SERC

#BetterOffAtSERC

GOOD PRACTICE
CASE STUDIES

A WHOLE COLLEGE RESPONSE TO THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

May 2021

SERC

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FOREWORD TO THE SERC GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES
KEN WEBB, PRINCIPAL AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Author
Ken Webb
Principal and Chief

The global pandemic that occurred in March 2020 has been a challenge for all educational establishments across the world and this continues to be the case. SERC is an entrepreneurial and innovative College whose ethos is in being 'solution focused', 'excellence driven', 'responsive' and 'collaborative'. The pandemic has put these values to the test.

The case studies outlined in this document provide some examples of the innovative practice across the wide range (over 50) of vocational areas provided by the College. They illustrate that innovation occurs at all National Vocational Qualification levels from zero through to level six (Honours Degree). The College had developed several key tools that have enabled it to respond in an agile way to the emerging pandemic:

- A flexible digital strategy that develops and integrates digital platforms and tools.

- A comprehensive continuous professional development approach for all staff.

- An innovative approach using SERC's Project Based Learning Model for learning and assessment.

- A focus on skills, enterprise and entrepreneurial development for learners.

- The formation of international strategic partnerships with like minded organisations.

I hope you enjoy the information provided and feel free to contact the College or any of our staff mentioned for further information
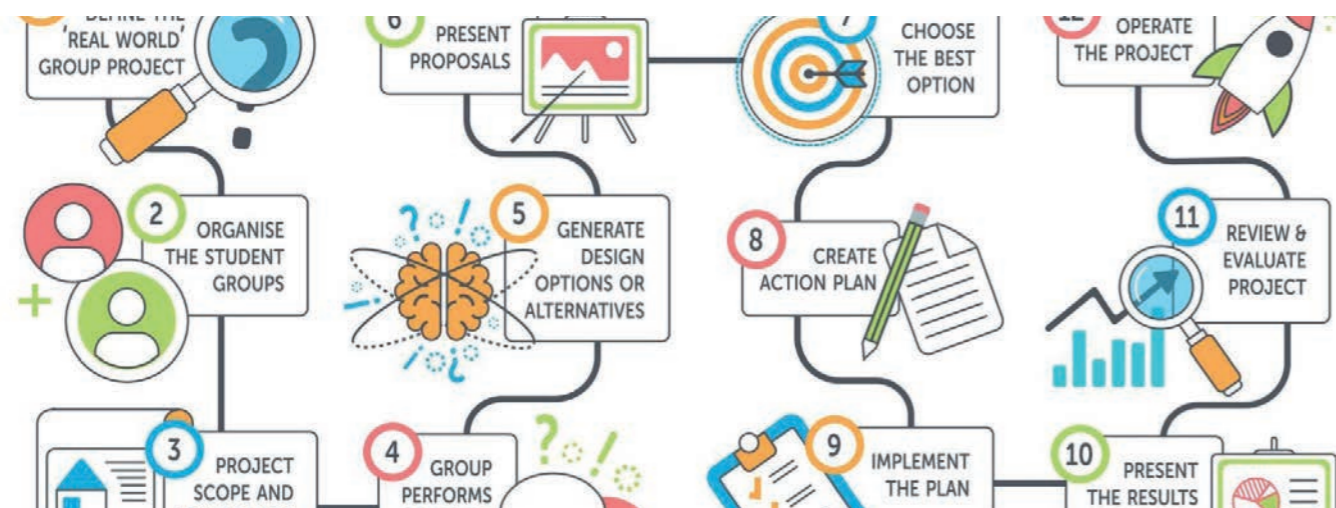
Yours sincerely,
Ken Webb

CASESTUDY

01

WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH, PART A
HOW TO WORK DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, 'ONLINE & WORKING COLLABORATIVELY', NOT 'REMOTELY'

Author
Dr Michael Malone,
Director of Curriculum and Information Services

Motivation
It is important during the pandemic to keep students as engaged as possible with both their peers and tutors. If this can be achieved, they will not only continue learning and improve their skills to gain their qualification, but also improve their mental health. Working online in project teams using Project Based Learning (PBL) is a key element in achieving this. The use of PBL will also encourage the development of the students transversal skills which is particularly important during the current restrictions. When some sort of normality returns students can complete practical aspects of their programme on campus.

Problem Definition
Students are finding the online delivery in many colleges a strain since they feel isolated from their peers and tutors in addition to the mental strain the long lockdowns have produced. This is particularly true in the 16 to 24 year old age group. Large parts of the media, schools and politicians refer to 'remote' learning rather than 'online and working collaboratively'. This is a subtle difference and approach because the word 'remote' can have a negative connotation and add to the feeling of isolation that students are experiencing. It does not encourage the tutors to adopt a collaborative online paradigm.

It is important to remember that providing online computer based training or working through one PowerPoint after another will have little or no impact on students and result in significant retention issues.

Approach
The College has been developing a PBL model over the last six years which has a number of key principles. The use of meaningful industry based projects is one principle as well as working together in students project teams to solve the challenges posed by the projects. The work carried out in teams outside of the normal scheduled class ensures that the students are talking to each other working together and creating further structure in their week.

Students teams use a variety of electronic tools to facilitate online collaborative learning, the most popular of these is Microsoft Teams. MS Teams enables the student groups to work in breakout rooms both asynchronously and synchronously.

MS Teams also integrates MS Class Notebook which has been adopted by many courses as an electronic portfolio. This enables students and tutors to submit and review evidence of their learning and skills and most importantly is available to students and staff anywhere and on any device.

The College recognises that students from disadvantaged backgrounds do not have the same access through online learning as other students. The College has loaned over 850 PCs to students for home use and provides access to College IT facilities for those students who have no internet access at home.

Results
The College has reviewed the quality of the project based learning several times during the year and the feedback from the tutors and students was extremely positive. This is further reinforced by the high levels of attendance at synchronous classes. In depth research with significant numbers of students looking at engagement has indicated that the majority enjoy the project based learning and working in groups. This research as also indicated other tweaks to the pedagogy in specific programmes that will aid even better engagement in the future.

All full time programmes (from NVQ level 1 to level 6) now use an electronic portfolio for the gathering of evidence to support the students attainment of skills and learning.

Conclusion
Collaborative online learning it is a very important tool during the current pandemic for maintaining high levels of student engagement.

Student skills in using online technology are extremely important for their future as they will play a significant part in the new world of work that has developed from the pandemic.

The pandemic has significantly increased tutor skills in using online technology. Some tutors have now developed very sophisticated and completely integrated online platforms for their programmes to complement the practical aspects of their programme.

"The way in which SERC uses project based learning and connections to real employers to bring the curriculum to life is a shining beacon relevant to colleagues in Further Education, schools and universities around the world. If education is going to successfully prepare young people for their future life and work, it needs to match the skills they will need including team working, problem solving and, like the workplace, being fully comfortable and competent in an online environment."

Olly Newton, Edge Foundation - Chief Executive Officer

CASESTUDY

02

WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH, PART A

SUPPORT FOR STAFF DURING THE PANDEMIC AND THE RANGE OF APPROACHES USED

Authors

Paula Philpott
Head of Learning Academy

Stefanie Campbell
Deputy Head of Learning Academy

Motivation

The College has a culture of excellence and solution-focused approaches, and this was evident during the move to online teaching and working in March 2020. High quality teaching and learning experiences for our students are underpinned by support for teaching staff, through training, classroom support and an overarching digital strategy. College Corporate staff also require training and support to enable the transition to online working practices.

Problem Definition

Teaching and support staff are working extensively online and adapting to new working patterns and environments. Where teaching staff may have been

using Moodle as the core digital learning platform, all courses have now moved towards Microsoft Teams, to facilitate online synchronous and asynchronous learning as well as a more focused development of e-portfolio solutions across all programmes. All staff in the College are now working through Microsoft Teams, meeting and collaborating online through video conferencing and Office 365; for many colleagues this was a significant adjustment to working patterns. In order to support teaching and corporate staff with necessary adaptions, the Learning Academy needed to provide an extensive suite of training opportunities and resources, that would be accessible and appropriate for all colleagues.

Approach

The Learning Academy used an adaptive and flexible approach, to ensure that all colleagues had the support and resources required to adjust more easily to the new working 'norms'. This included daily live workshops hosted on Microsoft Teams on a wide range of topics, a dedicated Teams site for all staff (Learning @ SERC staff portal) to create a sense of community, additional resources created and shared through the Learning Academy homepage, and also mentored support for individuals, course teams and departments to assist with specific queries. In addition, the Learning Academy provided a service desk, where staff could request support via phone call, online meeting, or email to assist them with questions and challenges.

Other adjustments were made to ongoing projects: new staff induction moved to online provision, supportive classroom observations were undertaken online, and leadership and management programmes (Level 4 and Level 5) were moved to online delivery models. Academic staff development days were hosted online in August 2020, in collaboration with Forth Valley College, with 364 academic staff attending. Similarly, in January Corporate staff development was run in conjunction with Forth Valley College with over 350 staff attending across the two Colleges.

Results

Feedback from staff noted the positive impact that the training and support provided had during the transition to online working and teaching. Over 150 workshops have taken place since March 2020, with over 850 colleagues attending a range of workshops. Over 919 staff are using the learning @ SERC staff portal, and to date there have been 160 service desk requests for support. In addition, a personalised learning platform (Digital Skills Kit) hosted on Moodle, has been developed and piloted to enhance confidence and competence in a wide range of digital skills.

Pedagogy mentoring has remained a core support for teaching staff, with 64 staff completing mentoring programme in 2019-2020, and a further 67 in 2020-2021. Staff reported that "During the lock down, the mentor was extremely helpful in setting online teaching on Teams" and "the mentoring programming had a huge impact on my students as my teaching was greatly improved." In total 220 observations both online and face to face were completed by the mentoring team providing tailored feedback and support to staff in 2019-2020. New teachers have been observed to identify any support needed and tailored training designed accordingly.

Online lessons were recorded and used to provide guidance and support to staff both in the college and for training for the Third Sector, associate assessors for ETI (Education and Training Inspectorate), ETI and the Welsh Inspectorate. Alongside SERC staff, training has been provided on Project Based Learning for staff in Walsall College and Sunderland Colleges.

Training and support has been provided for staff on the effective use of Microsoft Teams and Class Notebook for e-portfolios.

Conclusion

The initial support provided was critical in assisting colleagues adjust to new working patterns. Maintaining engagement with all departments and schools has been key in increasing confidence and competence in online working and teaching, and the adaptive, responsive approach has been maintained throughout the 2020-2021 academic year. The Learning Academy continue to expand support through our homepage for online teaching, creating opportunities to register for upcoming training sessions, and sharing good practice across the College. There are now a minimum of two workshops per week; "Teams Tuesdays", with a corporate focus, and "Webinar Wednesdays" which focus on teaching practice. The Learning@SERC staff portal has been extended to provide a dedicated Stream channel, where staff can access on-demand videos on a wide range of digital tools and strategies, and a "good practice" channel, where colleagues and share tips and tricks that have worked well online and on campus. The Leading@ SERC programme for SERC managers provided a tailored programme of training mapped to the training needs analysis carried out with managers.

"I really appreciate the opportunities and support available to us and the chances to talk and bond are prioritised alongside other content. We are very lucky at SERC!" "My mentor's assistance was excellent. I have gone from being rather overwhelmed and a bit fearful about losing stuff to being quite excited about the possibilities. Thanks to all of you."
"Thank you, for all your help and support - really appreciate your help with the team site and with mass texting of students. Has made a big difference and I am getting more students to engage..."
Quotes from SERC staff

CASESTUDY

03

WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH, PART A
LEARNER ENGAGEMENT

Author
Paula Philpott
Head of Learning Academy

Motivation
During the sustained period of being online and on campus, learners have had to adjust to the changes in how they engage with their learning, their peers and their tutors. For the College and staff this has meant ensuring uninterrupted learning opportunities, addressing unequal access and the challenge around social isolation for staff and students. Skills, competences, mindsets and values all feed forward into this wider systemic change that is needed to best support learners effectively. Powerful knowledge is of course essential, but alongside it employers and learners themselves want them to have the broad range of skills and behaviours needed to interpret that knowledge, to shape their futures and become happy and productive citizens.

