

# **Coleg Glan Hafren, Cardiff**

## **CASE STUDY IN E-LEARNING PRACTICE**

### **Supporting Professional Development Using the VLE in the PGCE/Certificate in Education**

#### **1. Curriculum and Intended Learning Outcomes**

##### **1.1 Subject/Discipline Areas**

This case study is based in Coleg Glan Hafren and focuses on the Post-Compulsory Education and Training Programme franchised from the University of Wales, Newport (UWN).

##### **1.2 Topic/Domain**

All students have to complete a Professional Development module which includes setting targets for development linked to their progress as learners and as lecturers.

##### **1.3 Mode of Delivery**

The learning programme has been developed combining tutor-supported learning and autonomous learning using a mix of group sessions and one-to-one tutorials in combination with an online distance learning package to assist learners with these outcomes, as well as with their progression on the course. It is hoped that this mix of activities will stimulate the variety of preferred learning styles that occur in any group of learners.

The same package will be used with Year 1 & 2 students as they will be able to use the process to choose aspects closely related to their individual professional development and their year's curriculum content. The programme was first introduced to students in October 2005 and would continue for the academic year.

Although used with the PGCE, using e-learning to support the Tutorial provision, target setting and ILPs (Individual Learning Plans) can be replicated across the FE provision.

##### **1.4 Intended Learning Outcomes**

Clearly the focus on development would be the whole programme but this package will be embedded in the Professional Development module, outcome examples include:

- Make recommendations for improvement through ILP processes, clearly based on evidence from evaluations.
- Identify and discuss their learning gains resulting from the experiences of the programmes, particularly as a manager of teaching and learning.

### 1.5 Context/Level of Study

As a result of legislation all lecturers in FE have to have a recognised teaching qualification. The demands of the PGCE are strong and many students are also working full-time. Hence a package that blended tutor-supported sessions with on-line material would benefit the cohort.

## **2. Activity**

### 2.1 General Approach

The Humanist/Andragogical approach to learning is fundamental to the PGCE; giving the students the materials to grow autonomously as individuals, working towards their own goals, at their own pace. Hence the primary purpose of the learning package was to encourage our students to consider and focus on their professional development needs, reflect on their progress and foster responsibility for their own learning and development. As well as being key to their success on the PGCE programme these are also skills that practising lecturers require in the workplace. Using the VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) as a tool to encourage this was central to the process.

### 2.2 Learning Tasks and Techniques

- An induction session with the IT Manager introducing the VLE and the concept of ILT (Integrated Learning Technologies).
- A group tutorial on the Professional Development module, its requirements and its importance and links to the rest of the course. This session would also outline the Supporting Professional Development learning programme.
- Group tutorial sessions with Learning Advisors. These sessions would be held in the first term and would look at Harvard Referencing, writing bibliographies, and accessing and using online resources. The programme changed slightly from the previous year focusing the later sessions on accessing and using specific college and UWN resources. This change was driven by the need to fully explain the Athens process for external access to both institutions' subscribed resources. Training on how to get the best use out of relevant UWN resources was given by the university's Education Librarian to the Learning Centre staff. It is anticipated that extra sessions may be needed in the winter/spring term to give further support in the

difficult areas of referencing and research. (Learning Advisors are available to give support and advice to students on an individual basis if necessary.)

- The Tutorial Programme Self-Study Guide to access the electronic resources available on the college VLE, the college Intranet and the University’s website. These resources, highlighted in the table below, look at aspects of Professional Development that the PGCE team at Coleg Glan Hafren consider relevant to our cohort of students.

The VLE	The Intranet	<a href="http://www.newport.ac.uk">www.newport.ac.uk</a>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using ILT</li> <li>• Using Powerpoint</li> <li>• Using Excel to produce drop-down assessment</li> <li>• Using Virtual Whiteboards</li> <li>• Using NLN (National Learning Network) Materials in your Class</li> <li>• Using discussion boards etc</li> <li>• Information and Study Skills self-study tutorials and assessments (LC materials)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time Management</li> <li>• Research Skills</li> <li>• Writing References and Bibliographies</li> <li>• Plagiarism</li> <li>• Using <i>InfoTrac</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harvard Referencing</li> <li>• Holding Seminars</li> <li>• Learning How to Learn</li> <li>• Academic Writing</li> <li>• Reading Strategies</li> </ul>

Table 1: Material Directed to Students

- Students choose their individual areas of professional development from those highlighted in the guide and produce targets for Professional Development in the ILP provided on the VLE.
- Students work through the online distance learning resources in order to meet their individual Professional Development targets.
- 3 one-to-one tutorial sessions with their course tutor to discuss their progress on the course and specifically progress relating to their Professional Development targets. ILPs will also be updated in these sessions.
- Students review Professional Development progress in their Reflective Journals (RPDs) as per the module outcomes.

