being able to demonstrate the benefits to learners and employers will win them round and may help to secure new business.

» Introducing new systems requires patience, perseverance and planning. It is vital that support for all users is included in implementation plans.

» Be open to new approaches and have a go – the learner who chose to use GoPro did so of his own volition and has worked with his assessor to show the benefits.
More information

Links www.didac.co.uk

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