Innovative Practices Further Education transcript

Further education colleges in Northern Ireland are using innovative practices when delivering qualifications and assessing students both locally and internationally. These practices are also driven by government strategy for blended learning and eLearning, student demand, environmental issues and quality improvement. Here are some examples of what has been developed by the six colleges.

Students at North West Regional College use a range of hardware, software and apps during a typical learning day. They use software and other web based tools like pearltrees, stickymoose, popplet and padlet and often refer to the online preparation that they have completed before class. On average students at the college use around 15 pieces of software or apps each day including notes and discussion applications for the flipped classroom. This form of blended learning allows students to access classroom material both at home and on campus using their own web connected devices or college PC's.

Belfast Metropolitan College uses Google Drive as a free source of IT applications and as a storage facility it removes the need for separate virtual learning environments, USB storage devices and installed software. Google Drive has many advantages for course delivery including paper reduction for teaching and assessment and the ability to share teaching and assessment resources. It also supports feedback and communication in course teams and classes. Students can access Google Drive from almost any web connected technology this supports bring your own device. Both lecturers and students at the college highly value this approach for flexibility, convenience and efficiency.

Northern Regional College is working with colleges in Northern Spain and the Netherlands through the eTwinning programme this gives all participants' access to a new network of lecturers and ideas. The programme encourages colleges across Europe to co-operate using IT by providing online tools, services and support. Using online collaboration and site visits the project fostered the idea of using Microsoft Azure.

This cloud computing platform is used for building, deploying and managing applications and services through a global network of data centres. It enables students from the colleges to collaborate on the configuration and testing of cloud hosted operating systems from this NRC students apply what they learn in a real world context and develop wider skills like teamwork and language.

South West College is increasing its capability and presence online nationally and internationally for example in China, America Europe and Zambia. The college delivers a fully online Level 3 IT course to students in Zambia that aims to help build up a local infrastructure in a poverty stricken area. This IT qualification has provided a progression route to university and employment. The college set up a computer hub in Ndola and worked with Fatima High School to start the course in 2013, these students have now graduated and progressed to a Higher National Diploma and a second group has started.

As a result of this project the college staff have gained new skills in developing and delivering online material. The college hopes to expand these courses to other schools in the region while continuing to develop best practice in online teaching and learning.

Southern Regional College has developed a blended model of curriculum delivery for higher level apprenticeships in Applied Industrial Science with Norbrook Laboratories. Using online and in college teaching and learning provides flexibility and accessibility to work based students.

They benefit from using digital technologies for collaboration, content delivery, assessment and teaching support. If these students are only in college one day a week it's crucial that they use the online environment to achieve their weekly 25 hours of learning. The blended delivery of this higher level apprenticeship has been successful and provides a model to help other colleges' structure their programmes.

South Eastern Regional College has used technology enhanced learning for continuous professional development and developed a range of innovative formal and informal CPD opportunities. Peer mentoring through the ILT pedagogy mentoring programme is individually tailored to each staff member and looks at using technology to enhance teaching.

Over 400 college staff have completed the mentoring programme and SERC has provided training in Asia, Ireland and Northern Ireland. The college's staff induction using online training that provides flexibility and accessibility currently over 1,000 staff members have completed online training modules Moodle Monday's and webinar Wednesday's have created live and recorded opportunities to share good practice with 24/7 access, SERC who shared these practices with colleges in Ireland, Singapore, Thailand and Japan.

Northern Ireland further education colleges continue to develop local and international innovations in teaching and learning that enhance the quality of the learning experience. Innovations in qualification delivery and assessment continue to be an important feature of college strategic development plans and sharing this work brings benefits across the sector.