



Leading learning and skills

In partnership with **Becta** leading next generation learning

Technology Exemplar Network

Exemplar status providers

April 2008

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LSC and Becta extend our warmest congratulations to the following providers, who have achieved the prestigious exemplar status and will now take a lead role in developing phase 1 of the Technology Exemplar Network.

Exemplar status recognises a high level of achievement and commitment to the use of technology for the benefit of learners.

In achieving exemplar status these providers have demonstrated that they:

- are a good all round learning provider, including demonstration of successful Ofsted inspections
- have a whole organisation approach to embedding the effective use of technology
- have an inspirational story to tell about one of two aspects of delivery that have benefited from incorporating technology
- have demonstrated commitment at the highest level of the organisation (Principal, Chief Executive, Managing Director etc) to engaging with the Network
- have an e-strategy which is embedded within corporate strategies and objectives, most critically the strategy for teaching and learning
- have invested in changing (or maintaining if appropriate) the culture of the organisation in embracing the effective use of technology
- have a culture of continuous improvement, including a clear action plan for furthering e-maturity
- can demonstrate the positive impact embedding the use of technology has had on learners, staff and/or employers
- have the capacity and commitment to deliver the objectives of the Network
- are prepared to engage with the network in an open and honest manner to share aspirations and issues/barriers/areas for development with all participating supporting and developing providers.

The Technology Exemplar Network will create a national peer support network that will help all those involved to further develop the use of technology for learners to improve the quality of provision and the learner experience.

Each exemplar provider has identified a key aspect of their delivery which is exemplary and will be the focus area for their work with other providers within the Technology Exemplar Network.

Exemplar status providers

April 2008

Alton College

Key aspect of delivery: eLP

Brockenhurst College

Key aspect of delivery: eSAR

Bournemouth and Poole College

Key aspect of delivery: Virtual learning environment

City and Islington College

Key aspect of delivery: Strategic management of culture change

Grimsby Institute

Key aspect of delivery: Embedding e-learning across the whole organisation

ISIS Training and Recruitment

Key aspect of delivery: e-portfolio

National Star College

Key aspect of delivery: Assistive technologies for learning

North Devon College

Key aspect of delivery: Strategic approach to embedding technology for learning

South Devon College

Key aspect of delivery: Staff development of the use of ILT to enhance learning

Xaverian Sixth Form College

Key aspect of delivery: Student tracking and information: providing a more personalised experience

The Technology Exemplar Network aims to:

- create a prestigious and highly respected exemplar status that recognises a high level of achievement in the use of technology for the benefit of learners
- improve the use of learner focused technology and levels of e-maturity within providers in the FE and Skills sector and promote effective practice across the sector
- establish a national network of peer support for providers across the FE and Skills sector
- build peer support skills across the sector
- have a positive impact on the quality of provision to learners and the learner experience.

The driving force behind the establishment of the Network has been the recognition that, for learning providers to plan the implementation of sustainable technologies, they need evidence of what has worked to date.

By reviewing real examples of effective practice taking place elsewhere and sharing experience, learning providers can further develop their plans for future investment and implementation of technology for learning.

Benefits of participating in the network

Membership of the Network will provide participating learning providers with an opportunity:

- to improve levels of e-maturity
- to network with and learn from other providers
- to improve the quality of provision and therefore enhance the learner experience
- to learn about potential pitfalls to avoid lessons and areas of effective practice
- to develop peer support skills in line with the self regulation agenda
- for organisational and personal growth
- to participate in the development of sector e-maturity models
- to develop long term supportive relationships with other providers.

Exemplar profile

Alton College

Students at Alton College know that staff will check-up on missing homework and absenteeism – and they like it!

Teachers can enter any concerns about work or commitment into the college information system and a message will go to the student's tutor. But this is far from being a CCTV security, 'spy in the sky', type of system to catch out wrong-doers.

From their first week, induction shows the students what information and learning technology can do to support them. Each student has an account with a password and can access all the learning materials on a Moodle learning platform 24 hours a day from anywhere in or out of college, even during the holidays.

Alton College's advances in the use of electronic individual learning plans (ILPs) won them exemplar status in the Technology Exemplar Network. Students can access their ILP, which has their target grades for each subject and their progress against those targets. This is used in their tutor review three times a year, but teachers can add comments, including positive ones, at any time and keep the tutor and student service managers in touch.