Problem Definition
Surfacing the issues that learners were facing required data and information beyond what was currently available through normal reporting mechanisms. It also needed to be surfaced at whole college level, with multiple stakeholder involvement. Touch point surveys would not be effective with those non-engagers. The data exhaust from the approaches being used needed to inform effective decision making and provide clarity around the strategic focus for individuals and teams to help re-engage those learners. Now, with over 10 months since the emergence of the global pandemic, it is timely to gauge how students feel about the College's response to Covid-19 and specifically the impact on their learning.

Approach
A taskforce was created which was comprised of multiple stakeholders who could inform and action the strategic approach the College would take to support those learners who were struggling to engage. Given the challenges of shifting to an online environment, the College was aware that there were a number of factors that may be impacting learner engagement. Personal circumstances e.g. home responsibilities, the impact Covid-19 was having on student mental health, distractions and technological barriers including access to hardware, software and reliable Wi-Fi.

A standardised touchpoint survey was created which would focus on curriculum areas were there had been non-engagement. This was a three-phase approach, allowing data to be compared at programme level and by campus, building on the responses from the previous phase and expanding incrementally to all curriculum areas. To reach those not engaging, the college staff telephoned and talked through the survey with students, noting their responses and / or set up student focus groups, to help surface the information to be able to inform next steps.

The Taskforce discussed the information as it became available and agreed a College approach. Staff focus groups were conducted within each identified curriculum area to elevate good practice and identify the challenges they perceived learners were facing. Staff completed a staff survey which closely matched the student survey. Curriculum reports were written making recommendations to each curriculum team of the suggested approaches to help better engage learners in that area. Clarification needed around processes, including technical support for students, access to hardware and software were communicated at College level.

Results
The overarching lesson from the pandemic has been the support from all areas of the organisation for the collective good. This was clearly evident through taskforce and the wider teams who engaged to address the barriers arising from the surveys. Curriculum teams responded positively to the data driven recommendations made as well as suggested alternative approaches.

To date 364 responses have been analysed, as part of phase 1 and 2. 43% of non-engaging students highlighted they prefer face to face teaching, however, they value getting feedback on their progress (40%) and 36% like the lessons recorded. Students are facing a number of personal challenges. 36% note they have multiple distractions at home and 26% are struggling generally with the lockdown. In terms of the learning and teaching, students have commented positively on their tutors checking in with them, but 24% prefer practical work, which may not be transferable online for some curriculum areas. Only 1% of students noted they did not have access to Wi-Fi. Eighty percent had no issue using a webcam and 93% were happy to use a microphone. 96% of students had access to a microphone. 90 percent had access to a webcam. A small proportion (4%) are demotivated because exams have been cancelled. 16% of students did not feel connected with their peers.

Student engagement initiatives including fitness classes and social gaming competitions were set up to address the disconnect some learners were expressing.

Conclusion
The College moved successful online and on campus with a hybrid of activities designed around the restrictions within each phase of the pandemic.

Students' personal preferences were able to be summarised at programme level and recommendations made. Actions were taken to support learning and the learner.

Wider engagement initiatives have been introduced through the Students' Union, some led by current students, to help create a sense of community.

The range of technical support available to students has been given greater visibility.

Excellent practice, identified through staff and student focus groups, has been highlighted by marketing on the intranet and shared with staff.

Levels of concern about missing face to face classes and lack of opportunities to complete practical activities, will change as students learn to cope with the online environment and should ease in line with the changing Covid-19 restrictions.

The uncertainty created by the pandemic seems set to continue for some time yet but the College has confidently put measures in place to identify and support learners.

"Contemporarily, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to digital, students and staff have been searching for ways to ease the transition and help students thrive both online and on campus. Listening to both staff and student voices in that has been important. Identifying barriers that students were facing and putting support in place to help address some of these challenges has been a whole college effort, whether it was in relation to the hardware, software, pastoral care, learning preferences, curriculum support, everyone has had a role to play."

Paula Philpott Head of Learning Academy

CASESTUDY

04

WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH, PART A
PROTECTING OUR COLLEGE COMMUNITY ON CAMPUS

Authors

Paddy McShane
Head of School

John Gault
Head of Health & Safety

Gary Chambers
Head of Estates

Motivation
In March 2020 the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETi) completed an evaluation of Level 3 provision within the College – in their findings regarding Care and Welfare provision they reported that "…the staff in the college care about their (student) progress and wellbeing…the students reported that they feel safe and secure in the college and are well cared for." SERC has built a robust reputation for putting the physical, social and emotional well-being of students (& staff) at the forefront of its daily business.

Problem
Unprecedented, unique, exceptional and extraordinary are but a few of the adjectives that come to mind when

considering the impact the pandemic had on the Further Education sector in the Spring of 2020. With one eye on the successful completion of the 19/20 academic year the College Management Team were also looking forward towards a key recruitment phase and the resumption of (at least some) face-to-face delivery in September 2020. The considerable challenge facing them was to transform the College estate into a low-risk "safe" environment for learning and teaching to resume.

Approach
The approach adopted was to mobilise the College's considerable existing physical and human resources. An open, friendly and collegial framework was quickly established with several

departments working long hours (including weekends) over the summer months to deliver a reconfigured estate. Collaboration took many guises – our Creative Developers worked with our Estates and Health & Safety departments to produce 4000+ wall and floor signs helping direct staff and students around new one-way systems. The Creative Developers also worked with the Head of Health & Safety to produce videos and online training modules to educate staff and students on the new Covid related provisions. All students and staff had to complete these activities before returning to campus. Our Finance team worked in a highly competitive environment to secure thousands of PPE items such as facemasks, hand sanitiser and disinfectant wipes. They also liaised closely with our Manufacturing team to secure highly sought-after Perspex/Polycarbonate for separating screens. This Manufacturing team managed to produce 3,500+ screens in a 6-8 week period. Our IT infrastructure team also worked closely with Timetabling/Estates/Health & Safety teams to reconfigure 250+ general IT rooms across 7 campuses. Our technical staff also reconfigured a large number of workshops and laboratories to comply with social distancing regulations. These are just some of the mitigations that the College has put in place.

Results
The College had a phased reopening for staff in early August with positive feedback recorded in "Have your Say" and at the "Ask me Anything" events. Students started to filter back in mid-August with classes commencing successfully in September 2020. As virus cases started to increase in geographical areas the College began tracking staff and students in terms of confirmed cases and close contacts. Analysis of these statistics suggest that there has been little/no evidence of community transmission on College grounds. Given the numbers off staff and students on site were relatively high compared to similar schools in our geographical area this is a remarkable achievement which reflects positively on the transformation of the College estate.

Conclusion
Whilst no public building can ever be 100% risk-free when dealing with an invisible enemy such as this the College has succeeded in its aim to protect the Health & Well-being of its staff and students.

With the regional vaccination programme giving hope to a return to some sort of normality for society the College can look confidently towards the future with the reassurance that, whatever the landscape, it can safely and effectively continue its day-to-day business.

The safety of our staff and students is of paramount importance. The college takes a very proactive approach in terms of implementing as many health and safety covid precautions as possible to ensure that learning and assessment can continue in a safe environment.

Ken Webb
Principal and Chief Executive

CASESTUDY

05

COMPUTING AND ENGINEERING
USE OF GRAPHICS TABLETS AND VISUALISERS IN THE EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF ANALYTICAL MODULES ONLINE

Authors

Gary Ritchie
Deputy Head of School

Richard Morrison
Deputy Head of School

Motivation

The school of Computing and Engineering is committed to providing the same high-quality delivery and learning experience to our students regardless of being on-campus or online. In some subject areas this can be more difficult to achieve than others. In an online domain lectures of analytical subjects lose their primary means of delivery and learning, the white board. Many lecturers in an on campus context avail of the white board to step learners through examples on complex calculations whilst being the central point of focus at the front of the room. Subjects with highly analytical content require a complete rethink in relation to the strategies and technologies that can be deployed to deliver them effectively online.

Problem Definition

In the initial period of online delivery staff tried providing students with detailed pre-completed solutions to problems within Word or PowerPoint and explaining the method to learners during the lesson. Staff quickly identified this approach was not suitable for all learners, students could not follow the steps and many required additional explanations. Within an on-campus scenario learners were able to focus on the lecturer at the whiteboard and follow the steps real time, in addition, if there was a particular part of the solution not being understood the lecturer could further develop that part of the solution at the board for clarity and understanding.

Approach

Staff delivering highly analytical subjects such as computational mathematics, calculus for engineers, and engineering principles quickly identified a need to utilise novel strategies and technologies to engage learners in the same fashion as when present in the classroom. After some research, the college purchased several devices to help recreate the classroom experience on-line, namely, graphics tablets and visualisers. Over the past number of weeks and months staff have developed their skills with these devices and a range of supporting software to deliver engaging analytical lessons online.

Results

Staff Proficiency has grown significantly, and they can deliver highly effective analytical lessons in the same fashion online (via Teams) as when the students are present on campus. Some staff prefer to use visualisers while other prefer graphics tablets. Visualiser's effectively turn the page into a whiteboard. Students can follow solutions to worked examples real time via Teams. Staff can easily record the completion of worked examples for uploading on completion. These recordings have proved to be a superb resource for allowing students to go back and review material in their own time and further their understanding. Graphics tablets are commonly used within the whiteboard feature of Teams to complete complex calculations. Some staff prefer to use the graphics tablets in conjunction with notes they have created within Word or PowerPoint. Staff leave space within these notes for completion of the calculations with students during the lesson, in effect, the document becomes the whiteboard and workbook in one. Completed notes can be uploaded to the VLE for learner review as well as the recorded Teams lesson.

Conclusion

Staff reflection on the pedagogy and devices used in the delivery of learning and assessment of analytical subjects in an online environment has created much more effective delivery and resulted in enhanced learner engagement.

Staff have utilised a range of new strategies, developed new skills and learned new technologies to deliver. The use of visualisers and graphics tablets have been vital to the successful delivery of analytical subjects as they allow lecturers to complete worked examples with students one step at a time while students follow along, lecturers can respond to student queries and provide additional explanation in real time.

The ability to upload completed worked examples with video recorded completion has been a massive advantage to staff and students alike for reconciliation of learning.

> Staff within SERC have shown tremendous dedication to engaging learners effectively in online teaching and learning. The speed at which staff conceived novel approaches and learned new technologies to ensure students were fully engaged in their learning was amazing.
>
> **Trevor Breadon, Head of School - Computing and Engineering.**
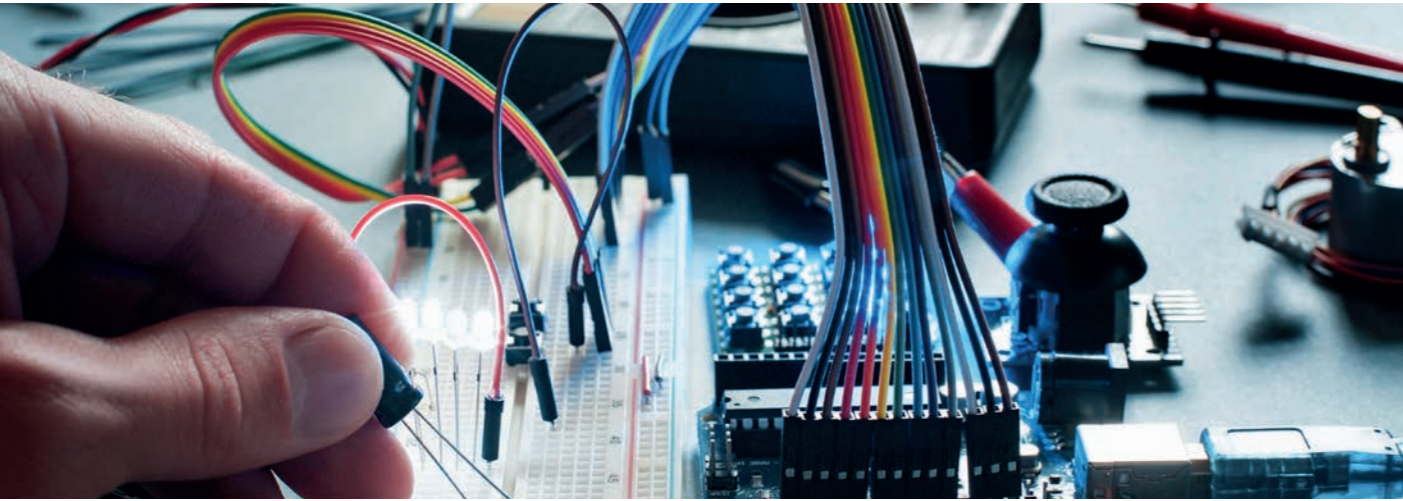
CASESTUDY
06

COMPUTING AND ENGINEERING
INTERNET OF THINGS (IOT) KITS PROVIDED TO INCREASE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT VIA PBL

Author

James Cully
Deputy Head of School

Michael Simcock
Deputy Head of School

Motivation

A key part of learning through PBL comes from the opportunity to build real world practical solutions to given problems. For many students, this practical element is why they choose to study with SERC and is a massive part of engaging students in their learning. Staff decided to develop an approach that would allow the practical aspect of such units to continue whilst studying from home. Staff were motivated to find a novel solution to allow practical to take place during the prolonged lockdown period.

