
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

Building a powerful partnership: empowering the student community

Two initiatives at **Leeds City College** are helping to enhance the student digital experience and to develop the skills, competencies and experience that will equip students for future study and working life.

1. Digital leaders

The college launched their digital leader scheme in June 2012. The aim was to harness the technological knowledge of students and to actively engage them in developing the curriculum to reflect changing student and employer needs.

Students were invited to apply for the role of digital leader and those selected were chosen on the basis of their experience, technical skills and the extent of their desire to help their peers and staff. Digital leaders received training and support throughout the year to develop their own skills as well as to learn how best to support others.

Digital leaders work alongside staff faculty technology champions known as learning leaders. Together, they mentor students and staff to enhance learning in their own curriculum areas and to resolve practical issues like helping students learning English for Students of Other Languages (ESOL) to overcome language barriers when logging on to the college network or creating new email accounts.

The digital leader initiative helped the college revitalise their work on learner voice and the way the college listens to students. Bringing together student proficiencies in the use of other technologies, social media and mobile devices also enabled the college to expand their digital literacy provision from a limited focus on use of Microsoft Office™ and online safety to wider digital literacy skills to enhance student employment potential.

Achievements of the digital leaders include:

- » Helping ESOL students to overcome language barriers which accentuate the 'digital divide' by embedding the use of a range of innovative technologies as part of a nationally supported scheme
- » Creating screencasts and videos uploaded to the college virtual learning environment (VLE) to simplify guidance on accessing college systems, email and cloud storage. ESOL students were encouraged to provide feedback on new materials posted to the VLE to help develop language and digital literacy skills as well as to inform the team on the needs for this particular audience
- » Participating in a student conference where they facilitated a session on the development of the college's vision for an learning strategy
- » Providing feedback on the Leeds City College student app which provides students with a range of information relevant to their learning experience including: news, media from video channels, events, contact information, local bus and train travel information, campus maps, timetables, attendance data and links to the college StudentZone, Moodle and email. The app is available for Apple and android devices
- » Supporting staff development sessions in preparation for the launch of the college's Active Learning Zones – flexible learning spaces equipped with a range of mobile devices
- » Supporting staff in curriculum areas such as catering where there has traditionally been less opportunity to access technology by showing them how to use tablet devices, videos and apps relevant to their curriculum

Students, staff and digital leaders have benefitted from the initiative with enhanced digital literacy skills, the development of models for embedding digital literacies more widely across other curricula and the growth in confidence and enhanced employability prospects for those stepping up to the challenge of being a digital leader. The increased staff confidence has resulted in an increase in the appropriate use of technology to enhance learning with a 10 % improvement in teaching practice observation data.

Staff comments on the impact of the digital leaders include:

"My digital leader is incredibly enthusiastic and has a real enthusiasm for sharing his technological skills"

"Our digital leader has an inspirational desire to enthuse me with new technologies"

"My digital leader is a constant source of enthusiasm"

Digital leaders are also enthusiastic about their experiences:

"The programme is brilliant. I'm helping both staff and other students develop their skills using tablets. It's helping me to develop my confidence when I speak to other people. I am supporting five members of staff at the moment but will be delivering a training session to the whole group of staff soon on how to use tablets and I feel really confident about it."

Digital leader and student at Leeds City College.

2. Students' Union Ambassadors

After learning of the digital leaders programme and discussing the initiative with the digital leaders themselves, student officers from Leeds City College Students' Union (LCCSU) commissioned students to investigate ways that the union could improve its development with the use of technological systems. Students also voted to use technologies to improve the student representative system for each curriculum area through their students' union ambassadors.

The LCCSU is leading the way in use of technology to support collaboration across multiple campuses by modelling use of cloud computing and productivity tools like **Google Apps** to communicate, run meetings and work together. Student voice groups are using online forms to provide impartial feedback, improve accountability and transparency of process.

Some of the other achievements of the LCCSU include:

- » The introduction of a student policy panel which enables student groups to review and participate in the development of all college policies
- » Attendance at college meetings and forums to represent student needs and views on aspects such as equality and diversity, health and safety, green energy, quality improvement, student voice, campus and estates, management and planning
- » An anti-bullying reporting system
- » Participation in complaints procedures and disciplinary processes
- » Engagement in enterprise activities means the LCCSU is now self-funded and a sustainable entity which has appointed four full-time sabbatical officers and one part-time member of staff
- » Developing the employability skills of students who are employed by LCCSU to do things like undertake data analysis of student voice data, run the LCCSU shop, design the website and other media initiatives
- » Introduced a partnership agreement between the union and the college, ensuring LCCSU has full autonomy

"Cloud technologies give significant opportunity for students to collaborate on projects and perhaps most importantly, easily transfer delegated tasks, information and projects between individuals and groups – absolutely a necessity when working with volunteers."

Craig Clements, students' union president 2013/14 – 2014/15

LCCSU report a positive impact on many areas of student life including making learning and teaching more interesting, increasing the variety of learning activities and giving students a better chance to succeed. The relationship between the union and the college is regarded as being respectful, collaborative and as a partnership that has a genuine desire to improve the experience of students.

LCCSU won the 2015 National Union of Students (NUS), further education students' union award.

"We won the award because we have been able to demonstrate a significant positive influence through collaboration with the college which is having a brilliant impact on our students. Our student leaders are truly empowered to make a difference, their employability skills are fantastic as a result."

Craig Clements, students' union president 2013/14 – 2014/15



How does this meet the challenge?

- » The partnership role is recognised and supported by senior and executive managers, staff and the board of governors. The role of digital leaders is valued by staff and peers
- » Students are routinely engaged in dialogue about their digital learning experience and how this can be improved. In most cases students working in LCCSU lead and teach others (including internal and external stakeholders) about the use of digital technology
- » Digital leaders and students' union ambassadors use technology to communicate and collaborate as well as to ascertain the views of members, analyse data and support others. Using technology has made student representation and gathering the views of a wider group of students more inclusive as well as providing an ongoing forum for capturing student feedback and ideas
- » Digital leaders are able to encourage curriculum teams to develop approaches pertinent to their subjects and disciplines and to the needs of specific user groups
- » The college is able to capitalise on student expertise in practices involving social media and multi-media and students now benefit from experience of a wider range of digital literacy practices
- » LCCSU are able to employ students on digital and other activities, providing useful work experience

- » LCCSU is a stable, thriving wholly student led organisation which engages stakeholders (especially the college) in a professional and influential manner. It demonstrates that technology is able to truly empower student leaders to demonstrate their ability to run an independent, stable, representative charity
- » The approach in both initiatives is strategic and designed to impact across the whole institution

Find out more:

The **LCCSU nomination** for the 2015 NUS further education students' union award with comments from the judges.

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