### 2.3 Feedback

Students will be given verbal feedback during the one-to-one tutorial sessions focusing on the relevance of the targets to the individual student and their progress on meeting these targets. Any issues relating to the on-line resources will be discussed here. They will receive written feedback on their progress when their RPDs are marked. As most of the aspects the students will work on in this programme are closely related to the whole PGCE any assessment that is completed on the course will elicit feedback (written and verbal) on their progress in this area e.g. all assessment criteria for written assignments make reference to

correct referencing and all assessment of teaching practice considers their use of ILT.

### **3. People Involved**

#### **3.1 Number of Learners**

This case study involves 4 groups of learners, 2 in Year 1 and 2 in Year 2. This is approximately 60 students.

#### **3.2 Learner Characteristics**

A large majority of our students work as lecturers in Further Education institutions, with others working in the public sector or in training organisations. It is common that our cohort is equally divided between those with a first degree and those who have joined the course through a vocational route – this mirrors the situation in other centres. Students studying the Certificate in Education have specific professional development needs. Members of the teaching team felt these students were mainly excellent in the classroom and had sound subject knowledge but often struggled with the academic nature of the course i.e. research skills, referencing, target setting and academic writing. The whole team also saw the need to move all students beyond the core texts and encourage their wider reading of current materials i.e. journals. Hence there was a need to ensure that all students had access to the information necessary to enable them to highlight their areas of professional development, set their personal targets and access the material to enable them to meet their targets. The material needed to be accessible to all outside the classroom environment and to students with varying proficiency in IT skills. Although IT skills are not formally assessed they are discussed during the IT induction session. These were the characteristics that underpinned the choice of learning tools and activities.

The language used in the programme was appropriate to the level of the course and best practice was followed in the design of the material for supporting the needs of students with specific learning needs. The benefits of e-learning for these students has been proved.

#### **3.3 Other People Involved**

The success of the programme required liaison between academic and support staff at both institutions, to ensure that material was put on the VLE, that all group sessions were delivered appropriately, that students received the support they needed and that all technical equipment and systems were maintained. Without these factors it would be difficult to bring students on board. Regular

meetings were held between the staff involved from both institutions to consider progress and make any changes necessary.

#### **4. Environment for Learning**

##### **4.1 Physical and Social Settings**

Group sessions which required students to have computer access were held in the Learning Centre IT Training Suites. These rooms also have interactive whiteboards. Other group sessions and the one-to-one tutorials were held in the PGCE classroom. This is a regular classroom with no computer access, although an interactive whiteboard has recently been installed. A data projector has been available for use.

It is anticipated that the students will work through the programme either in the Learning Centre during free Tutorial time or from their home computers. Both Learning Centres have Read & Write TextHelp software on all PCs which dyslexic people often find useful. It is possible to download or print off some of the material to enable them to be used without Internet access or in hard copy form.

##### **4.2 Tools**

All IT tools required for completion of the programme were standard desktop applications and Internet access was also necessary. For some IT material an Ecdl plug-in was required but this could be downloaded from the VLE. It was not anticipated that the IT tools would present difficulties to our cohort.

##### **4.3 Resources**

A variety of resources were used with this programme. The Tutorial Self-Study Guide contained guidelines on how to access the materials suggested for use in professional development. Students were also given an ILP template to complete. Both these documents were available on the VLE. The Learning Centre staff produced presentations and handouts for their sessions. The guide directed users towards a variety of materials as described in Section 2.

Students have access to a variety of electronic resources via Coleg Glan Hafren Learning Centre by virtue of their status as college staff. As they are also enrolled as students of UWN they are automatically provided with a UWN Athens account, enabling them to access appropriate resources subscribed to by UWN for the duration of the course. A list of the resources available to them is shown in Appendix 1.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The package and support materials are available on request.

#### 4.4 Support Issues and Access

Students were able to access technical support in the Learning Centre and could contact their Course Tutors for all other support needs. Students had some difficulty using Athens to access university resources owing to the fact that Athens account information was communicated from the University to the students some time after the start of the course. Following close liaison between the college and university staff, this practice is currently being reviewed by the Newport School of Education to improve the situation in time for the next academic year.

### 5. Outcomes for Learners

#### 5.1 Tutor Feedback

From informal evaluations it is apparent that increasingly targets for development now underpin many aspects of the students' work. Students are accessing the materials through the VLE and are using these to focus on their professional development needs. Targets are discussed and progress analysed throughout the Professional Development module, that is, in the RPD and in the SPE (Supervised Practical Experience – teaching practice). For example, a student may have a target for progression in use of ILT in their ILP, this will be discussed in the RPD and developed and evaluated in their teaching. It is undoubtedly beneficial that this is done and the link is made between the different components of the course. Although we are not currently tracking student use of the VLE this is an area which we are looking to develop before the end of the academic year.

In discussion during one-to-one tutorials it became clear that some students were not fully aware of the purpose of the VLE materials from the initial group sessions. This is an area that will need further consideration.

#### 5.2 Learner Feedback

Students were given a questionnaire to ascertain their opinions of the programme. This was completed in March when students were  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way through the programme. The results indicated that students were accessing the online resources and were using them for their professional development. Many students were also choosing to further develop their IT skills by using the on-line IT packages. Students felt that the most useful part of the process was the material and sessions on Harvard Referencing. Students had some difficulty using Athens to access university resources. It was also clear that our students did not like the format of the ILP.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Full results from the survey are available on request.

