

Digital student exemplars

Enhancing the digital experience of students

This case study is relevant to the digital student challenge:

Take a strategic approach to developing the student digital experience

Creating a culture shift at Blackburn College

Three powerful and innovative projects at **Blackburn College** are helping students and staff to engage with digital technologies and to enhance learning and teaching and the broader student digital experience.

Deliver a relevant digital curriculum

The college has developed **learning wheels** – a simple graphic device that links the college’s blended learning strategy to practical guidance on using different technologies.

Learners are at the centre of each learning wheel which features four modes of engagement:

- » Learning content
- » Assessment
- » Communication
- » Collaboration

Suggested activities, digital learning content and resources relevant to each mode can then be placed around the edges of the wheel, guiding staff by highlighting digital technologies they could use and by linking platforms, apps and web content to learning delivery.

Staff can develop wheels relevant to their own curriculum and are encouraged to share these with colleagues both within the college and further afield.



"The wheels help staff to gain knowledge and competency, from building confidence and understanding around digital technologies through to the application of technologies within their own curriculum areas."

Learning futures programme

Deliver a robust, flexible digital environment

Blackburn College have invested heavily in technology and staff training to help teaching staff to fully engage in innovative digitally supported education with a range of technologies available to use in any classroom, promoting an interactive and engaging learning environment. Digital technologies available include:

- » Mobile Devices (iPads, tablets, smart phones, laptops
- » Go-Pro, Flip and snake cameras
- » Visualisers
- » Voting systems
- » Interactive Boards
- » Interactive Tables
- » Smart Podiums
- » Specialist accessibility software

The college has also established an **Innovation Lab** (iLab) and (iStore) – a flexible learning environment specifically designed to support staff to increase their use of a range of learning technologies and to develop their skills. The iLab has nine zones facilitating different uses of a range of technologies in nine different environments:

- » Three soft spot zones, offering eight and ten seater sound-booth style seating areas for meetings and staff development sessions . iPads remotely display on a dedicated TV screen and there is a smaller two/three seater area for small meetings, consultations and demos
- » iPit zone – an area for independent research, exploration or use of an iPad, apps etc.
- » Interactive classroom zone, equipped with an 87" interactive screen with integrated voting technology for a variety of purposes and able to accommodate groups of up to 18 people
- » Webinar zone – an area for attending/hosting online meetings and conferences with a PC and headset
- » Screen casting zone – to facilitate the creation of professional videos and to record on-screen activities/demonstrations which can be shared with learners on any device. This area has a dedicated computer, specialist software and a headset
- » Exploration zone – an area for exploring new technologies with technician support if required. This area includes resources such as **MakeyMakey**, visualisers, snake cameras and voice recorders
- » **ActivTable** to support collaborative, small group learning and motivate users to lead their own learning, drive engagement and aid consensus decision making and classroom collaboration
- » The iStore enables staff to trial and showcase their resources in a safe and supportive environment

Support students and staff to work successfully with digital technologies

In 2013 the college created a team of friendly digital enthusiasts called DigiPals. DigiPals are students who champion the use of e-learning and encourage peer engagement with technology to enhance learning.

Typical examples of the types of activities that DigiPals engage in include:

- » Showing their peers and staff how to use different technologies in a learning context
- » Taking part in training sessions, roadshows and promotions

- » Creating instructional videos and guides
- » Working with the college's blended learning team to provide feedback and to inform and influence the technology vision and strategy

Different models of DigiPals have evolved and the college now has:

- » Six student scholarship DigiPals – typically students who are passionate about using digital technologies to enhance learning eg mobile devices, software, apps and social media. These DigiPals support peers and tutors within the classroom as well as getting involved in development activities such as creating self-guide instructional videos and handouts and supporting training events. They receive a bursary of £1,200 per year to work with the team for approximately three hours a week
- » Four staff DigiPals who work with the student DigiPals, supporting and co-ordinating their work and leading digital initiatives in the curriculum
- » Trainee teacher DigiPals - these are volunteer DigiPal students studying for their certificate of education or post graduate certificate of education who are offered an opportunity to develop their IT skills and extend their knowledge by understanding how to engage learners and deliver learning using digital technologies. They are offered training and support but do not receive payment. An example of the type of activity these DigiPals engage in is to create interactive Moodle pages and content for the curriculum areas they engage with during their placement work – skills that are invaluable to them as they begin their own teaching careers

All DigiPals are offered training and support to help them fulfil their role and are equipped with an iPad to assist them in their role. The work of the DigiPals team is co-ordinated by a member of staff and supported by blended learning coaches and the blended learning team.

It has been really useful to have DigiPals in class. If you run into any technical issues they are always there to help and they are all very good.

Student, Blackburn College

The DigiPals initiative was initially developed with funding and support from the **changing the learning landscape programme**, a collaborative initiative led by the **Leadership Foundation in Higher Education**.

The current phase of the DigiPals project and the learning wheels are part of **the learning futures** programme, commissioned and funded by the **Education and Training Foundation**.

How does this meet the challenges?

- » The learning wheels and the development of contextualised wheels are helping staff to explore a variety of technologies as well as different modes of learning and to apply these pedagogically as part of curriculum design and review processes
- » In turn, learners are encountering a range of digital practices which will help them to develop their use of technology to support learning and gain employability skills
- » The college is providing students and staff with access to technologies that will help students to learn

- » The bank of resources facilitates access to technology for those who do not have their own devices
- » Access to technologies enables students to become confident and competent in their use
- » The Innovation Lab offers an area for staff to develop their confidence and broaden their digital repertoire to better engage and support learners
- » The DigiPals scheme is supporting the wider student body in developing digital literacy skills and in using technology to support learning. It also creates a student-staff partnership and by engaging students in discussions about their experiences and in collaboratively creating content and solutions. This partnership shapes and informs e-learning at the college

Find out more:

- » **Learning wheels** (including a quick guide and examples of both resource-based and contextualised learning wheels)
- » DigiPals videos:
 - › **The dawn of the DigiPals** (June 2014)
 - › **The rise of the DigiPals** (November 2014)
- » Detailed case study on DigiPals [link to CAN case study when complete]
- » Deborah's presentation on the work of DigiPals as part of the **Jisc Change agents' network webinar series**

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