There is a traffic light system. Everyone starts in the green category but missed work or unexplained absences can move a student into the amber zone. This automatically prompts the tutor and manager that something needs to be followed up. Dropping into the red zone can mean disciplinary procedures are about to start.

"We knew we had a paper system that was inefficient and had to be replaced," says IT Services Manager Chris Grant. The green slips on which teachers wrote notes to tutors had the disadvantages of any paper system, but the computer keeps all the information and does the filtering through automatic e-mail alerts to tutors and student service managers and by generating lists of students in the amber and red zones, thus saving tutors the time they would have spent scanning lists for dropped grades.

The system began with a thorough survey of staff and students to find out what they wanted from the system. There was no single piece of software that fitted the bill, says Chris, so they made the decision to design a bespoke system of their own. They used open source applications available on the internet, but recruited a developer to make sure they worked together as the college wanted.

And the students react positively, says Steven MacCormack, Vice Principal, Student Services and Business Development. "They welcome it very much. They know there's a structure there and that they're being followed up and supported. It's very motivating." If they slip down to amber, they try hard to get back into the green zone.

Parents still get traditional paper reports, but are able to log into their child's ILP – if the student allows it. In the annual parental survey, the system gets around 90 per cent approval rating.

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Exemplar profile

Bournemouth and Poole College

Teachers, not techies, make the best champions for using technology for learning, according to Quinton O’Kane, Assistant Principal ICT/ILT at Bournemouth and Poole College. “They’re not perceived as IT specialists, so it’s all about the impact of technology in the classroom. Many colleges have relied on IT people, but that doesn’t have the same level of penetration,” he says.

The champions are recruited from among teachers with grade 1s and 2s in lesson observations who also happen to be people who use technology well. They are seconded for two years to work in a team with Chris Frost, ILT Development Centre Manager, to develop materials and advocate the use of ILT with colleagues.

Teaching staff are given training tailored to their needs. The learning platform system monitors whoever is uploading resources and tracks student use of the learning platform by each course. Where staff seem to be under-using the system, the ILT team can discuss the issues with them in a small forum to find out what they need. It was for excellence in integrating the learning platform into mainstream teaching and learning practice that the college won exemplar status in the Technology Exemplar Network.

Librarians are also key players. Coming from that background himself, Quinton considered how the library service should evolve in the new world of digital information. Each librarian is attached to a subject area, identifies opportunities to use technology and works with course teams offering one to one surgery sessions.

“Librarians are very IT literate. They’re predisposed to this kind of work because they are used to library management systems and this is a natural progression

Over the last two years, the librarians and the ILT team have interviewed staff to find examples of good ILT practice, creating an ideas forum where case studies are made available on the staff intranet. In training sessions they also get lecturers to explain their use of IT, thus advocating change to their colleagues. Quinton would like to involve the students in the same way so they can articulate to lecturers the benefits that come from being taught using technology.

Some of the learning materials are created by multimedia students from the local university on work placements. “This is cost-effective and gives them the opportunity to work in a non-commercial environment,” says Chris. The college believes that the learning objects they produce are as good as anything from the National Learning Network.

Quinton believes that, finances allowing, the next phase could see the introduction of 4D technology, in which images of objects can be manipulated by removing parts. This could illustrate the relationship between different parts of the body, or the workings of an engine, or the effects of demolishing buildings in a cityscape. “We could expose students to the artefacts and they could learn more rapidly than by simply reading a textbook.”

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Exemplar profile

Brockenhurst College

Brockenhurst College has eliminated mountains of bureaucracy and wasteful paperwork that have been a constant drain on time and resources through its innovative use of new information and learning technology.

The latest development to help achieve this is the electronic self assessment report system, for which it has been awarded exemplar status in the Technology Exemplar Network. The system integrates the entire college management information system (MIS) and learning platform.

Robin Gadd, head of information services, said: "We desperately needed to aggregate departmental responses on everything we did in order to improve the efficiency and timeliness of the college's Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan." Brockenhurst is a Beacon College, noted for its excellence in self assessment, and it needed to keep up the momentum.

But this was about much more than kudos and awards. "The Ofsted Common Inspection Framework in 2006

created the imperative," Robin said. "Also, the self-assessment review is crucial to the whole self-regulation agenda that the Government is promoting."