Students could also develop a range of solutions required by the college to address the increased health and safety protocols introduced in response to the Covid pandemic.

Problem Definition

With the prolonged period of lockdown and online delivery there was a real risk that the practical elements of many PBL projects within subjects such as Electronics and Internet of Things could be lost.

Approach

After some deliberation staff delivering electronic type subjects decided to use Arduino microcontroller hardware as a platform for students to complete PBL projects, particularly the practical element of these projects. The first step was for staff to identify the components students would need to build a microcontroller system in response to

the projects given. Projects included the design and development of bin level monitors, hand sanitiser dispenser level monitor, temperature sensing device for a greenhouse, roller coaster queuing system, injection moulding machine monitor. With these projects in mind staff developed hardware kits for issue to each student to allow buildings of projects at home. The kits consisted of an Arduino Uno and programming cable, Breadboard, Push Button's, selection of resistors, 7 segment display common cathode, Ultrasonic sensor, I2C LCD Display, male to male jumper wires, Servo Motor, Potentiometer and Active Buzzer.

The microcontroller kit combined with TINKERCAD software provides the opportunity for students to design, simulate and programme and build their system in response to the project brief with the online support of their lecturer. These kits give the students a practical insight into IoT and Electronic subjects from both a hardware and software perspective and build upon previous knowledge gained in these modules.

Results

The issue of these kits allows students to actively follow the lecture and produce Electronic and IoT systems themselves. Students have been able to complete the PBL projects selected earlier in the year and most importantly the most engaging practical elements. To date, positive feedback has been received from the students regarding the level of practical activity during an on-line class, something that is not easy to achieve but will have a very positive impact on student skills going forward to further study or employment.

Conclusion

Lecturing teams have went above and beyond to find novel solutions of continuing to engage our learners in PBL activities, not only that, but to enable learners to complete the practical and often most engaging aspects of these projects whilst online. The development and use of Microprocessor home kits is just one

example of how this has been achieved. The hardware and software provided has been utilised effectively during the prolonged lockdown to maximise student development within lockdown constraints.

Students feedback has been very positive, and they have welcomed the opportunity to take part in practical activities.

Staff have been impressed with the level of ingenuity demonstrated by students utilising the kits and the standards of projects produced.
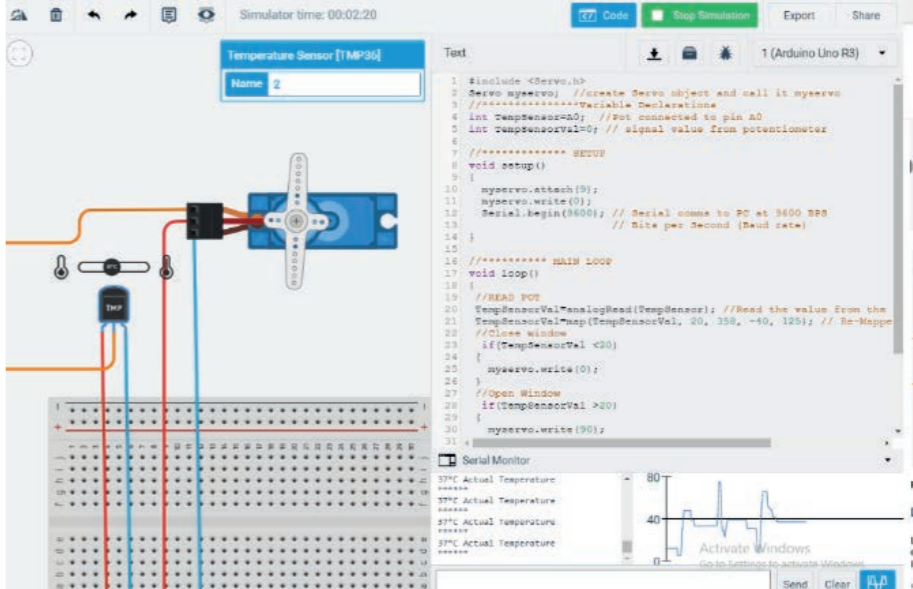
Many students within SERC love the practical aspects of their course and learn a lot from putting the theory into practice. Its fantastic to see the effort by staff to make this possible despite the prolonged period of online learning. As a result, learners have been able to engage in many of the PBL projects originally planned.

Trevor Breadon, Head of School - Computing and Engineering.

CASESTUDY

07

COMPUTING AND ENGINEERING
FIXIT, A COMPUTING STUDENT COMPANY SUPPORTING THEIR PEERS WITH ONLINE LEARNING

Author
Gary Ritchie
Deputy Head of School

Motivation
During the COVID pandemic and the lockdowns which ensued many students found the move to online study problematic due to limited access to IT equipment, particularly a PC. Many students simply had no access to a computer at home, while others who had a computer were not of the required hardware specification to run many of the software programmes required for computing and engineering subjects. This coupled with the drive to engage our students in Project Based Learning and Enterprise activities became the motivation for the FixIT project.

Problem Definition
On entering the lockdown and the prolonged period of online learning it became clear that many students had no access to a computer or at least a computer of the required specification to run many of the more complex industry specific software packages. Lack of access to suitable devices posed a problem regarding student engagement, students without suitable devices could not engage in online learning and hence progress with their studies.

Approach
On recognition of the potential issue that threatened to prevent student engagement, IT staff within the college began the process of setting up college PC's for home use in cases where students did not have access to suitable devices for online study. The scale of this task soon eclipsed the staffing capability of the college IT team, an innovative solution was needed to address the shortage of staff with the skills needed.

It became clear this was the perfect opportunity to engage computing students in a real world PBL project. Students from within the FixIT student company were tasked to work alongside college IT staff to prepare IT equipment for online learning. Computing students were also tasked to provide technical support to their peers via the college IT help desk.

Results
To date computing students have helped to prepare over 800 IT devices for student use from home. This has had a massive impact on the ability of all learners to engage in their online learning. Students have responded to thousands of queries via the IT Helpdesk assisting their peers with troubleshooting advice of everything from how to set up their PC through to problems with accessing specific software. This project is a magnificent example of how students can hone vocational skills via PBL projects. Students involved have report significant development in their own transversal skills through this project, in particular, time management, communication, and working under pressure.

Conclusion
The FixIT student company is a brilliant example of enterprise and PBL being utilised to the benefit of the learners within the student company. Significant numbers of students have been supported in getting online by providing them with a device and supporting them to get online.

Learners within the student company had the opportunity to develop their vocational and transversal skills in a real-world context whilst assisting hundreds of their peers in engaging online.

FixIT is a fantastic example of where project based learning has enabled students to develop not only the technical skills required for employment but also the transferable skills which are highly sought after by employers. Working with the College IT Services Department, FixIT have had a significant impact on College life for many of their peers through the support provided for online learning.

Andrew Emmett, Chief Technology Officer

CASESTUDY

08

CONSTRUCTION, ENGINEERING SERVICES AND SKILLS FOR WORK

CAN WE DELIVER DUKE OF EDINBURGH AWARD/JOINT AWARD /GAISCE AND PBL ONLINE? YES, WE CAN!

Author
Michelle Hickland
Deputy Head of School Construction and the Built Environment

Motivation
Working with students who have complex needs is challenging in face-to-face classes. Add in a pandemic, lockdowns, new software and a completely different approach to teaching and learning, the challenge grew exponentially. However, lack of choice is a great motivator.

Problem Definition
The Foundation Skills Academy encompasses Entry Level and Level 1 learners. Individual students present with multiple significant barriers to learning, across SEN, physical conditions and social demographics. Students and staff had limitations around working online but the Duke of Edinburgh Award (Joint Award/Gaisce) is an important part of the whole learning experience in all our courses. How could we cater for all students' individual needs and successfully work online to cover Project Based Learning (PBL) and Duke of Edinburgh Award (Joint Award/Gaisce)?

Approach
Listed below are some of the main approaches used to move from face to face to online provision of PBL and Duke of Edinburgh Award:

Using Innovative and reactive teaching style/practices.

Enhance student autonomy.

Supporting students to think outside the box.

Upskill staff and students to use Microsoft Teams and OneNote.

Ensure students know how to log on from home and find the apps/software/sites.

Provide staff and students with suitable computer equipment to engage from home.

Short synchronous teaching sessions followed by supported independent learning and review.

Use of one to one asynchronous/synchronous scheduled sessions.

Utilisation of collaborative whiteboards and broader range of online resources

Results
Here is a picture of a PBL activity that students have done through online learning, Zooniverse. One student has engaged in making 'tik tok' videos around 'It's OK to not be OK' to try to support others who may be struggling with mental health issues.

Some students are making booklets and leaflets to raise awareness of emergency services and a 'How to get online'

booklet for students starting next year. Another group are writing letters to residents of a care home, who are in full isolation inside their home. The list could go on.

Student physical health is being supported by online sessions of Tai Chi and other exercise classes. Getting them to record walking activities on Strava and other health apps. Setting a regular time each week when they are encouraged to get up and move.

Conclusion
One of the overarching things about the Foundation Skills Academy at SERC is the importance of providing a rounded whole student experience. Staff constantly strive to provide a wide curriculum where students actively engage in their own development opportunities. The Duke of Edinburgh Award/Joint Award/Gaisce offers opportunities for everyone, regardless of ability, background, or demographics. Over the 3 years it has been running at SERC approximately 500 vulnerable learners have taken part, completing PBL activities, enhancing life experiences and growth in individual soft skills.

Collaborative online working between students, staff and parents/guardians has extended and strengthened the pedagogy, using PBL in ways previously not considered to support the completion of the award. Students are continuing to reach their goals of becoming Duke of Edinburgh/Joint Award/Gaisce Award holders.
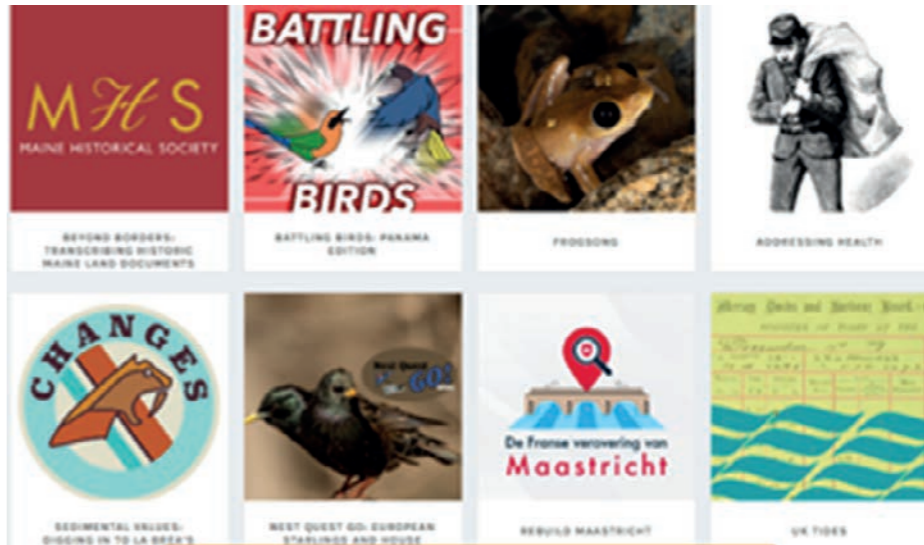
The Duke of Edinburgh's Award isn't all about achieving an award or a qualification. It's about going out meeting new people, developing your skills, goals, experiences, teamwork, confidence etc. It's good for employers to see the DofE on your CV or application form. The DofE has helped me prepare for a virtual assessment for an apprenticeship at BT

