

Digital student exemplars

Enhancing the digital experience of students

This case study is relevant to the digital student challenge:

Engage in dialogue with students about their digital experience and empower them to develop their digital environment

DigiDesk: A helpdesk run by students for students and staff

What is the DigiDesk?

The DigiDesk initiative at **Barnet and Southgate College** was established in 2013 and was inspired by practice at **Deltion College** in the Netherlands where the e-learning team promoted the use of a 'learning company' model to help promote e-skills across the organisation. To e-learning coordinator, Angela Rideau, this seemed a replicable model that would also help to fulfil the **FELTAG** ambitions of encouraging greater participation in digital leadership activities and schemes.

The DigiDesk provides first-line support for both students and staff with their digital literacy or 'e-basics' needs and technical queries. It is staffed by volunteer DigiDesk advisors, typically level 3 students with good interpersonal and IT skills and an interest in careers in computing, IT, animation and training. It is run as a professional IT helpdesk located within the learning resource centre at the Wood Street campus and is open daily between the hours of: 9 am – 5 pm and one late evening until 7 pm to accommodate part-time students. All DigiDesk queries are logged using IT helpdesk software (**OS Ticket**).

DigiDesk advisors receive **induction and training** in customer service, safeguarding, e-learning and using digital tools, using the helpdesk software, job roles and responsibilities. The role in supporting e-safety is particularly emphasised in addition to being made aware of the issues, the advisors are also trained to know and follow the correct procedures should there be any incidents. Staffing rotas for the helpdesk were negotiated according to availability and scheduled to work around study commitments.

DigiDesk builds on the earlier student e-ambassador project at the college. e-Ambassadors proved to be successful but impact was limited to classroom peers and teachers that the ambassadors regularly came into contact with. The DigiDesk makes e-learning support more accessible to the wider college community.



The launch of DigiDesk

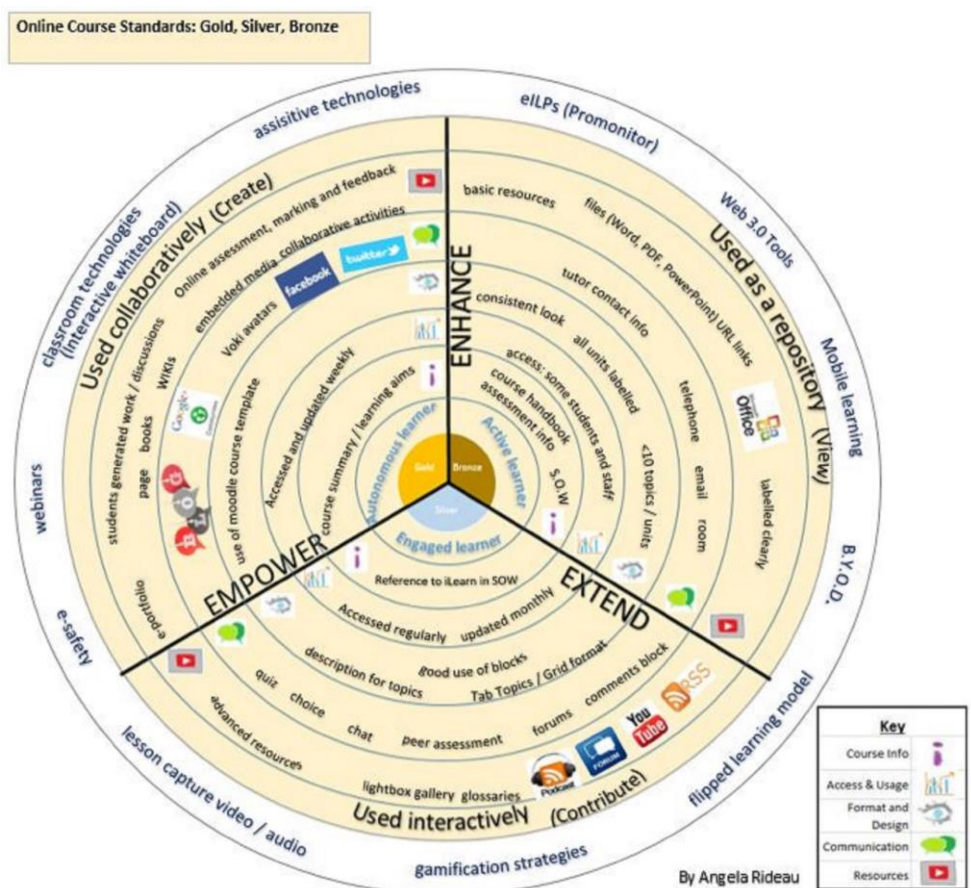
What else do the DigiDesk advisors do?