With success rates already at 97 per cent, it was difficult to see where improvements in learning could come, he said. "The big benefits were around reductions in bureaucracy. The previous system meant printing out hundreds of sheets of paper per department, which were time consuming and very difficult to process. This system eliminates duplication and makes it easy to pull together common issues."

All staff – teaching, support and management – were trained to use it for departmental self-assessment and record keeping. It is an accessible, easy-to-use software application, available online for use whenever and wherever staff wished to use it, and incorporating data sources that were traditionally only available as separate reports.

"They have the chance to talk to each other, record outcomes and see how other departments were doing it," said Robin. Self-assessments were also more accurate since they were subject to constant non-threatening peer review. "You get a better sense of whether departments claiming to be good are actually outstanding or vice versa. Staff like it because, prior to this, the whole thing was a bureaucratic chore that people just had to get through.

"We knew we were doing innovative things but we had no really tangible evidence. It is great to receive this (exemplar) status, we think it reflects the effort that the whole staff have made. We had a good history of sharing information before but this is a valuable opportunity to find out what else is going on and to help others.

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Exemplar profile

City and Islington College

City and Islington remains the 'first choice' college for North London students and is heavily oversubscribed despite fierce competition from an increasing number of school sixth forms.

Jane O'Neill, Director of Students, attributes the success substantially to the levels of learner satisfaction brought about by the college's advances in new technology. "We are a widening participation college. Many of our students have part-time jobs or care for brothers and sisters. They have to have access to resources from their homes in order to stay successful. This has resulted in high levels of satisfaction."

Indeed, success rates are extremely good for a college in an area of relatively high urban deprivation. More than 4,000 of the 14,500 students last year were aged 16 to 18, with 89 per cent attracting widening participation funds and 54 per cent coming from black and ethnic minority communities. The overall pass rates were 97.7 per cent for A-levels and 94 per cent for vocational courses, with 1,034 students progressing to higher education.

"But the starting point for any college seeking to sustain such levels of satisfaction and success has to be staff support and confidence in the system", Jane says. It is this emphasis that won City and Islington exemplar status in the Technology Exemplar Network. Its strategic management of culture change has seen technology embedded in the system at every level of organisation.

"The main issue has to be supporting the staff to increase their confidence. This is not just about the technology but culture change. People feel comfortable with ways of working and even for very good teachers it can be unnerving if you are trying something new for the first time,"

The college already had a good track record, with its own intranet system in place in 1998 and winning the Nilta Award for innovation in information systems in 2000. Even so, staff and management knew when they embarked on a high investment four year new build and accommodation strategy that a major cultural change was essential.

All staff were involved in an initial three year strategy and 'roll out' of an effective self-assessment review process that generated development plans at course, curriculum and college centre level. From this came the priorities and devised ICT and e-learning development plans. Everyone – staff and students – undergo induction into the system, with full support to boost confidence in a system that is continually monitored by a range of development groups for ICT, e-learning, e-champions and separate ICT user groups for each of the five centres.

The college has now created a new ILT-based customer relationship management system, as well as an employer satisfaction system, as part of a range of developments that led to the college taking the unofficial role as JISC RSC exemplar in the area prior to the launch of the Technology Exemplar Network.

Frank McLoughlin, college Principal, says: "The importance of becoming an [Technology Exemplar Network] Exemplar for us is the recognition it gives all our staff who have embraced e-learning and taken on the challenge of striving for the very highest quality of teaching and learning for our students."

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Exemplar profile

Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education

What Grimsby Institute for Further and Higher Education did with new technology two years ago, the BBC does tomorrow.

The path-finding college had 'video-on-demand', distance learning support for lecture theatres and workshops in 2006, and yet the BBC has just got round to the same with BBC iPlayer. Also, through a subsidiary digital media company, Grimsby was the first on the scene with an FE-supported Sky TV education channel – a £3m project set up with Regional Development Agency support.

Adrian Clarke, director of information services, says: "In terms of technology we are brave and will take risks in trying to take on new things and make them work. We are also very customer orientated, very enterprising, in our focus on business." It is an approach that has seen

the institute expand from a £16m to £39m business within six years, substantially as a result of ILT developments.

