

Virtual learning environments – good practice examples

Ofsted publishes good practice examples on its website; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice. The following have some relevance to virtual learning, or the application of ICT, which may be of interest.

Online literacy and numeracy training

Improving employees' skills in mathematics and English through online learning in the workplace: McDonald's Restaurants Ltd, May 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120123.

McDonald's offers literacy and numeracy training to all its employees. The response has been very enthusiastic and employee turnover has dropped to its lowest ever level. A constant review of the programme ensures that it meets its users' needs.

Creating a simple online Excel monitoring system for work-based learners

Tracking and monitoring the progress made by work-based learners, Inter Training Services, February 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120137.

This example shows how effective use of simple online reporting and well-managed monitoring systems can improve the quality of provision and success rates for work-based learners.

Using ICT – particularly shared resources - to support learning and management

Making the most of information and communication technology: South Devon College, May 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120108.

South Devon College has improved from inadequate some years ago to outstanding in 2008. Since then, success rates have continued to rise and using information and communication technology (ICT) well has been a central element in this success story. There are few, if any, elements of the college's work that are not well supported and often significantly enhanced by the effective use of technology in all its modern guises.

Among other aspects - the use of web postings to communicate with learners

Collecting and acting on feedback from learners: City Lit, March 2012;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120133.

This example illustrates the extensive range of methods that a successful provider of adult education uses to gather learner feedback. It includes innovative practice to ensure that course applicants are able to make more informed choices.

An example of use of technology (producing DVDs) to engage with 'learners'

Using audiovisual technology to help offenders maintain family ties and learn new skills: HMP Lowdham Grange, October 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-using-audiovisual-technology-help-offenders-maintain-family-ties-and-learn-ne.

This example demonstrates how the prison's high-quality audiovisual technology helps offenders to maintain strong family ties through the 'Story-Time Dads' project. Accreditation in video editing qualifications at levels 1 and 2 also enables offenders to gain skills that support successful resettlement.

An interesting reference to apprentices being motivated by online tracking

Good practice resource – Engineering excellence at Rolls-Royce, May 2011;
<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-%E2%80%93-engineering-excellence-rolls-royce>.

See how Rolls-Royce empowers apprentices to manage their own learning and prepares them for the challenges of life as an engineer. Explore the application of business improvement techniques to managing learning and discover how closely their learning environment reflects real working.

A simple example of using technology to enhance leaning for very young children – possibly indicating the expectations of learners in 10 years' time

Good practice resource - Information and communication technology – not just about computers, Mar 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120049.

This childminder demonstrates how she uses a range of information and communication technology (ICT) resources to support all areas of learning and prepare children for a world that is increasingly dependent on technology.

A survey on ICT in Colleges, rather than VLEs, but some applicability in terms of resource or activities

Identifying good practice: a survey of college provision in information and communication technology, January 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080299.

This report examines factors that enable post-16 learners to make good progress in the sector subject area of information and communication technology. Between October 2007 and March 2008, inspectors visited 25 colleges where provision in information and communication technologies had been judged to be good or outstanding at their most recent inspection. The report has examples of good practice and recommendations for further improvement.

How ICT in schools is/needs to be improved, with some applicability for those considering the skills of post-16 learners

Subject professional development materials: Design and technology, June 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/subject-professional-development-materials-design-and-technology.

Ofsted publishes a number of subject surveys every year. They look at developments in a specific subject over the previous three years, based on specialist inspectors' visits to a range of schools. This resource has been put together to help teachers in secondary schools improve teaching and learning by reflecting on the main messages from the design and technology report 'Meeting technological challenges?' published in March 2011.

Ofsted's last full survey on VLEs; the work on this portfolio suggest that many of the points made three years ago are still valid

Virtual learning environments: an evaluation of their development in a sample of educational settings, January 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/070251.

Virtual learning environments (VLEs) use computers to allow remote access to learning materials. As the routine use of computers becomes all pervasive, there is an expectation that VLEs will form a significant part of the next generation's experience of learning. This survey evaluates how VLEs are developing within a selection of providers.

In addition there is a range of case studies, reports and materials on the LSIS Excellence gateway site; www.excellencegateway.org.uk/searchresults or their 'treasury' of older examples. A few are highlighted here.