Kyle Henderson SFYL student

09

CONSTRUCTION, ENGINEERING SERVICES AND SKILLS FOR WORK
E-PORTFOLIO DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT
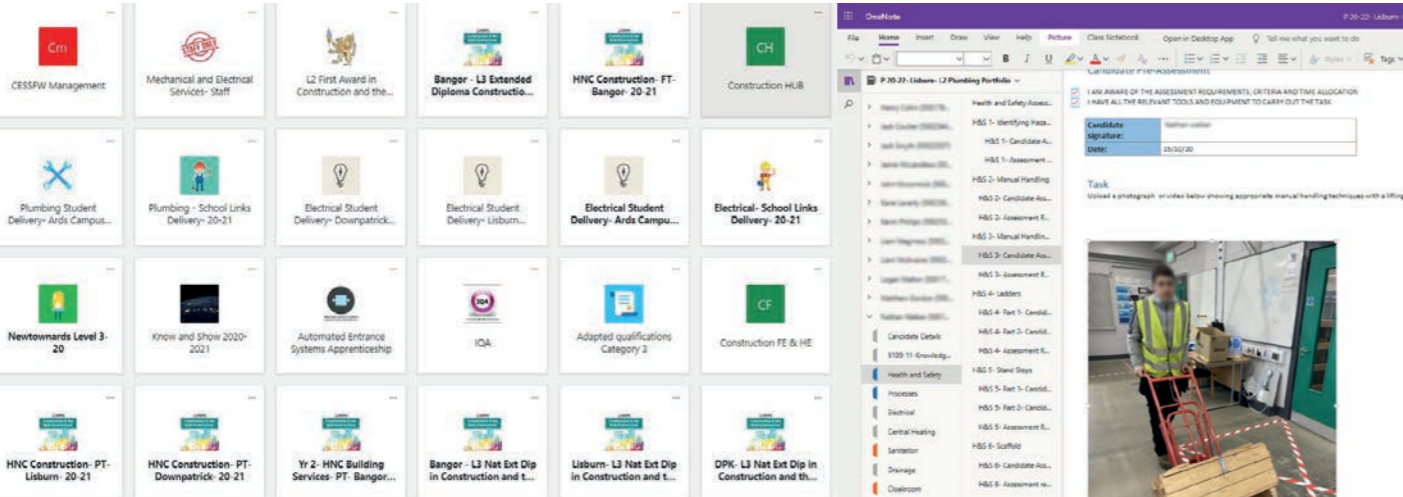
Author
Stuart Rankin
Deputy Head of School Construction and the Built Environment

Motivation
Due to the ongoing pandemic and the necessity to get good online engagement of learners. It is important to develop a methodology for students to engage with their portfolio and allow online for cross moderation. Without these features assessment and IQA processes become restricted and fragmented, with learners only being to submit work when in the college.

The development and use of a digital portfolio would enable a new method of working for both the learners and the assessment team, allowing them to engage online using various digital devices. It would allow learners to capture evidence easily and upload directly for review as well as developing their digital skills.

There are significant numbers of students studying in these areas so the impact would be very significant. The College runs the Construction Hub for N Ireland.

Problem Definition
Within the construction trade vocational areas the process of gathering of evidence was intensive and time consuming. Students carried out the assessment gathering their evidence then had to print out and write up their evidence in a paper-based portfolio. The Assessor would have to track this and write up the folder. The folders would then have to be IQA'd across campus at various points of the year. This process was problematic, time consuming and required transfer of numerous folders around the different campus, before work could be claimed. The assessment and IQA process would need to be considered in the development of the digital portfolio process.

Staff and students required access to printers to print off evidence as well as storage facilities for the folders to be stored securely. Amendments were also difficult and could result in multiple versions having to be printed by the learners to fix issues. Student work could be lost along the way.

Approach
The Building Services Management team reviewed existing digital portfolios available on the market. The team felt some of the current schemes were restrictive on how evidence could be gathered and were relatively expensive to purchase.

It was decided that the team would review the use of Microsoft Classnote as a method of developing a digital portfolio. This is something that had been used for some of the FE Construction provision within the college, and it was clear that the software had the potential for a portfolio to be built to suit the need of the trade based VRQ and NVQ based portfolios. The project was broken into two stages. The first was the implementation of a digital portfolio to allow for the capturing of students assessment evidence, and the assessment process to take place. The second phase was to develop a digital course file that reflected the requirements of the IQA/EQA process. By the end of stage 2, the whole assessment and IQA process would be digitised and on a platform that allowed for online development and assessment of students work.

A pilot was agreed for the L2 Plumbing and Heating NVQ and the L2 Electrical Installation qualifications. A structure was developed for both qualifications following good practice, capturing all the required elements of the programme. This was further enhanced to develop the content of the portfolio using the requirements of the Awarding Organisations. Once complete, the portfolios would be scrutinised by the Assessment teams and revised if required before being implemented for use by the learners.
The pilot scheme would provide a template for developing other portfolios moving forward based on feedback from the learners and assessment team.

Results
The system provided many advantages over the traditional paper-based system. It is also more flexible than other proprietary portfolio systems, allowing for evidence to reflect the learner journey including PBL projects.

Positive feedback has been provided by both students and staff on the benefits of the system and ease of use and meaningful structure implemented. The process of assessment has been streamlined and become more efficient, saving time and space. Work is secure and restricted by user account control. The use of Classnote as a digital portfolio platform allows the learner to capture evidence in a different way than traditional method. The learner can provide robust assessment evidence such as images, videos or sound clips. The dictation function allows the learner to input their responses without the need of a keyboard.

The Building Services Department has now implemented digital portfolios for the following areas including L2 Electrical Installation, L3 Electrical Installation (NVQ), L2 Plumbing and Heating (NVQ), L3 Plumbing and Heating (NVQ), L2 Refrigeration and Air Conditioning (NVQ), L3 Refrigeration and Air Conditioning (NVQ) and L3 Fire and Security (VRQ). Work on the L3 Fire and Security (NVQ) is in progress. The digital course file has been established, and the team are looking at the best way for this to be implemented to complement the digital portfolio.

Conclusion
The digital portfolio development and implementation has been a great success. The custom portfolios allow the inclusion of PBL as well as reflecting the student journey on tasks and provides a flexible online method of capturing evidence for the learner. The digital portfolio system has also allowed staff and students to develop their digital skills, which is an important tool in this current climate. It has also allowed students and assessors to continue with the process throughout the current pandemic. The assessment and IQA process has been made more efficient by the implementation of the digital course file process.

The e-portfolio template and processes are being rolled out across all disciplines in the School of Construction and Engineering Services.

"The digital portfolio has made evidence gathering for assessments more efficient. The structure and tools included in the portfolio allows the learners to capture evidence in a range of ways using their devices. As a lecturer, it lets me track progress and simplifies the assessment and IQA process."

Graham Thompson- Lecturer in Plumbing

CASESTUDY

10

CONSTRUCTION, ENGINEERING SERVICES AND SKILLS FOR WORK

INCORPORATING PBL INTO ONLINE DIGITAL PORTFOLIOS FOR PLUMBING TRAINEES AND APPRENTICESHIPS

Author
Julian Wilson
Deputy Head of School Construction and the Built Environment

Motivation
When the COVID-19 pandemic took place the world was gripped with fear and uncertainty. This would completely transform the way we live, work, and learn. Colleges found themselves having to deliver their classes online and having to use MS Teams to achieve this. Paper based learning and assessment for Project Based Learning activities and student evidence folders would make life very difficult for both the student and the lecturers. The plumbing department at SERC used this as the motivation to commit fully to digital portfolios and embed PBL into the assessment process and make learning more enjoyable for students and staff.

Problem Definition
Embedding PBL pedagogy can be challenging at the best of times for both students and staff. Using this methodology in a global pandemic with significant lockdown periods and almost all delivered online is a significant challenge. Online learning has proved to be a challenge for some students and lecturers having to learn new digital skills via different platforms almost overnight.

Students also face challenges in not having computer equipment to access online learning in addition to acquiring the online technologies digital skills. There has been significant support from their lecturers, and it is now possible to deliver large parts of their course online.

PBL for the level 2 students has seen a rise in lack of engagement as their knowledge within the industry has been limited due to them been put onto furlough.

Approach
PBL has been incorporated within the plumbing course for several years now though Enterprise Fortnight and the ongoing qualification assessment. To address the new restrictions that we now find ourselves in our approach was now to deliver the qualification and PBL online, so the learners were not disadvantaged in anyway.

Enterprise Fortnight for students was still held and this give the students the opportunity to showcase their projects across the campuses meeting all COVID-19 regulations. Students were given a dedicated room and time slot and judges would call to the location and see the student's projects keeping the movement to a minimum.

With the implementation of the digital portfolio incorporating PBL scenarios over the course, this now allowed the students to capture their evidence and continue the assessment process. Students would be given a breakout room via teams and this allowed them to meet and discuss in group how they would manage the project and record their findings.

Results
With the new digital portfolio implemented across plumbing this has allowed the PBL activities to continue during the restrictions.

Some of the tasks the students complete during the PBL scenarios

Students complete sketch to give the customer rough idea of the system layout.

Students completing real life PBL

Tracking and reflection of the PBL Tasks

Conclusion
The digital Portfolio development and implementation has been a great success and has allowed both students and lecturers to continue the excellent training that SERC provide across all areas.

The inclusion of PBL pedagogy into the online portfolio allows the students to capture evidence for both practical skills and theoretical knowledge in the same online place.

The level 2 PBL has been impacted more significantly by the local lockdown because so much learning and assessment time has been online. Level 3 programmes have had better engagement and the students' skills development (vocational and transversal) from the PBL activities has been significant. These will give them a significant advantage in progressing from an apprentice to running their own business and employing future trainees from the College.

The PBL Tasks throughout the assignments have played a great part in making me understand what all is required for a Pacific job from the tools right down to how you price the jobs. By far the best part of the PBL task would be looking through the different situations and jobs you will come across within the industry.

Chris Hughes Level 3 NVQ plumbing

CASESTUDY

11

HEALTH AND EARLY YEARS
ESSENTIAL SKILLS : THE CHALLENGE OF ONLINE LEARNING

Authors:
Michelle Devlin
Head of School
Annette Dixon
Deputy Head of School
Eddie Conlon
Curriculum Manager

Motivation
The landscape of COVID-19 required SERC to adapt operational and strategic plans for 2021. This included: teaching / learning modality, classroom capacity and managing the flow of staff and students in buildings to comply with social distancing. A strategic decision was taken by HOS and school management team to fully deliver Essential Skills (ES) classes online; the exception being adult classes where a blended approach would be adopted. This also meant that vocational practical lessons could proceed in line with DfE and Public Health guidance and restrictions.

Problem Definition
While the decision to deliver Essential Skills classes online helped to address

the issue of capacity and social distancing, it created its own challenge. The challenge was to create a well-structured teaching and learning platform, support materials and assessments. This provided an opportunity to review teaching and learning strategies and incorporate upcoming concepts such as digital skills, e-portfolios and develop engagement strategies. Providing assurances of validity, authenticity and robustness in assessments to Stakeholders such as CCEA and the Awarding Body, remained a challenge in both the COVID-19 and online landscape.

Approach
The school management ensured that the Essential Skills team collated sufficient evidence and progress logged on SERC's ES tracking system; should college assessed grades (CAG) be required.

Learning from the approach adopted in the first lockdown (March - June 2020) staff and students:
• Continued to develop teaching skills.
• Continued learning and assessment through MS Teams.
• Logged the student's journey / progress on the ES Tracker.

Cognisant of staff and students' needs in adapting to a fully online modality for the academic year, the ES management team identified additional elements that needed to be addressed, namely:
• Identify and sharing good practice from the previous learning.
• Further standardisation on how evidence was gathered through MS Teams.
• Monitor and encourage attendance and engagement.

'Sharing best practice' events were successful as they were led by practitioners. For example, a practitioner introduced assignment functions within MS teams. The peer-to-peer instruction culminated in the widespread adoption of the function by ES colleagues. From this interaction, ES staff also agreed a standardised structure within their MS TEAMs that would allow for the tracking of engagement, teaching and learning activities for each ES area. Within Teams sites Channels were used for teaching resources, Assignments for submitting work to Moodle was embedded for additional support materials.

The high online attendance rates were testament to the staff commitment and motivation to keep students on track. This was achieved through rapport building, the use of channels and break-out rooms in MS teams as small group teaching, contact with students outside of teaching time whilst maintaining joviality and fun. This approach correlated to the SERC's student engagement research which highlighted 3 main requirements reported by students:
• Know what they have to do.
• Feel staff cared about them.
• Make it fun.