Where many colleges are only just considering whole-college networking with whiteboards and wireless systems, Grimsby is a generation on, dismantling whiteboards for smart boards, complete with voting systems and other advantages associated with the most advanced technology. Even so, they take nothing for granted and are seeking wider consultations with other colleges, training providers and businesses on even more radical improvements as they plan to move into a 700-room hi-tech building in three years.

"We want to use the status and resources that come with the exemplar status to think anew, to help others and to bring them in to advise us on what we are doing right and what wrong. Are we planning to have the right network and kit? We want to discuss with colleges whether we should have breakout areas? What do they do with their equipment? And so much more."

Adrian knows the institute has done well, with its innovative 'Learning Curve' room for quality development work and staff development. Over the past two years, it has succeeded in embedding e-learning across the whole organisation, using peer support and sharing of technological ideas, for which it was awarded the Technology Exemplar Network's exemplar status. "Instead of us dictating, we allow staff to bring technology to us," he says.

As an exemplar college, they want to study the barriers and problems encountered when facing change. How are (or were) these barriers broken down? Its own management of such issues has helped win the Grimsby college Ofsted accolades, Star Awards for leadership and innovation and Beacon Awards for lifelong learning in the community.

Its latest ventures include £6.9m of research work for business, creating ICT toolkits for business production improvements linked to NVQs and Foundation Degrees, working with everyone from the local community, sector skills councils and even the United Nations.

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Exemplar profile

ISIS Training and Recruitment

Using new technology to meet the needs of learners in a rural community proved a double challenge for the work-based learning provider, ISIS Training and Recruitment.

It is enough of a task getting people to accept the change of culture with moves to e-learning and e-assessment, says Mick Gilroy, Programme Leader and E-learning Co-ordinator. But first you have to get the systems in place and that is not as easy as it sounds.

ISIS provides learning and assessment programmes for 420 apprentices scattered around rural Lincolnshire. Many live in such remote areas, they cannot even wire-up for broadband or online services people in towns take for granted. Yet, traditional teaching and assessment methods were becoming prohibitively costly in both time and cash.

“Isolation was the motivating factor,” said Mick. “The problem is not about the learners accessing us; it’s about the assessors accessing the learners. They used to be driving around seeing just one or two a day. That cannot be effective. Even for many of the learners, they cannot just jump on a bus and come into a training centre.”

ISIS has a mixed bag of learners, focused considerably around tourism and the rural hospitality industries. They are mainly 16- to 24-year-old apprentices, plus a fair number of adult learners on NVQ specialist IT courses or one-of qualifications and pre-apprenticeship, Entry-to-Employment and level 1 programmes.

So Mick and his team set about building systems of distance learning and distance assessment schemes, supplying laptops which include where necessary digital cameras for recording work for assessment. “At the moment, we are taking WiFi hotspots so that anyone can get internet connections. In extreme cases, where they cannot, we leave the work with them on laptops and go out to collect them later.

As a result, ISIS already had 170 learners using e-portfolios – for which the organisation won its Technology Exemplar Network exemplar status – among a range of e-learning methods.

The success of the scheme soon attracted attention from other providers. “Everyone going down this route would have to jump the same hurdles. You make wrong decisions about software and have to think again. But we found increasingly that people were asking our advice – this is not about telling them what to do but helping them find out what will work for them.”

For ISIS work continues to grow and it already plans for 200 more work based learning students. It has excellent links and relationships with the employers, 20 training providers, FE Colleges and schools.

Mick believes that “the exemplar status will help us reach even further as we continue to develop and implement wider use of e-portfolios and e-learning strategies for our work-based learning learners.”

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Exemplar profile

National Star College

Staff at the National Star College have turned to some surprising sources for 'enabling' technology, to help liberate students from their learning difficulties and disabilities.

The college, which is fast developing a name as a leader in the exploitation of such applications, has even turned to the defence industry. Students have been trialling a device that tracks eye movements, allowing pilots to move a cursor around the screen. But instead of firing weaponry the technology, developed by Swedish company My Tobii, is helping students who have no physical movement record their work, make independent choices and communicate independently.

"I was a bit sceptical at first, but it's fantastic," says David Finch, Director of College Development at National Star College. "Its liberating possibilities are immense when they know how to use it. It's revolutionising their work because up until now they've not been able to do things independently."

