

The Glossy Project on mobile learning

www.gloscol.ac.uk

<http://glossymolenet.wordpress.com>

The aim of the Glossy project was to enable learners at Gloucestershire College to access learning at a time and place to suit them through use of mobile technologies integrated into learning activities, in order to improve retention and achievement.

Tags:

FE, Mobile, VLE, Digital visual/audio, Personally owned devices

Harnessing technology system outcomes:

Enabling Infrastructure and processes

Engaged and Empowered Learners

Sectors:

Further Education

Innovation

The infrastructure provided by the Glossy Project has enabled a more integrated use of mobile technologies for educational activities at Gloucestershire College. Two particular objectives of the project were firstly to ensure that personally owned devices, as well as college technologies, were supported for this purpose, and secondly to provide an opportunity for staff and students to experiment with using different mobile devices to enrich learning.

Background

Gloucestershire College prides itself on being an early adopter of technology for learning: every teaching space has an interactive white board and internet access, and the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) is well developed with a central role in the life of the college. As such the college was keen to take advantage of the opportunity presented by recent advances in mobile technology and the fact that a large proportion of staff and students now own personal mobile devices.

In November 2007 James Clay, the ILT and Learning Resources Manager, initiated the Glossy Project, a Mobile Learning Network (MoLeNET) project funded by the Learning and Skills Council and managed by the Learning and Skills Network. The project ran until July 2008 and was carried out in partnership with the National Star College. The two colleges worked closely together, although each pursued distinct goals. The core aim of the Glossy Project was to enable learners to access 'anytime anyplace learning' using content that could be retrieved, modified or created using personal devices.

The college recognised that the infrastructure put in place by the Glossy Project was only the beginning and there would also need to be a change to the culture and pedagogy to capitalise on this medium for learning.

Technology

The technical infrastructure included the installation of an additional student wireless network to enable learners and staff with a Wi-Fi capable device to connect to the internet. The college library's computers have Bluetooth, DVD burners and memory card readers installed so that learners can transfer digital content to other platforms including less portable devices they may have at home, such as games consoles and DVD players. It was important to Gloucestershire College that the infrastructure in the Glossy Project was sustainable and so efforts were made to choose future-proof technologies.

The college also invested in different types of mobile devices that support specific styles of teaching and learning such as portable games consoles with cameras, netbooks, mp3/4 players, smart phones, mp3 recorders, high definition (HD) and mp4 video cameras. These have been purchased in sufficient numbers to enable full class participation.

Teaching and learning

Because the Glossy Project has invested in a broad range of devices both learners and tutors have been able to experiment and find the most appropriate technology for each situation. In particular there has been an increased use of video and audio in learning activities, for example sports studies students use handheld games consoles with cameras to record sporting techniques for learning. As the consoles have larger screens than most digital camcorders,

the students can review their sporting techniques while still in the field. Later on the students can transfer the material to put in their learning assignments and presentations.

“Glossy for me was kick starting a cultural change in the college. We have embedded the technology and the infrastructure into the building and our teaching, we now need to embed it in learning and that’s what we’re now in the process of transforming by moving on and building on the work of Glossy.”

James Clay, ILT and Learning Resources Manager

Impact

The infrastructure implemented by the Glossy Project has been vital for the uptake of learning using mobile technologies, which are becoming an instinctive and seamless part of teaching for many staff. The college is now considering the potential of the devices in other areas such as formal assessment and administration.

Mobile technologies tend to have kudos among the students. This is important for learners who need to record lessons and review them at their own pace due to issues such as learning difficulties or a limited understanding of English. These students can now use technologies that the whole class uses rather than requiring assistance that singles them out as having special needs. Further it has been found that offering the devices to students who have previously been excluded from education for behavioural reasons has helped to build the students’ self esteem and has improved the trust relationship with their tutors.

Challenges

Wireless network security has needed careful consideration, and the college is working closely with the system supplier to ensure a secure and safe system. Network access on the wireless network is only available to authorised and authenticated users. Devices also need to be stored safely when students are not using them, for instance when students are in a sports session.

The roll out of services to such a large number of users has led to a step change in demand on college IT support services, for instance in enabling students to charge their devices when in college.

Wider adoption

Gloucestershire College’s willingness to experiment by adopting new technologies and pioneering their role in learning has been key to the success of the project. There has been enthusiastic support for the project from the Principal, senior management, IT Services department, middle managers, practitioners and importantly the learners:

"Within the college it's important to get the culture and message of the project right. If another college were to replicate Glossy I'd advise them to focus on the learner experience, why are we doing this, what would make the learners life and learning easier and more relevant and engaging." **James Clay**