Comments from students and evidence from written work indicate that the cohort are regularly accessing the University's Library online resources. This would suggest that they are keen to develop their current and future professional development, as well as reflect an awareness of the importance in academic study of wider reading.

## **6. Reflections**

### **6.1 Aims and Rationale**

As discussed earlier the course team felt that our students would benefit from a directed package that would use blended learning, with e-learning at its core to encourage the development of their professional development needs.

The following conclusions can be made about the Supporting Professional Development programme:

### **6.2 Benefits and Opportunities**

It is apparent that embedding e-learning at the heart of the professional development support programme has been of clear benefit to the students. Improvements in the students' work within those areas identified in the rationale for the programme have been clearly acknowledged and recorded. Students are now reflecting on areas of their work that could be enhanced by further professional development and are now setting personal targets in these areas. Students are accessing resources for wider reading and improvement in referencing has been noted.

The programme has developed two further areas of specific improvement within the students' own teaching practice - Transferability and Flexibility.

Transferability:

- The use of e-learning as part of the package has highlighted the transferability inherent within the programme by enabling the students to reflect on how those study skills taught can be used to develop their own learning and that of their students.

Flexibility:

- As a core function of the programme students have directly benefited from the flexible delivery embedded in the programme to work in key areas at times suitable to them.
- Indirectly, flexibility has enabled those undertaking the programme to experience first hand the benefits of a flexible programme, in the course of which they have experienced the time demands of their own students.

The two areas of Transferability and Flexibility are seen as key issues in delivering a balanced and blended programme and embedding the two principals within the heart of the programme ensures efficient use of both course time and content.

The mix of group sessions, one-to-one sessions and distance learning materials is useful and has encouraged students to consider their responsibility for their own development. This mix also works to a variety of student preferred learning styles. All key players in the process worked well together for the success of the programme.

Although the actual ILP was not popular with the cohort, using this document enables trainee lecturers to use a process that they will be increasingly involved with in the workplace with their own students. Ensuring students have to access their ILP on-line can encourage further ownership of the process. This is an aspect of work that can be developed further throughout FE.

Focusing on Professional Development and individual targets prepares students for appraisals and Professional Development Reviews in the workplace. It is an opportunity to encourage focus on CPD (Continued Professional Development) and to help students see the value of target setting for their future development. The programme gave a central focus to the Tutorial process, linking it to the Professional Development module and the course as a whole and the students' needs.

### 6.3 Problems and Risks

There were several areas of concern with using on-line materials to support learning in this way. For staff it was time-consuming to upload the materials onto the VLE, this can affect attitude to the process.

Any problems accessing resources can affect students' attitudes to the whole learning package and on-line learning especially.

Although not linked specifically to e-learning, students did not like the ILP process. As this is currently linked to Basic Skills students in FE institutions, the terminology itself could be off-putting to our students; some felt it was patronising.

Not all students could see the link between the programme and their professional development needs, even though they benefited from the process of target setting and the material they were accessing. This could risk their negativity to the programme itself.



#### 6.4 Advice

It is imperative that all staff involved in the process are supportive and are fully informed of the purpose of the programme and what is required. Close liaison is needed both within the institution and those stakeholders outside the institution too.

Students need to be fully informed of the purpose of the programme and how it links to their course and their future developmental needs. The group sessions have to be well planned and it is clear that more sessions focusing on the programme and the materials available would be useful.

Access to all technology must be available as students can fail to interact with a programme if they have initial technical difficulties. The issue of Athens accounts is key to the success of this programme as in reality students have focused on this aspect – all saw research skills as one of their targets. The college is now looking towards Athens DA which will enable seamless access to college subscribed resources, and limit the number of usernames and passwords the students have to remember. The Learning Centre staff hope that Shibboleth developments will eventually resolve the problem of students needing to access multiple institutions' resources with several logins, and make the experience effortless for the end user.

Consideration needs to be given to the use of ILPs, in particular the terminology. Our cohort, on the whole, linked this to students with Basic Skills needs and this clouded their attitude to completing them. Students liked the process of setting targets and saw the benefits of this but not setting targets in an ILP. It is important to link this process and the documentation to CPD rather than ILP.

In conclusion e-learning, coupled with close professional relationships between all parties, can provide an innovative experience for various learners. The fact that the material is online is not paramount to success, and technology itself can cause problems, but with good liaison and support it can offer any time anywhere access for students, and empower them with skills immediately transferable in their own classrooms as teachers.

## Appendix 1

<http://lis.newport.ac.uk/sz/index.htm>

<http://www.glan-hafren.ac.uk/LearnCent/>

This case study is the work of Michell Hiller-Forster and Amanda Phillips of Coleg Glan Hafren, with support from Alison Harding at the University of Wales, Newport.

### Contact Details

Michell Hiller-Forster  
Coleg Glan Hafren  
Cardiff

029 20250359  
[hiller\\_m@glan-hafren.ac.uk](mailto:hiller_m@glan-hafren.ac.uk)