At the college, an independent specialist provider for students with learning difficulties and disabilities, students are assessed to match up enabling technology to their learning needs for a personalised curriculum and for living skills.

Profoundly disabled students use POSUM control systems (Electronic Assistive Technology) with their communicators to unlock room doors, turn on televisions and open and close curtains. This helps them live independent lives without constant dependence on a care assistant.

Other students use more common gaming technology, such as Eye Toy and Nintendo Wii, to improve their posture. Moving in front of a webcam, they can see themselves on a screen. The game measures their progress and with an occupational therapist, gives them targets to reach. "Many who were reluctant to do their physical therapy before are now keen because they are interested in the technology," says David. The assistive technology has even given an international flavour to the curriculum. At 9:30 (GMT) every Friday, students communicate simultaneously with other disabled students in Finland and Germany as part of the EU's Comenius programme. Using MSN messaging they get to know each other and how disability affects them in their countries. Using a Moodle virtual platform they post articles and pictures to create a travel guide for disabled people.

Many colleges for students with learning difficulties and disabilities have learned to exploit assistive technology. But National Star College has gone further, sharing its expertise with mainstream colleges, especially in the use of mobile technology. They have also helped colleges with looking at how their bespoke management information system can be used to communicate and gather information regarding student assessment, progress and achievement with on-screen individual learning plans. It is these extra steps which have earned the college its exemplar status in the Technology Exemplar Network.

Helen Sexton, college Principal, says: "ILT and enabling technology are fundamental to the quality of experience of our students at the National Star College. Technology, and its expert application by our multi-disciplinary staff, liberates our students, opening up a world of opportunity and new skills that bring confidence, a sense of achievement and raised aspirations for the future."

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Exemplar profile

North Devon College

Response rates for student satisfaction surveys have shot up since they went online at North Devon College, to the delight of everyone concerned.

John Laramy, Head of Learning and Performance, is most pleased. "This not only makes it easier to respond to student concerns, but also to pass on praise to members of staff," he says. However, the online service is just one part of a total transformation of the way technology is used.

The success of the college earned its exemplar status in the Technology Exemplar Network for its strategic approach to the embedding of technology for learning across the organisation. According to John, for any college to succeed in really changing the organisation, "ILT strategy must be driven from the top." However, the motive must be to improve teaching and learning, not simply to have the latest technology.

North Devon College spends about £750,000 a year on ILT, so this has to be written into the budget from the earliest stages. "You can't use ILT if you haven't got a computer," John says. "You need support from senior management team level to make sure the budget goes into it."

It is also important to invest in the whole infrastructure, he adds. If staff are to feel confident in the system, the

servers have to work and the hardware system has to be considered as a whole. He compares this to analysing, why you like a good car. "It's not just because of the steering wheel or the wheels, but the way in which all the parts work together."

John recommends that any college hoping to embed technology across the organisation adopts a strategic approach. At North Devon, first the registers went online so that staff interacted with ILT on a daily basis. Now, most information is on the college central information system and staff can access it in a way that is "timely, accurate and at their fingertips." The W-drive, or 'wonder drive' as staff call it, allows any file to be accessed from anywhere in the system, making information sharing much easier, for example, sharing material for tutorials.

Students benefit because their reports, reviews and many individual learning plans (ILPs) are online, making it easier for staff to access the information they need to personalise learning and support individual students.

Holding information centrally, but accessing it from anywhere saves time and effort – on the principle of 'input once, use many times'. This is particularly useful in the self-assessment process for inspections.

None of this will work, however, without training all staff to use the technology effectively. While some of the training is done centrally, most is based in the departments where people work and each department has a dedicated 'ILT champion' – not necessarily the most technologically capable person but a 'good teacher' who happens to use ILT. The college also found the most effective training to be that which was done in small groups – to meet both individual and departmental need – driven by a manager in the area.

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Exemplar profile

South Devon College

With digital projectors in every classroom and interactive whiteboards in more than half the rooms, staff at South Devon College are immersed in technology to a degree that few other institutions can boast.

Progress made over the past three years has earned South Devon exemplar status in the Technology Exemplar Network as a college able to share and spread best practice nationally, embedding e-learning across the organisation and raising standards in staff development.