In order to accommodate online delivery and deal with COVID restrictions, Moodle sites were designed and developed for administering the digital Initial Assessment and the Diagnostic Assessment, thus allowing these results to be entered onto the college developed Essential Skills Tracking App along with students' target levels. These were moderated assessments which involved mics on, cameras on and real-time submission. In addition to these sites, and in collaboration with OCN, the ES team made other key changes to operations. 'Mock exams' were no longer available as exams could not be taken under normal circumstances. Final assessment problems were further compounded when DfE announced that there were to be no exams for FE from March onwards. In the absence of guidance regarding evidence required for the awarding of results, additional Moodle sites were created for literacy and numeracy. These sites were populated with 'Moderated Interim and Summative Assessments'. The ES team also re-designed and created additional interactive Moodle sites and classroom resources, including new entry level sites. Students could study asynchronously as they home-schooled, cared for dependants or worked in front-line services. All ES learners had access to the same resources, on-line support, feedback and could see their own progress on the Teams Assignment tracker.

Results
Tutors found Teams and Assignments 'easy to navigate' and the 'one stop shop'. They also found student induction onto teams was more successful for adults rather than FE/TfS. The online moderated assessments, Initial Assessment and Diagnostic Assessment (IA/DA) proved to be successful. The new standardised IA/DA/interim tools were accurate put together. Student feedback showed that ES learners were more willing to engage with their camera and mic on, which could be seen as confirmation that the moderation process was clear and accepted by learners.

Conclusion
Online learning accelerated the ES teams' evaluation and reflection on teaching, learning and assessment strategies and required a re-design and rapid development of resources and Moodle sites. A learner profiling strategy was developed to measure exam readiness and shared with OCN. This strategy is reflected in their pandemic response strategy as teach, assess and bank. Staff pedagogical and student engagement skills have developed at pace. Student attendance and engagement is good at 75-80%. The slower pace of online learning compared to face-to-face teaching means that further supportive measures, such as on campus surgeries and clinics, will be timetabled when restrictions are relaxed. Students can then receive additional assistance as needed.

> It was a challenge at first and still is. The main win is to establish a rapport with students and engage them in the first few minutes of the lesson. This can be discussing football, TV programmes or any topic. Once established, students engage very well.
>
> **Quote from staff member**

CASESTUDY
12

HEALTH AND EARLY YEARS
THE PATH TO PROMOTING AND ASSURING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND WELL-BEING DURING LOCKDOWN IN HEALTH AND CARE COURSES

Authors
Frank Carter
Deputy Head of School

Michelle Devlin
Head of School

Motivation
The SERC Health Care Staff are passionate about inspiring, transforming and enriching the lives of our students. The outstanding standard of teaching on health care courses at SERC has helped thousands of students join the work force and build the Northern Irish economy. Staff and students had an advantage when the first lockdown period (March 2020), as a good rapport and understanding had already been established with students. The completion of the 20/21 academic year was more of a challenge of technology than of engagement.

Problem Definition
Curriculum planning and adaptation for 20/21, recognised a 'new normal' meant a blended online and socially distanced on campus approach was needed. This Health Care team embraced this challenge and used evidence of previous students' experience to devise a modality of delivery and curriculum that would benefit students who were carers, frontline workers and home schooling.

Approach
Curriculum management and delivery were amended to 70:30 online: face to face modality using MS teams, breakout rooms and channels, the team identified student engagement and support students' well-being as greater challenges. Students adapted to the delivery modality very well, but mental health was an outstanding feature during engagement. As a team, this became a major focus in the plan to ensure students engaged and progressed through their course. To support this during lockdown the School of Health, Early Years and Adult Education staff promoted the following initiatives.

Ensuring learners had access to hardware and software: Working with individual students to identify IT issues, staff worked with the College IT services to provide computers and the College has put in place a new 'Online Apps' services which will allow students at home to use a range of software when outside the College, even on older equipment. For those students who need access to specialist software, links were provided so students could freely download it for use at home on their equipment.

Encouraging a flexible approach to learning – synchronous and asynchronous classes: Staff were communicating with and listening to the student voice on a daily basis. Classes were delivered both synchronously and asynchronously to support those working on the frontline of healthcare and home schooling.

1-2-1 support at least once per week and timetable adjustments: Time for both group and individual tutorials was added to timetables. Staff arranged to speak 1-2-1 with students and had an opportunity to review both academic concerns and student engagement and well-being

Making use of MS Teams through breakout rooms to encourage small group working and social activities: Breakout rooms were used to support learning through focussed group tasks. Often the groups were randomly assigned to create a greater sense of community. Several classes regularly have lunch together in Teams. Making learning fun: Time was allocated in many classes to have a bit of downtime. Telling a joke, talking TV or just using some features of MS Teams (see below) raised a laugh or two.

Promoting an open-door policy to support students with College work and pastoral care: An active and well used (real) open door policy has been successful for several years. Staff explained to students that the (virtual) door is still very much open. Students were regularly reminded to this and encouraged to reach out with any issues they may have.

Five-minute Fridays: This was an opportunity for showcasing a skill/ talent/interest, quizzes and just 'having a chat'.

Starting classes with a 'check-in': Staff explained to students that it is okay not to be okay and the pandemic can get us all down. Starting class by reminding students we are here to support their academic progress and well-being and that they can contact us for support. Student feedback: Having engaged the students, it was important to understand 'what works' in online learning and then making adjustments as required. This led to adjustments such as additional asynchronous classes, moving a class time, support with IT, more group work and many more.

Results
In trying to understand the student experience, staff asked a range of Health and Care students to share their experiences of online learning this year. Below is a selection of comments:

"I feel that I have gotten so much support and understanding with my progress in online learning doing HNC Healthcare Practice. The tutors at SERC give their time to make sure that every student is supported with every step of their course and understand the importance of student's achieving their academic goals. It is support that I didn't receive at secondary school and I'm very grateful for this support at SERC."

Conclusion
From these initiatives, attendance was across all levels in the school was over 90%, some courses even reported improved attendance. It was also identified that absence was, for the majority, due to working on the frontline of healthcare and home-schooling. Students felt that the approachability, flexibility and problem-solving of staff has allowed them to flourish. As one student said, "College has been the only good thing during lockdown".

The staff have shown creativity, adaptability, compassion and a will to deliver excellent learning. Many have done this while continuing to work as frontline practitioners and home-schoolers! Often in education, success will be measured by how many students achieved a qualification, grades and progression. In these extremely challenging times, it is great to think that our Health and Care students have had such creative, caring and continuous support in their education and life journey.

"The tutors have been supportive online, Taking their time to complete one to one calls has helped me to get extra support just like if I was in college meaning my learning isn't impacted. Thank you"

"I've felt supported with all of the tutors anytime I have a question or I'm stuck on something it is easy to contact them".

Quote from Health and Social Care students

13

HEALTH AND EARLY YEARS
KEEPING STUDENTS TOGETHER WHILE APART - OPEN ALL HOURS

Authors

Ellie Bradley
Deputy Head of School

Chris Mohan
Deputy Head of School

Motivation
Adult students in Access and Restart Programmes have, like the younger cohorts within college, continued to engage in online learning during lockdown. Adult Returners to education, however, have also had to deal with the additional pressures of juggling home-schooling, working in front line services, caring and, for many, insufficient online computers to a greater extent than other learners. Many have spoken of missing the social contact, encouragement and support provided by their tutors and classmates, usually provided by the daily chitchat of the classroom whilst waiting to start classes, lunch and coffee breaks, the classes and workshops themselves. They report that their mental health has been

compromised and that the daily grind of home-schooling, work and their own learning has led some to experience the feeling of being left out and getting behind.

Problem Definition
Covid 19 lockdowns have removed students physically from the supportive environment of the classroom. In order that both students and staff mental health, students' academic development and aspirations for career progression is supported and enhanced, it was essential that the classroom routines, support and collaboration, both social and academic, be replicated in the online platforms.

Approach
In order that contact is not only about academic work but replicated the social - emotional work from the classroom strengthening relationships, providing distraction, building hope and resilience. To this end Teams channels which were already being used extensively by the students to keep in touch have had Daily challenges added each day. Using different challenges each day which encouraged students to share their favourite quotes, songs, films and to take 15 mins to tackle something which they'd been putting off, and a gratitude challenge. This has created connection between students, the sharing of emotions and stories, hopes and recognition of achievement of goals. The idea of cultivating feelings, thoughts, and actions of appreciation and how this can help to become more aware of the resources we have at our disposal, both within ourselves and outside of ourselves and how this can help us manage stress, is now recognised. Although the challenges start in the morning, they remain open all day with students adding and responding when they are able. Students and staff have responded to other students outside of college hours and brought them into conversations, reigniting the relationships necessary for support.

With students reporting a lack of routine towards their studies while working from home, some had become little more than an avatar to other students and the staff. Recognising that, for some, the timings of class clashed with home schooling tasks or their increased shifts as frontline carers in the pandemic online classes where recorded and streamed for students to watch when they were free to concentrate without missing the input of the other students. The tutor team adjusted the assessments to encourage online collaboration with each other to complete tasks successfully, including awarding marks for collaboration and checking in with each other and to create opportunities for students to engage with each other. With the use of the E Portfolios already established,

private channels were established for the collaborative groups where students could share resources, fears, discoveries and potential difficulties as a smaller group. Students met as hoc (without lecturer prompt) meeting at times which suited themselves.

Using the Teams channels Tutors could pick up questions and then follow through with one to many sessions with each group for support. All progress including engagement with the material could be monitored by the tutors which allowed follow up and extra support for those who were struggling.

Results
Contact with all students has been increased since the initiatives were put in place with only a few not up to date with assignments and assessments. Students who were unknown to each other only a few weeks previously had worked together to complete a common unit of assessment in sourcing a household budget and comparing multiple sources of information in NICATS. Working collaboratively meant that the scope of the project could be expanded to give deeper meaning and analysis of the problem.

Students who were disengaged for a few weeks were encouraged and motivated by their peer group.

Students who hadn't spoken in online classes responded to the daily challenges, both responding to and initiating conversations. This confidence led to more interaction in the online classes and collaborative work. Playlists of music, film recommendations, quotes have led to further conversations throughout the week with students requesting a display wall to collect the material.

Conclusion
Online collaboration is extremely important for both social and academic reasons.

The new pedagogical approaches developed in the college have created better peer to peer relationships and collaborations.

Interactions between students and staff both socially and academically, and renewed aspirations among the students for career and academic advancement that have resulted from the pandemic will be a very useful addition to learning methodologies when society reopens.

"Building and supporting connections between students and tutors, and between students has been more important than ever. Being connected in a virtual Open all Hours classroom using conversation starters, online lessons and group work has supported Adult Learners' mental health, academic skills and social relationships."

Elllie Bradley, Deputy of School

CASESTUDY

14

HOSPITALITY, MANAGEMENT, TOURISM AND LANGUAGES

DIGITAL AND COLLABORATIVE SKILLS THROUGH PBL

"STAYCATION MAGAZINES" FOCUSED ON THE LOCAL TRAVEL AND TOURISM INDUSTRY

Authors

James Currie
Head of School

Catherine Anderson
Deputy Head of School

Motivation

The global pandemic, COVID-19, has completely transformed the way we live, work and learn. The FE Colleges are playing a key role in the development of a new DfE strategy with two of the key policy objectives being:
• Investing in our Digital skills across all sectors of our economy
• Creating a culture of learning for all ages to include upskilling and reskilling in addition to innovation

The college addressed these objectives by investing in high quality skills provision including a renewed focus on Digital skills, particularly for those already in the workforce who will need to adapt to new working practices post COVID-19. SERC is conscious of the need to develop suitable skills interventions that assist all sectors to adjust to the impacts of COVID – 19, one of those being the Travel and Tourism Industry.

This has been the motivation for the Travel and Tourism team to further develop the PBL strategy by supporting local Travel and Tourism businesses and sector bodies. Creating awareness of the many wonderful holiday, leisure and business travel opportunities Northern Ireland has to offer. Replacing the need to travel abroad, will generate economic benefits to aid recovery of the local tourism economy.

Problem Definition

The move to online learning has proved to be a challenge for many learners and has tested tutors' skills to ensure the interaction and engagement of all travel and tourism students is successful. Delivering 100% of their programme online, since October 2020, learners have been stretched to develop their digital abilities, whilst learning at home. A Student Engagement survey which took place in Feb 2021 with Travel and Tourism students, across all three campuses, found that 52% of learners were struggling generally with lockdown and 50% preferred face to face.