Bromley College – online tracker

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/3549

The eTracker is an electronic individual learning plan (eILP) solution that enables lecturers to take a highly personalised approach to the individual needs of their learners. It enables them to identify issues early and intervene quickly – not just academic issues but also pastoral and behavioural. eTracker has been a motivating force for the learners at Bromley College and it facilitates good communication across the College.

Assessing 'Moodle maturity'

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/3620

Since Shrewsbury College switched to the Moodle virtual learning environment (VLE) in 2006, ILT Co-ordinator Richard Booth and Learning Technologist Dave Shearan have actively encouraged engagement across the College through various initiatives. The most recent is 'Moodle Maturity' – a self-assessment process that encourages staff to consider their current position with the VLE, and how they could progress further.

Online conferencing

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/13413

Use of webinar by Northampton College – conference of providers interested in apprenticeships and their timely success rates.

Peer mentor programme via Moodle

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/12425

Use of Moodle by Bedford College in a project to develop processes and resources to support a peer mentor programme for learners in the Computing department who find the transition from school to College or between college levels difficult.

Switching Mahara inputs to PDF

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/12426

Removing Barriers to Mahara E-portfolio adoption by the development of an interface to the wkhtmltopdf open source utility to allow PDF print functionality of views (useful for awarding bodies).

VLE for apprentices

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/12431

Platinum Employment Advice and Training – developing an e-learning portal for work-based learners.

e-learning good practice celebrated in video

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/20831

Colchester Institute, South Staffordshire College and Lincoln College have seen their e-learning good practice highlighted in new videos, which are available from the below link. They touch on a Virtual Bricklaying Suite, the use of mobile technologies in the subjects of Hair and Beauty and Catering and general thoughts on how to progress from good to outstanding in inspection.

Toolkit for online tutorial

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/25409

As part of an LSIS Regional Response Fund project, Otley College has developed an online toolkit for one-to-one tutorials, based on research undertaken with practitioners and learners. The toolkit has been developed to meet the needs of students and tutors, and attempts to fulfill the requirement for tutorials within a new straightened funding agreement.

Social media used to engage learners

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/25022

Barnardo's Palmersville Training successfully uses Facebook (FB) to enhance and improve communication with, and engage young people. FB has proven to be a very successful tool in interacting with learners, as well as re-engaging with learners who have absented themselves from training.

Virtual computers for hardware training

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/24970

Chesterfield College introduced the use of web-based learning using virtual machines to help learners studying on its computing courses. This had several advantages; learners were able to have new learning opportunities for activities that were impossible to create in the real world; it made better use of class time for both staff and learners; it ensured greater consistency of access; and most importantly it engaged learners.

Interactive tutorials

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/24967

Research and citation skills are important competences for students to possess, particularly when moving into higher education. At Somerset College, Jolanta Peters, Research and Library Services Manager came up with the idea of producing interactive tutorials for students. This unique student-led project has helped to provide 24/7 resources and enhance communication and project management skills for students.

Effective deployment of Mahara on a VLE

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/24800

Dan Jeffries, Head of Online Learning at Access to Music has successfully deployed the Mahara ePortfolio platform through the college Moodle VLE. (Virtual Learning Environment) Mahara is helping learners to create a dynamic and collaborative portfolio of work, which they can use to share with potential employers and cultivate their achievements online.

e-PLPs on Moodle

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/3645

Barnsley College introduced electronic personalised learning plans (e-PLPs) three years ago (2007) as a plug-in for its Moodle virtual learning environment (VLE). After a year-long trial period, use of e-PLPs has been made compulsory across the College, with staff buy-in achieved with the help of a comprehensive programme of one-to-one and practical training. The usefulness and usability of the plug-in has encouraged staff to use the VLE

more frequently and gain confidence in doing so, while greater use of the VLE by learners has encouraged better quality use of the VLE by staff.

Using Moodle to deliver functional skills

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/14107

Development of Moodle at Leicester College to deliver Skills for Life and Functional Skills for large numbers of learning.

Second Life to create a virtual museum

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/3639

E-learning staff at Barnfield College have created a revolutionary learning environment in Second Life. Following a successful bid for funding, Barnfield College has been involved in a collaborative project with Museums Luton to create a virtual museum. This has helped drive a culture of innovative and engaging learning in the College and has helped to raise the profile of local museums in Luton.

Distant language Learning

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/12417

Using e-learning to deliver language training to the Isles of Scilly – and qualitative evaluation.