In addition to helpdesk support, the DigiDesk advisors have been involved in several other activities including:

1. **Learner voice video:** DigiDesk advisors used iPads to capture feedback from students on the Moodle courses, asking students to what extent Moodle was meeting learner needs and how the content and experience could be improved. This provided some insightful feedback which was shared with the leadership group and managers and used to inform teaching and learning quality standards in e-learning.
2. **Moodle audit:** The audit was conducted by eight DigiDesk advisors over a two-week period. The advisors were given training on what to look for in a blended Moodle course with specific criteria and headings to measure the content against. They were then granted non-editing teacher access to view course content within all Moodle courses. Each Advisor was assigned a specific area to audit that was different to their own study programmes.

In addition to the set criteria given, many advisors gave additional feedback and suggestions for how the courses could be made more engaging. Staff were impressed with the professional way in which advisors approached the task, providing constructive feedback and maintaining confidentiality.

The findings from the learner voice video feedback and Moodle audit led to the development of a framework for online course standards of bronze (view), silver (contribute) and gold (create) shown as an e-learning wheel.



Barnet and Southgate College E-learning Wheel: Online course standards (Angela Rideau, 2014)

3. **Taking part in staff training activities:** The DigiDesk advisors have been involved in a range of staff training and continuous professional development initiatives. These include tutorials for learning resource centre (LRC) staff to use, and support use of, the AppleMac™ machines located within the LRC. Advisors have also trained staff on the use of specific technologies such as Prezi, OneDrive, using Twitter, creating QR codes

and using Moodle and have delivered workshops at the college learning technologies conference for staff and have taken part at the e-factor conference. Advisors contributed to the planning of an e-learning themed 'learning walk' where, for a set period of time, staff were able to visit taught sessions by colleagues who are experimenting with e-learning. The **feedback from observers and managers** to this e-learning themed walk revealed that staff were engaged in a variety of innovative e-learning practices.

4. Developing Moodle 'know how': The DigiDesk advisors have their own Moodle course to allow them to experiment with the features and settings and to explore how this could be used to support teaching and learning. There were some excellent examples of how the advisors had changed the theme to address accessibility issues and had experimented with social media type features such as wikis and forums – all of which was shared with teaching staff to improve blended learning delivery.

Benefits for students and staff

Both students and staff have benefited from the DigiDesk service and from the support of the advisors:

- » DigiDesk advisors have gained skills and knowledge from their training and experience of running the helpdesk as well as other valuable employability skills such as time management, organisational skills and working with others. Although unpaid, this is valuable work experience that will help them stand-out at interviews and in UCAS statements
- » Students have benefitted from the range of support the DigiDesk advisors were able to offer from specific IT problems, how to use tablet devices, how to connect to the wireless network and introducing software such as Prezi during class sessions. The advisors have also helped to train new DigiDesk advisors
- » Staff recognise the services of the DigiDesk advisors as being of a professional standard:
 - › The presence and support of the advisors has released time for learning advisers (staff) to spend more time supporting students
 - › Training in use of the AppleMac machines has improved staff skills and the overall service the LRC staff are able to provide
 - › The DigiDesk service also provides valuable back-up for teaching staff who, perhaps having undergone some e-learning training that they would like to put into practice, are wary of things going wrong in the classroom. The DigiDesk advisors can help by guiding them through the processes and supporting delivery in the classroom

"When you feel confident that someone is there in the room with you to help if things go wrong, then you are more likely to try something new because you have support from your students and they appreciate that you are trying to make learning more engaging and fun."

Member of teaching staff, Barnet and Southgate College.

DigiDesk advisors at work



How does this meet the challenge?

- » The DigiDesk service gives the advisors a recognised and valued position as well as a mandate to improve the digital skills and the environment of others
- » Students are trained and supported to develop their own digital and employability skills
- » The overall capacity of the organisation is enhanced by engaging students in this way. Students have proven that they can offer a professional and, when necessary, confidential service
- » The student-partnership model has helped to develop a collaborative and supportive culture and increase student engagement as well as staff and student skills

Find out more:

- » Read Angela's blog posts on the DigiDesk initiative: [DigiDesk Project – what's it all about?](#) and [DigiDesk – the projects they did](#)
- » See [feedback from staff on the DigiDesk service](#)
- » Discover more about the Barnet and Southgate College Online course standards in [e-learning within the classroom – the pathway to gold](#)
- » See the feedback from the [e-learning walk that focused on e-learning](#)

Contact:

Angela Rideau, e-learning coordinator: Angela.Rideau@barnetsouthgate.ac.uk and on twitter [@angelarideau](https://twitter.com/angelarideau)