

Project Success Story

Institution

Bradford College

Project title

Digital by Design

Background/Context

In response to the impact of Covid-19 on opportunities for face-to-face learning, teaching and assessment on campus, blended, hybrid and online learning approaches have been prioritised by HEIs, across all areas of the sector. A strategic decision was made by Bradford College to transition its teaching model from a face-to-face model to a blended approach in order to make their programmes more accessible and flexible for learners in the future.

Following this decision, it was recognised by the college that in order to achieve this, the use of technology and the development of technology enhanced learning was a key improvement that needed to be made.

Following research about how this could be done, the College became interested in the Active Digital Design (ADD) approach to hybrid education, developed at the University of Surrey in collaboration with Advance HE.

Solution

Drawing on the ADD method Advance HE developed a distinct signature pedagogy for Bradford that was digitally rich, supportive, inclusive and accessible. The project adopted a two-phase approach: to support the leadership team to take forward a digital transformation and upskill teaching staff so that they are more digitally fluent and better prepared for hybrid teaching.

The programme was adapted from its original design to be applicable across all programmes in a college-based HE setting. The original 'sprint' approach was lengthened to give staff greater opportunity for reflection throughout the course and the programme was designed to be inclusive of all courses offered by Bradford College. The Digital by Design programme was intended to be a 'pioneering' cohort of courses with the objective to widen this to other courses in future.

Just as ADD is inspired by the learning philosophy of Heutagogy through its 5 values – explore, collaborate, create, share, reflect – Bradford's signature pedagogy would draw upon its 5 values through the process of digital education design, development and delivery to create digitally rich, student-centred learning, teaching and assessment.

The project's approach to digital design and the development of quality digital education at Bradford will also develop a community of practice focused on digital education which will support ongoing sustainable development (beyond the lifecycle of the project) in order to support colleagues across the institution.

Outcomes

The impact of the programme on the College has been a **'significant shift in mentality' from teachers and learners to digital learning**. The digital skills of staff who took part in the programme

has been significantly enhanced, regardless of their prior knowledge or comfort when using digital techniques.

Tim Lupton, Head of Learning, Teaching and Assessment, said: *“Those who were already comfortable with working digitally have cemented their skills, while those that weren’t were given ideas for how a virtual learning environment (VLE) could work and how the design of it can facilitate learning and engagement with students. During lockdown staff were forced to move on to Microsoft Teams, and the programme identified that Teams could work hand-in-hand with the VLE.”*

The bespoke programme designed for Bradford College took place over a longer period of time than a traditional ‘sprint’ approach, and staff felt this gave them more time to reflect on their learning between sessions.

Tim explained: *“Staff found the theoretical side of the programme interesting, but the ‘doing’ side of it was more beneficial. They would have liked more time to play around with techniques and ideas but the longer time between the two sides of the programme allowed staff to think and reflect on ideas they might want to incorporate into their own VLE space. They found the idea of a standardised VLE space would work for them as long as it had the ability to be modified for their own needs and learners.”*

The big picture goal of the programme is for Bradford College to make their teaching programmes more accessible and flexible for the next generation of learners, and the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated this need across the sector.

Craig Tupling, Vice Principal, Quality and Student Experience, said: *“Lockdown was a massive wake-up call for us and required a significant shift in mentality from everyone at the College. This programme was about putting learning back in the hands of learners and now 30 percent of the courses at the College are taught online. It is a fundamental change in pedagogical approach and we needed the expertise from Advance HE to make that transition.*

“Feedback from students has been excellent, we hear from them directly that they like the flexibility and being able to access learning online. The blended model means we can meet the demands of students from all backgrounds, which is especially important in such a diverse city as Bradford. We do have to be aware of issues such as digital poverty. We continue to accommodate individual requirements of students and understand that not everyone is able to come with us on the digital journey.

“The other side of this is the need to embed digital skills in our curriculum. It is vital that cutting-edge technology is also embedded in vocational programmes to make our students as employable as possible when they leave. There is a long way to go but the Digital by Design programme has been a real kick-start, and without it we definitely wouldn’t have had the same pace of change. The learning will spiral for us now and moving forwards and not have a constant trajectory, but we’re in it for the long haul.”

For more information on Advance HE’s Active Digital Design programme and how it could benefit your institution, visit <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/consultancy-and-enhancement-services/active-digital-design>