With SERC's approach to assessment using e-portfolios and the drive to embed PBL, to ensure the real-life experience is continued and developed, the focus to enhance these digital skills is a key driver for the Travel and Tourism department. A mixture of skills development and the need to succeed in assessments, proves to be the main challenge faced by learners. PBL has always been embedded within our curriculum bringing the reality of the Travel and Tourism industry to the classroom which is integral to the learner's development and knowledge of this sector.

Isolation and lack of "getting out" to experience industry visits and work placements, has partially hindered learners from developing a full understanding of key cultural and industry aspects within the Travel and Tourism sector.

Approach

Building on the development of PBL within the Travel and Tourism department, Covid-19 has inadvertently assisted learners to address positively issues they experienced previously with PBL and have sought to develop something more "realistic". Due to covid-19. Staycations are now a "trend", an opportunity for the local tourism industry to thrive. By creating awareness via "Digital Platforms", students have been able to develop a digital magazine and social media platforms to promote their local areas to our Northern Ireland visitors.

Students have collaboratively developed the Staycations Digital Magazine and created and posted on social media platforms. The use of MS Teams enabled them to meet in breakout rooms (synchronously and asynchronously) to discuss and develop the Magazine content. Within their MS Teams they have integrated a MS Class Notebook to gather evidence of their learning (both formative and summative) and develop content in "real-time", shared between all learners in each campus.

The PBL Staycations magazine has facilitated learners with;

Collaboration between tutors, students, peers, Travel and Tourism industry

Production of a viable Travel and Tourism product for the public and visitors to N Ireland

Integration of learning outcomes across the two programmes at Level 2 and Level 3 ensuring learning is relevant to the curriculum.

Proof reading skills prior to issue to the public of the Staycation Magazines

Utilisation of learning resources for literacy and ICT skills

Continuous embedding of Essential skills for literacy, numeracy and ICT

Results

Travel and Tourism curriculum continues to see a rise in retention rates and an increase in achieving higher grades, across all three campuses. The development of the "digital skills" and "collaborative" skills have ensured that the students have not lost out on their education due to the Covid-19 pandemic. They in fact have been provided with a more enhanced learning experience. The success rates are a substantial improvement, given the high level of subject delivery online.

The high level of attendance and the positive feedback from learners indicates that this methodology is successful, and students enjoyed the collaborative approach.

Conclusion

PBL together with the effective use of "Digital Tools" has proved to be invaluable to the Travel and Tourism students during the current Covid-19 pandemic. It has contributed to the engagement of learners, success rates, collaboration techniques and digital skills.

For PBL to be a success it must be real, and the "Staycation" Digital Magazine is both realistic and industry linked.

Learners have developed confidence and leadership qualities which are imperative for entering a career in this demanding industry, as they have embraced the wide range of technologies the experienced tutors have introduced them to when delivering this programme.

> "I found the breakout rooms really useful, as when we were talking in the room, we could type what we were talking about in a collaboration space, so anyone could go back and see what activity was completed."
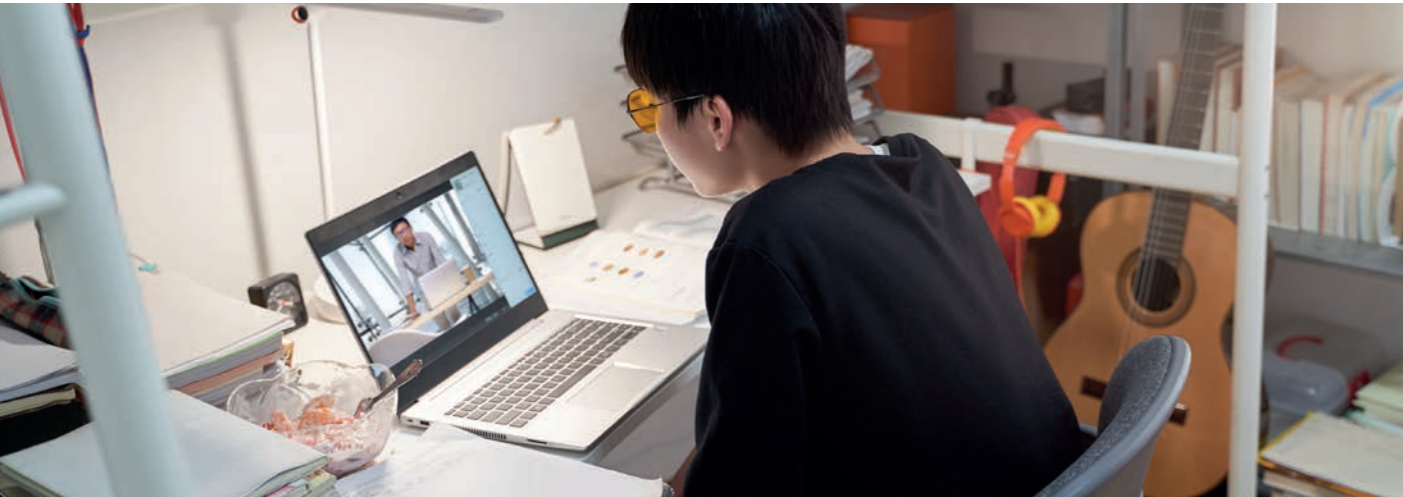>
> **Student Jessica Smyth**

CASESTUDY

15

HOSPITALITY, MANAGEMENT, TOURISM AND LANGUAGES

GLOBAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE & CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXCHANGE

Authors

James Currie
Head of School

Catherine Anderson
Deputy Head of School

Motivation

SERC uses "internationalisation" to enhance teaching and learning by providing staff and students with new personal and professional development opportunities. International activities are helping students improve their intercultural awareness and soft skills, increasing their employability chances in today's globalised workplace.

Over the past ten years, SERC has built many successful international partnerships and developed new global relationships, leading to significant mutual benefits. The college has a well-established student exchange programme with Toyama National Institute of Technology in Japan, which has grown into a full-fledged college partnership, incorporating aspects of knowledge exchange, best practice sharing, joint student and staff projects and collaborative research. Nurturing this relationship has opened the door to other college partnerships in Japan, this year with the Travel and Tourism Department. SERC Principal, Ken Webb said, 'It is vitally important to ensure our students are equipped with the employability skills, intercultural skills and confident attitude to succeed in this international economy.'

Student International Exchange collaboration offers students the opportunity to be exposed to another culture and to expand their scope of understanding of another country, which they would never have had the opportunity to explore before. The collaboration our learners have established with Toyama High School has assisted with engagement, understanding and cultural development.

Problem Definition

Student Exchange Initiatives have been identified as a segment of the international student market that has significant growth potential. With careers in the Travel and Tourism industry amongst the fastest growing areas of employment in the world the impact and experience of the international initiative can only be positive. A focus of the college's international work is looking at how it benefits learners and staff, and the college is continually seeking to build on the significant impact of this international work to develop and grow as an organisation.

These initiatives offer many benefits and outcomes for students, educationally, personally, and long-term. With the restrictions in travel and the inability for students to experience "first-hand" the different cultures and environments across the world, collaboration in a "Virtual" environment, satisfies, partly this gap. It will ensure more SERC students have opportunities to learn side-by-side with their international peers, remotely, to gain this knowledge and cultural awareness otherwise lacking.

Approach

Travel and Tourism students continue to build their international collaborations with their involvement over the past three years with Erasmus projects this has allowed students to experience first-hand, the ethos of other cultures and developed their capacity to respect these cultures.

Students have been given the opportunity to explore virtual methods of "communication" with their fellow students at Toyama High School. They were made aware of the opportunity to explore cultural understanding and the opportunity of collaboration on international learning, cultural awareness, language acquisition and broadening their general knowledge, together with the opportunity to develop their self-awareness.

The Travel and Tourism students commenced the exchange by working collaboratively with their tutor to prepare a presentation on key facts on Northern Ireland including weather, population, food and drink, key visitor attractions and language. A short video of this presentation was created with subtitles, which allowed the transcript to be translated into Japanese and shared with the Japanese students, in advance of the introduction meeting. All students from both Northern Ireland and Japan met via Zoom. The students from Toyama presented a similar presentation "live" in English (their course is in English language) and following this all students exchanged several questions to their peers on various aspects of their culture and country. The students were guided to deliver presentations to each other and ask questions to learn more about each other's cultures.

Results

The live student exchange which took place in February 2021 involving 20 students and teaching staff from SERC's Level 3 Travel and Tourism course and an International Studies class from Toyama Minami High School. The students who engaged in the initial Introductory meeting fed back to their tutor that the experience was exciting, new, and very interesting. They were surprised how easy it was to engage with students from a different country, overcoming the language barrier, learning about the Japanese community and country, and having effective communications in a confident manner. They entered a new place in their own personal development, and this gave them a sense of accomplishment and self-achievement. The prospect for further cultural learning will be an exciting aspect of the student exchange initiative. The students are aware that they will be committed to communicating with their Japanese peers and continue to promote the culture of Northern Ireland to them.

Conclusion

This exchange has broadened the aspect of international learning with the Travel and Tourism students allowing them to understand different international cultures around the world and enabling them to gain a clearer perspective on world Travel and Tourism culture.

The educational benefits also improve their communication, interpersonal, organisational, and cultural awareness skills. Long-term this initiative will not only increase their cultural understanding but increase their employability and networking skills, demonstrating that they are globally aware and can communicate with their international counterparts.

> "I really enjoyed taking part in the student exchange. This was a great opportunity which will benefit me in my course. It has made me aware of different cultural experiences and further developed my interest and understanding of students, just like myself, studying in different countries."
>
> **Amy Glen a second-year student on the Lisburn Level 3 Travel and Tourism**
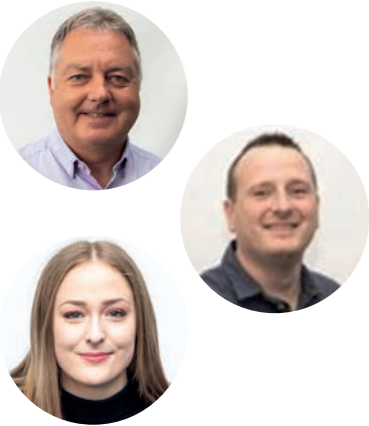
CASESTUDY

16

HOSPITALITY, MANAGEMENT, TOURISM AND LANGUAGES

INNOVATIVE ASSESSMENT - DELIVERING COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS DINNERS FOR LOCAL FOODBANK

Authors:
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Head of School
Paul Mercer
Deputy Head of School
Elizabeth Philips
Curriculum Support Officer

Motivation

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption to the delivery of vocational assessments within the college realistic work environment, causing possible delays to the achievement of hospitality and catering qualifications. The SERC Hospitality and Catering team has thrived on the college-wide strategic directive of teaching and learning via PBL since its inception in 2015. Preparing students for the fast-paced and ever-changing Hospitality industry requires our students to be not only prepared in their practical training but also in their ability to think entrepreneurially and collaboratively and use these skills effectively in real-life scenarios. Transversal skills are essential for students to successfully operate in the Hospitality and Catering industry.

To ensure that the quality of learning was not impacted, the importance of providing real-life project opportunities with tangible and meaningful results became a priority for this academic year. Within the North Down area, the Bangor Foodbank has identified that at least 770 local families have been helped with 3-day emergency food parcels since lockdown started in March 2020. Independent figures show that demand for food banks has increased by 61% in 2020. Low income is the biggest single and fastest growing reason for referral to food banks, accounting for 28 % of referrals.1

Problem Definition

SERC students usually accompany their studies through working in local restaurants, hotels, and cafés, both in the kitchen and front of house, whilst working in the college training restaurants and kitchens as part of their assessment. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, this became impossible for our students, and this loss of enriching real-life experience and our students' wellbeing was a concern.

Outside of college, the effects of Covid-19 on many disadvantaged local communities were intensifying in the months leading up to Christmas. Ken Scott, manager of Bangor Foodbank met with SERC staff to discuss the worrying increase in foodbank use by existing clients, and the alarming rise in numbers of new clients over the course of the pandemic and Christmas period.

Approach

The catering curriculum team saw an opportunity for an ambitious, collaborative PBL project which would encompass social responsibility community engagement, transversal soft skills, and practical work-based skills. This project became The Community Christmas Dinner, which aimed to successfully provided 1000 Christmas dinners, 1000 packs of shortbread and mince pies, and 300 dessert packs for children, and a service of festive hotdogs straight from the College Food Truck, being donated to clients of Bangor and Newtownards foodbanks and a variety of local charities, all in one day.

