Kirklees College: giving learners more control of their own learning

What was the challenge?

The college also offers a wide variety of higher education courses including business, computing, teacher education, childcare, health and social care, engineering and creative design. It draws students from across a wide area of West Yorkshire that includes Batley and Holmfirth as well as Huddersfield and Dewsbury. This is an area with significant pockets of deprivation and around 3,000 students need bursary support each year.

In 2012 the college was exploring innovative ways to deliver learning and engage students more effectively and became interested in blended learning, which combines face-to-face teaching with varied online activities, content, feedback and assessment to give learners more control over their own learning.

How did we help?

Blended learning

Kirklees College’s e-learning team asked us for advice on how to implement blended learning and we introduced them to their counterparts at Heart of Worcestershire College who were making good progress with blended approaches and were generous in sharing their experiences, offering new ideas and providing mentoring. Kirklees adopted a similar blended learning model and for the last four years 10% of its courses have been delivered through blended learning. It is now seen as one of the country’s pioneers in the field and David Scott has presented about the college’s implementation journey to delegates at our annual digital festival Digifest (jisc.ac.uk/digifest).
E-books

The college has been using our e-books for FE service (jisc.ac.uk/e-books-for-fe) for eight years although initially take-up among staff was patchy. The library services teams have worked hard with staff to highlight the greater flexibility and improved functionality that e-books offer and also with students to promote the benefits. Subject librarians actively market e-books to students and encourage them to access the books on their own devices, at times and in places that suit them. Students are increasingly sold on the idea and prefer their screens to print both for the sake of convenience and for financial reasons. Public service student, Mohammed Hussain’s experience is typical:

“Two years ago my mum bought me the theory book. I’ve probably used it three times. Mostly I’m on my phone. It’s easier.”

The college’s statistics show that downloads and usage of the e-books in our FE package are growing year on year.

Events – Connect More

Kirklees College engages actively with peer organisations at Jisc events including Digifest and Connect More (jisc.ac.uk/connect-more), a series of events held annually around the regions to enable college and university staff to share expertise and insights and meet sector experts.

As a result of a meeting with representatives from Salford College at Connect More Kirklees has been able to make faster progress on developing and implementing its new three-year strategy to develop staff digital skills. With the strategy in place it has just got its new CPD programme off to a positive start with a conference for 500 tutors at which Bob Harrison (formerly of FELTAG and now a member of the Ministerial Educational Technology Action Group) was keynote speaker.

What were the benefits for the college?

Student experience

Following a baseline survey when blended learning was first introduced, the college surveyed students again in the first half of 2017 to assess its impact. It found that 83% of learners believe it has helped them to become more independent learners and David says that when they leave college,

“we are tracking if students are getting better jobs because of these independent learning skills. The blended learning programme was a big piece of work and I would attribute a lot of what we did to Jisc because of that conversation and their inside knowledge of who is doing what within the sector. Of course we could have eventually got there, but this was like a short cut and it saved us a lot of time and effort.”
Learning and teaching, business efficiencies

The e-books for FE package has come to underpin many of the college’s courses and it has helped to ensure that all students have access to quality resources even if they are financially disadvantaged. The college would not be able to purchase e-books or printed textbooks for every student if it did not have access to the Jisc resources. David says:

“Jisc’s negotiations on behalf of the sector gives us a level playing field for our students.”

For example, the college buys EBSCO databases to give students access to online journals – a “luxury” that the college would not be able to afford without the budget freed up by using Jisc’s resources. David affirms:

“Purely from an efficiency, an economic and a budgetary point of view, as a manager who has a budget, the Jisc e-books are invaluable.”

The college has done extensive work to explore the factors that lead its students to success and has found clear evidence that those who use their core e-books and printed materials and also explore their wider bibliography frequently do better.

Public services tutor Steph Mills also told us:

“The actual quality of the work we’re getting back is much higher. More are going for merits and distinctions because of the activities that are included in the e-books. We would never have been able to set those as homework in the past because only a quarter of the class might have had access to them.”

What next? How can we help Kirklees College achieve more?

As we’ve seen, the college’s strategy for the next three years is to develop the digital skills of as many of the teaching staff as possible. This will enable the college to make more innovative use of edtech in classroom settings and equip students with the digital skills they will need whether they go on to further study or enter the world of work. Our building digital capability programme (jisc.ac.uk/rd/projects/building-digital-capability) supports colleges and universities to equip teaching and other staff with the skills and confidence with technology that they need in their evolving digital environment.
What’s it like working with Jisc?

David says:

“In the eight years I’ve been at the college, I’ve had nothing but positive things to say about Jisc. The college uses Jisc for many reasons. We subscribe to the network, of course, which has a real impact on our cyber security and making sure that we’re all safe online. We have access to eduroam. We have access to advice and guidance. Jisc has always been proactive and continue to be a practical help and our college has really benefited as a result. When we benefit, our students benefit and then the local economy benefits. Our students are going out there and using the skills that we picked up. We tend to engage with Jisc as often as we can - the latest project we’ve signed up for is the 2017-18 student digital experience tracker.”

More information
Find out more about how Jisc can support FE and skills providers (jisc.ac.uk/membership/our-catalogue-of-services-for-further-education)