The key words in all this for Rebecca Barrington, Continuing Professional Development and Blended Learning Manager, are “staff development”, without which, she says, any attempt to change the culture around information learning technologies in a college is problematic. And effective staff development requires five core essentials – top management commitment, major investment, a whole-college approach, teamwork and immediate access for all to equipment and resources.

“There is no point making the resources available if the staff are not trained, nor is there any point training staff if they cannot immediately make full use of all the equipment,” says Rebecca. She was fortunate in having the support of a new and very committed new management team when the college moved to new premises in January 2006 – itself an

incentive for a thorough review of learning technology use, training and provision.

But even before a strategy could be drawn up and staff development initiated, a thorough ILT audit programme was carried out to ensure the skills development needs of all staff. A questionnaire was sent round to see whether staff were comfortable or not with the changes proposed. But it was more than just a survey of skills – it was the start of a strategy to devise personalised learning plans for every member of staff, tied to professional development and appraisal.

As a result of known in detail individual strengths and weaknesses, full training and support is now available, ranging from structured whole team workshops and one-to-one ‘hands on’ sessions to instant support in the classroom to deal with problems, under expert technicians who set up everything needed in advance. Part of this training programme called ‘The ILT Facilitator’ won the 2007 AOC Nilta Practitioners award for the ‘outstanding’ support of ILT training – an accolade won as a result of the praise and comments from teaching staff.

“The hardest thing was deciding with training who took priority”, said Rebecca. “We did not want some people doing it and others not so we launched with just teaching staff, then support staff.” With 795 staff – including almost 400 academic staff – listing their every skill, what courses they had been on and what training they needed was vital.

According to Rebecca, “ILT is now fully embedded in the college with digital delivery technologies being part of the normal learning experience for learners alongside access anytime and anywhere to online resources and course materials.” The interactive whiteboard is used in 88 per cent of observed lessons and an Ofsted inspector stated that “walking around the college it was evident that there is extensive use of electronic whiteboards”.

Heather Maxwell, college Principal, is in no doubt what being an exemplar college means to them. “This is excellent news for South Devon College and we are thrilled that we have been awarded exemplar status. We are very passionate about how technology can support teaching and learning and we are very much looking forward to supporting other colleges in their implementation of ILT.”

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Exemplar profile

Xaverian Sixth Form College

Xaverian Sixth Form College was the first in the UK to make students' exam results available electronically. But logging on from a summer holiday beach side internet café to find their grades is not the only benefit the students get from new technology.

They can monitor their own attendance and punctuality, access the learning platform and book careers interviews, among other facilities. And they have the flexibility to work anytime, anywhere; monitoring shows that 40 per cent of access occurs off campus.

But to achieve this, the college had to design its own intranet. "Commercial systems seem to have been designed for part-time students or those involved in distance learning – they don't integrate well with management information systems (MISs) and they were difficult for staff to use," says Simon Channell, Virtual Learning Environment (learning platform) Manager. It was easier to write their own system that integrated with the MIS, bringing academic and management information together.

The aim was to create a personalised system of student tracking and information that students actually wanted and it was this that won the college exemplar status in the Technology Exemplar Network. As well as getting their results, for instance, exam timetables are sent out in

advance and marks from individual modules are automatically converted into indicative grades.

All registers are completed online and the information fed into each student's individual learning plan (ILP) so that they can monitor their own attendance and punctuality against college and Education Maintenance Award targets. The College works closely with the Connexions service to create materials and book careers interviews online, which can be monitored for attendance.

Each student spends a weekly session in the Learning Support Suite where they can take diagnostic tests and get support with key skills. Curriculum leaders also provide support materials week by week in addition to homework, and as well as subject tutors there are staff to support literacy, numeracy and ICT. Rather than let the students get lost by browsing enormous amounts of material, the weekly system presents them with what they need at that particular stage in the course. With all the information on attendance and punctuality, prior achievement, diagnostic tests, target grades and additional learning support feeding in to the ILP, staff can get a complete profile of each student. Reviews and reports can be created online.

As well as academic resources, students can access information about the college, such as the handbook, and information on careers, higher education and financial support. A bulletin board also appears each time the student logs on.

Working electronically also saves time for teachers and administrators by eliminating duplicating, collating and distribution. The college estimates that moving from written to online reviews and reports has saved 67,200 sheets of paper and £3,539.20 per annum on printing costs.

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