With the support of Ards and North Down Borough Council's Mayor Trevor Cummings, who had chosen to support Bangor Foodbank as one of his three nominated charities for his term of office, and the local foodbanks, a plan was created to provide 1000 Christmas dinners and festive treats to clients of Bangor and Newtownards foodbanks and clients of various charities in the local vicinity. Students from cross-level Hospitality and Catering programmes incorporating 11 different qualifications collaborated in the project to overcome challenges in, event planning, logistics, and coordination of both internal and external agencies, marketing and branding, fundraising, menu development based on the ongoing 'street food' concept, food production systems, food packaging, off premises catering and management of legal requirements such as food safety and allergens creating a new strand to the college realistic working environment. Utilising their practical knowledge with creativity, planning and time management skills students could see the project from its conception through to execution while working and learning with peers and external stakeholders to develop skills that often can only be learnt through real-life scenarios.

Results

1000 Christmas dinners, which were chilled and ready to reheat at home, along with over 1000 pieces of shortbread and mince pies, 300 packs of marshmallow snowmen and gingerbread reindeers, and a huge number of festive hot-dogs from the College Food Truck, were successfully donated on the 10th December 2020. The students were heavily involved with the packing and distributing of the food to clients of Bangor Food Bank and Community Support and Newtownards Foodbank, as well as several clients of local charities in the area. Ards and North Down Borough Council (Twitter) "Well done to all the @S_ERC students and staff involved in this initiative to support local foodbanks, helping families in need this Christmas. The students' success in this project is not only valuable to the communities they are part of, but has also enhanced their employability and self-confidence, all whilst assisting their studies and personal development. Despite various changes to our plans due to fluctuating severity of lockdown and working through one of the wettest and coldest nights in December, our students showed versatility, and resilience when problems arose, and continued to be enthusiastic and focused from start to finish.

The positive attitude of our students was noted by many who were involved in the project, such as Mayor Trevor Cummings, who said it was "Great to work alongside such an enthusiastic bunch of young people. Making a difference in their community and a credit to staff at SERC."

Conclusion

The catering students, by harnessing all their skills and learning for the good of the community, have continued to progress, and we have been able to achieve a massive social responsibility community project which has made a difference to many people who were facing a difficult festive period. The feeling of being part of a team and the satisfaction from seeing a project through from start to finish was the driving force behind the success of the project and an important factor amongst the students.

These Real-world scenarios have been extremely successful in creating assessments that favours entrepreneurial learning, and the combination of industry-specific technical skills and transversal skills is the college-wide focus and recognising that our students learn more proficiently with a specific, focussed end-result.

"This is a prime example of organisations coming together to help those in need in the community. We are delighted with the support of the College and of course the young people."

Diane Dodds MLA Minister for the Department of the Economy (Twitter)

"Training and service to those who need a helping hand! Well done to these young people and their tutors"

Ken Scott, Bangor Foodbank and Community Support

CASESTUDY
17

PERFORMING AND CREATIVE ARTS AND ENTERPRISE
ONLINE INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP: CREATIVE ARTS RESPONSE TO DELIVERING REAL-WORLD LEARNING

Authors
Aurla McLoughlin
Head of School

Natasha LLoyd
Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Academy

Motivation
The College's innovative approach to education, 'Project-Based Learning' (PBL), involves setting students a challenge and providing them with support to research and develop an effective solution. PBL is driven by the goal to develop self-directed, enterprising learners who can readily apply their skills and knowledge in real-world settings. A key element of this approach is making learning real-world by connecting students to relevant stakeholders for whom they deliver their projects and by supporting cross-discipline collaboration, a common feature of the modern workplace.

At SERC, the Creative Arts department works in collaboration with the College's Entrepreneurs Club to support students in setting up and running student companies, thus providing students with real-world experience in applying their skills. Two notable examples include the art student enterprise, Threadbear, and the student start-up, Lydia Bell Art. Threadbear is an eco-student company embedded in the Level 3 Art and Design curriculum which upcycles second-hand clothes and textiles into alternative fashion garments and accessories for sale. Founded in December 2019, the company has traded the product it designs and creates in class at various markets, selling out at the 2019 Christmas fair. Lydia Bell Art, on the other hand, began as an independent student start-up,

accepting commissions for drawings and paintings. The now-alumnus, Lydia, has completed over 30 commissions to date and continues to receive extensive support to develop and promote her business.

Problem
When the pandemic struck, both Threadbear and Lydia Bell Art found their business plans disrupted. Threadbear were not able to trade product at physical College markets and Lydia was unable to host the exciting exhibition she had been planning with The Entrepreneurs Club to raise her profile. Nonetheless, the Art Department and the College's Entrepreneurs Club recognised the importance of continuing to provide real-world learning opportunity to keep students motivated and engaged.

Approach
The Creative Arts Department encouraged the Threadbear students to approach the challenges created by Covid-19 as opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurialism and was provided support by The Entrepreneurs Club to make this achievable at a time when students and lecturing staff were experiencing considerable pressure.

Supported by their lecturer, Threadbear was encouraged to reflect on how they could pivot their business to respond to the needs created by Covid-19. As such, the students began designing and creating reusable facemasks from recycled textiles. Equally, the College's Entrepreneurs Club began developing an online catalogue to provide students with opportunity to showcase their product for sale.

The Creative Arts Department was also eager to provide students with the opportunity to collaborate across disciplines and to deliver their project for stakeholders beyond their class. The Entrepreneurs Club was able to facilitate this, connecting Threadbear with Level 2 Hair and Media Make Up students, who modelled the reusable facemasks for a photoshoot that provided high-quality images for the online student product

catalogue. The Hair and Media Make Up Department used the photoshoot as the real-world context for their students' end-of-term make up assessment.

Equally, Lydia Bell was supported by The Entrepreneurs Club in moving her exhibition online.

Results
The collaboration between Art and Design and Hair and Media Make Up students was a great success, with 7 Hair and Media Make Up students completing their make up as part of their course assessment for the masks' photoshoot. The Art and Design students showcased 3 different mask designs in the online Christmas catalogue, making several sales. The photoshoot and catalogue provided both sets of students with real-world application for their work and greatly increased motivation at a time when students were attending College largely online.

Lydia's exhibition was also a great success, gaining over 2000 views online and being covered by 4 different publications, including the Ulster Star and The Irish News.

Conclusions
Providing students with real-world experience and opportunities to innovate, collaborate and be entrepreneurial in response to the needs of society, the economy and the environment is integral to developing work-ready, enterprising learners. By adopting an agile and entrepreneurial approach to the challenges presented by Covid-19, the College was able to support students in pivoting and continuing their real-world projects online. Not only were students able to continue the development of skills they had been building previously, but students were also able to develop new digital literacy skills and found new opportunities for collaboration. Key to enabling such innovation and entrepreneurialism at a difficult time was providing students and lecturers with adequate support through the College's Entrepreneurs Club.
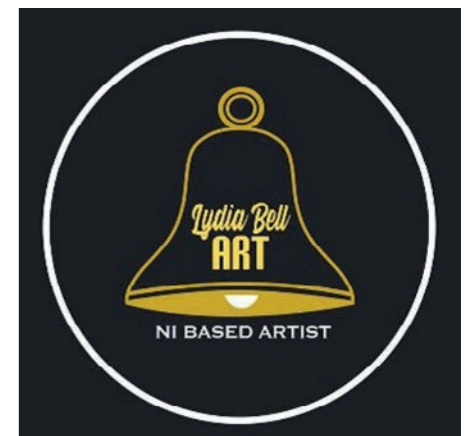
> ''The Entrepreneur Club has helped and supported me not only with my business ideas but also mentally. They have helped me gain the confidence within myself to show off my ideas and also follow through with them. They helped me believe in myself as they believed in me.'
>
> **Lydia Bell**

CASESTUDY
18

PERFORMING AND CREATIVE ARTS AND ENTERPRISE

THE ENTERPRISE FORTNIGHT ' HOW TO DELIVER A SOCIALLY DISTANCED EXPOSITION

Author
Aurla McLoughlin
Head of School

Motivation

The 'Enterprise Fortnight' and Student Induction coexist as an annual event where students engage with and are immersed in Project Based Learning (PBL) where they are assigned with the task of generating solutions to real world problems relevant to their curriculum area, industries or communities. Using the Ingenio app all full-time students are assigned to teams within their cohort based on their results. Students take a solution focused approach to their set challenge. This unique approach facilitates the development of transversal skills through the provision of an environment where students work collaboratively, address conflict and resolve challenges. An important stage of this process is the presentation of project results to peers and internal and external stakeholders at an exposition, which enables students to receive instant feedback on their projects. The exposition format allows for face-to-face interaction and raises awareness of the various projects across the curriculum areas.

Problem Definition

Due to National and Local Government directives regarding Covid 19 - a change in the planned management of the Expo's and Enterprise Showcase finals ensued. New plans incorporating safeguarding and social distancing required a logical and methodical approach to ensure all teams had the opportunity to present to stakeholders and receive instant feedback in a secure environment. Additional factors including size of gatherings, sanitation of areas, flow of traffic around the campus and timetabling were all variables that had to be considered.

Approach

To address the uncertainty of Covid-19 and the ever-changing restrictions put in place, three scenarios were considered when planning the expo. Following several iterations, an on-campus version of the expo where the showcasing of projects would be undertaken in classrooms instead of a communal area was selected. This ensured that each student cohort had the opportunity to present their projects and receive immediate face to face feedback, a fundamental aspect of the process.

Staggered start dates for students and a rolling Enterprise Fortnight which extended across a three-week period allowed for small showcases, ensuring the college were compliant with all regulations and students and staff were safe.

Effective timetabling undertaken by the Enterprise team for the events on each campus alongside provision of a robust 'Enterprise Showcase Pack' including key dates, an overview of the event management, and a succinct judging rubric ensured smooth and successful operations of each showcase.

With a different format this year, the Enterprise Showcase required college wide support in order to be successful. The Enterprise team collaborated with corporate and academic staff who acted as judges and scored the groups electronically using QR codes. These linked directly to the students' project portal page cumulating quantitative scores. A report of these scores and special mentions from judges resulted in seven groups successfully reaching the final Expo.

With the ongoing pandemic and further adaptations to restrictions, it was agreed that an online final was the most pragmatic approach. The successful finalists presented their pitch on camera to external judges via Microsoft teams.

Results

The College's ethos and culture towards and investment in students, made the buy in to the events, from all members of the staff, Caretaker to Principal, easy to obtain; 83 members of staff, both corporate and academic, signing up as volunteers to judge and give feedback to the students on their projects. More than 700 projects were created during the enterprise challenge, with each of these projects receiving the opportunity to present in person to a pair of judges. Consequently, 22 projects developed into student companies, with whom the Enterprise team are actively engaged in progressing their ideas.

Feedback from students, staff and external judges was extremely positive.

'I think the induction fortnight went really well and the approach of project-based learning is great. It made us work together and in turn allowed us to get to know each other and work towards something as a group! I have been to other colleges where they did not use the PBL approach, and it is hard meeting people for the first time but being in groups and doing a project together really eases your nerves and makes it easier to talk to others! It's a terrific way to learn as you are doing something fun it's not boring and it's opened my eyes to the entrepreneur's world, it has really interested me. - Georgia Pritchard from Memory Captures.

Conclusion

The induction fortnight successfully drives enterprise and entrepreneurship across the student body, allowing the individual to re discover their creative and innovative side whilst experience a novel approach to learning using PBL methodology, that naturally promotes the development of transversal skills which have been identified as critical skills by employers.

"It was with delight I observed the Enterprise Department swing into action, embracing the challenges imposed by social distancing and with a solution focussed approach, which ensured the safety of students and staff was paramount , produce, alternative, inclusive showcase events which far exceeded our expectations. Fabulously well done!"

Lizzie Buick Deputy Head of Enterprise.

CASESTUDY
19

PERFORMING AND CREATIVE ARTS AND ENTERPRISE
SERC ENTREPRENEURS CLUB

Authors
Aurla McLoughlin
Head of School

Motivation
The Entrepreneurs Club, an inclusive environment for students and alumni, was formed to provide a supportive platform from which to network, share ideas and build effective teams. The provision of such an environment fosters innovation and entrepreneurship, empowering students to cultivate and develop their own ideas, supported by experienced stakeholders, with access to industry relevant resources enabling individuals to fulfil their ambitions. Problem

The Covid 19 pandemic and associated periods of lockdown disrupted the opportunities for planned one to one mentoring for members and scheduled internal and external competitions and trading opportunities.

Approach
In true entrepreneurial spirit the Enterprise Department embraced the challenge flipping the Entrepreneurs Club online and open for business. Launching via Microsoft Teams in May 2020, students maintained and

continued to foster entrepreneurialism and innovation during these unprecedented times. Scheduled activities continued online with the enterprise team hosting live workshops, talks and events, which provided valuable resources, allowing the Innovation Advisors, to have real time collaboration and communication with students and staff across SERC's campuses.

The first online catalogue (December 2020) removed frustrations regarding reaching target markets for student companies. Students experienced first-hand a solution focussed method to address challenge and change using this agile and adaptable approach.

Results
Engagement following the successful May 2020 launch of the Virtual Entrepreneur Club increased significantly, moving from 50 to 261 members at the time of publication. The VEC has hosted 16 online workshops, talks, and events and has an exciting full calendar of events to the end of the year.

External Competitions and engagements have been fruitful, Student Company The Waterboys were semi-finalist in Invent NI 2020 and finalist in Invent NI Student category, whilst Hannah Dunwoody, a Higher-Level Apprentice student from the Engineering Department is currently engaging with the Catalyst Co-Founders Program 2021 and reached the finals of the prestigious Invent NI 2020.

The Virtual Entrepreneur Club currently supports 84 student companies including alumni, 43 of which are new start-ups coming on board from September 2020 to February 2021. Ongoing engagement with the student companies is regularly provided by dedicated Innovation Advisors and bespoke one-to-one mentoring from our Entrepreneur in Residence Professor Terence Brannigan.

Conclusion
The Covid 19 pandemic presented the opportunity to speed up the process of diversification and forays into online engagement with membership not just maintained, increased fourfold.

Speedy and efficient access to Innovation Advisors permitted vital opportunities for high quality support to all. Members continue to thrive; innovation and entrepreneurialism is strong across the college community with the development of online resources such as the Virtual Entrepreneur Club and the SERC online catalogue enable continued success.

"The risks that SERC has taken, the investment they have been prepared to make in the team and the students, the determination and commitment displayed exemplifies all that is necessary if we are to lead and inspire our young people to deliver on their true promise. Well done SERC!"

Professor Terence Brannigan - Chair Tourism NI. Entrepreneur in Residence.

CASESTUDY

20

PERFORMING AND CREATIVE ARTS AND ENTERPRISE
GO GREEN - EMBEDDING SUSTAINABILITY IN THE CURRICULUM

Author
Lizzie Buick
Deputy Head of School

Motivation
Environmental research is clear: to secure the wellbeing of future generations and the planet, we must act now, and we must support the next generation in thinking and acting sustainably in all that they do.

SERC is committed to being part of the climate solution and has been embedding sustainability throughout its offering for over two years. Indeed, during that time, the College has set eminently sustainable themes to guide its curriculum, including the umbrella theme, 'Sustainability, Healthy Living and Learning', and sub-themes such as 'Energy Conservation, Upcycling and Reducing Waste.' In 2018, the College also pledged to take its stance on its environmental impact from passively compliant with legislation to proactively green

Beyond improving the energy-efficiency of its buildings and grounds, the College has worked extensively with staff, students and the wider community to deliver a range of exciting eco initiatives. These include Eco Committees across 5 campuses, a Zero Shop that pops up at College markets to provide eco alternatives to everyday products, a scheme to reduce waste from fast fashion ('Suited and Booted') and a team to support the development of sustainable student companies, to coordinate the GoGreen movement and to support lecturing staff in embedding sustainability throughout their PBL projects (The Enterprise Team).

Problem
In 2020, the key question for the College's GoGreen movement was not only how to further and expand its eco action, but how to do this at a time when in-person meeting was restricted.

When Covid-19 struck, many of the College's environmental initiatives were taking place on campus - the Eco Committees would meet in College to plan actions such as litter picks, they would promote environmental awareness at events such as the Freshers' Fair, the Zero Shop would pop up at on-campus markets and student company work and support was carried out in classrooms and co-working spaces. The College set out to find new ways of continuing and expanding its vital work on sustainability.

Approach
The Eco Committees were supported in moving their meetings online and formal roles were created to increase student and staff engagement. The Enterprise Team created and promoted the role of 'Green Champion', open to all staff and students, and worked with the Students Union to create and promote the student-elected role of 'Eco Officer'. Both roles provide students and staff with the opportunity to collaborate on creating eco change while also developing transversal skills. Students and staff are also eligible for Eco Skills Certificates for their involvement.

The Eco Committee began devising projects that could be carried out safely within the restrictions to continue to fulfil their targets of reducing and reusing waste and increasing eco awareness and action. A key example was the campaign they ran to increase the use of reusable masks and to encourage proper disposal of single-use masks. This involved online promotion with materials the Committee had designed and created itself and safe pick-up points for mask collection across six campuses. The Eco Blog has been further developed and promoted, with more frequent posts now shared across four platforms. Of particular note was the extension to Pinterest and Facebook.

Support to set up sustainable student companies and social enterprises has been increased and access improved. The College launched a Virtual Entrepreneurs Club (VEC) to increase opportunity to collaborate and to access support, resources and events online. A standout sustainable event was the December 2020 interview and Q&A with the founder and CEO of Titanic Denim, a local sustainable fashion business, which attracted 40 attendees. As part of the focus on reducing and reusing waste, the Enterprise Team worked with the Eco Committees to make two successful applications for recycling bins for the Bangor, Ards, Holywood and Lisburn campuses.

Results
Between November 2019 and February 2021, there was a dramatic increase in student and staff engagement with the College's GoGreen movement. 113 individuals joined the Virtual Eco Committee in this period, and, in October 2020, 3 Eco Officers were elected and 9 Green Champions adopted their roles.

With the £9,000 secured via application to the North Down and Ards Borough Council, the College was able to procure 35 recycling bins for the College campuses in that area. The £3000 from Live Here Love here has funded 6 standard recycling bins and 5 innovative talking bins for the Lisburn campus. 2 of the latter bins are being donated to local public sites to support their work against littering, while SERC engineering students are working to convert some of the standard recycling bins into talking bins. 7 SERC students have also designed unique graphics to be displayed with the bins to promote correct recycling.

The Zero Shop is moving online and has already made several sales through the Enterprise team's online student company product catalogue.

Increased access to support has led to the development of 60 student companies that place the environment at the heart of their vision. A notable example is 'The Water Boys', who were student finalists in the prestigious Invent 2020 competition for their low-cost, low-tech water filter that removes nitrates and phosphates from polluted water. (Eco-Unesco) The College has been recognised by the Green Gown UK and Ireland Awards who have named SERC as finalists in the Sustainable Enterprise category.

Conclusion
Embedding sustainability throughout the College's offering not only secures the wellbeing of future generations and the planet, it also provides opportunity for students to develop innovative and entrepreneurial mindsets as well as important transversal skills. A dedicated eco team is important in developing in initiatives. Harnessing online communication and technologies is also essential to having the widest reach and creating the greatest impact possible.

On behalf of Social Enterprise NI and the social economy sector it is great to note the increased focus within SERC to embed sustainability within the curriculum, focusing on a greener and better future for all. Evidence indicates young people are looking to invest their time in establishing businesses as ethical organisations focusing on social, economic, and environmental outcomes. SERC's ethos enhances people's lives through supporting the circular economy, provides students with opportunities to create ethical businesses focusing on profit with purpose, whilst ultimately making a real difference to society.

Colin Jess

CASESTUDY
21

SPORT AND APPLIED SCIENCE
ONLINE CURRICULUM AND WELL-BEING EVENTS FOR SPORTS LEARNERS

Authors

Colin Atkinson
Deputy Head of School

Lynda Robinson
Deputy Head of School

Motivation
Every year the Sports team, staff and students, organise various curriculum based (and fun!) events with the aim of engaging current and potential students in Sport. Whilst providing vital engagement with the local community these events also provide the opportunity to promote physical and mental well-being amongst our own cohort. The pandemic has made traditional methods of delivery impossible thus setting the challenge to our staff and students to deliver an online event.

Problem
The Covid-19 pandemic and associated periods of lockdown have significantly increased the physical and mental stress amongst both the staff and student body. Extracurricular activities, once taken for granted, such as team sports, outdoor pursuits and other less intense pastimes have been postponed or in many cases cancelled. For those who have chosen Sport as a vocational pathway the sense of frustration can be more acute.

Approach
Led by an innovative team of staff and using industry standard equipment (GPS tracking software "Strava") the students have organised an online (Covid regulation compliant) sports competition. The competition is centred on the amount of time students undertake healthy activity – these activities can range from walking to cycling to paddle boarding amongst others. The team have linked the event with Worldskills competitions and the Sport NI mental health and wellbeing strategy. As a result of this the team have managed to secure funding for resources and prizes for the students.

Results
The competition was completed over a period of 2 weeks with 100+ Level 2 and 3 students from all 3 campuses engaging and competing against each other. Attendance across each of the cohorts remains high at 92+ % and evidence from student focus group meetings suggest that the online competition has succeeded in keeping students engaged and more importantly motivated during these difficult times. The use of software such as Strava and the associated tracking of activity has helped further develop the digital skills of the students.

"The Strava competition was really good fun. Taking part gave lots of us a reason to do some training and even a bit of competition which we are all missing because we are not able to train or compete in our own sports. I already used the Strava App for my own training but I know it was new to most people and it was interesting to compare each other's performances with all the data it produces..... I think having the SERC Sport club will help motivate people to continue getting out for their daily exercise through lockdown and beyond. It was quite difficult to organise a group project without being face to face in class but using MS Teams helped us share information and gather feedback."
- Lizzie Campbell (Level 3 Extended Diploma Sport)

Conclusion
Online arrangements are engaging students and this has resulted in high retention rates. This novel approach has allowed a naturally competitive cohort to compete against one another despite the lockdown restrictions.

The new innovative approaches have allowed a student-centred learning approach to continue despite the lack of face-to-face contact.

Sports learners continue to remain engaged in a healthy, active and balanced curriculum.
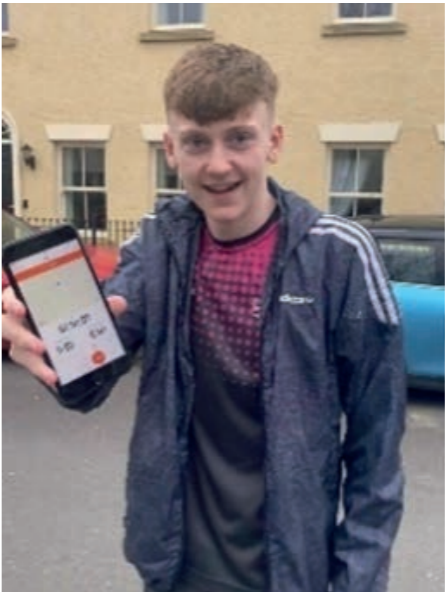
"The challenge really encouraged me to exceed my mental and physical limitations, each ride was definitely a challenge for me (longest 4hr 26mins), but I must say that a good playlist and a friendly wind always help!"

Patrick Morgan - competition competitor and Level 3 Public Services student

SPORT AND APPLIED SCIENCE
ADAPTING DIGITAL AND PBL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ANIMAL MANAGEMENT STUDENTS

Authors

Karen Orme
Deputy Head of School

Jonathan Cash
Curriculum Manager

Motivation

Animal management courses tend to blend the best of the FE sector – active practical skills-based learning underpinned by a true vocational knowledge base. The course team have, for the past number of years, been very successful in embedding Project Based Learning (PBL) as the primary method of delivering this skills-based learning. This success has been evidenced by rising enrolments at Level 3 and the introduction of a new Level 4 HNC course opening in the Bangor Campus.

Problem

Current students have been drawn to enrol on the programme because of the active nature of the course and the reputation the team have built in the wider community. The pandemic, through prolonged periods of lockdown and reduction in on site delivery has made engagement with our current students more difficult. The challenge for the team was to "flip" online as seamlessly as possible and adapt their PBL delivery into meaningful, accessible and engaging learning exercises.

Approach

The team have used a range of different approaches to meet this challenge. Firstly, they decided to create a robust yet student friendly online learning environment. Across all BTEC units the team have developed a Class Notebook/E-portfolio that allows students to upload class/assignment work quickly and easily. Also, by using private channels student engagement and progress can be monitored effectively by staff. Secondly, PBL tasks were modified, so that they were accessible across the cohorts and campuses. The College purchased and issued bird feeders and seed for students in order to adapt their PBL activity to a home environment; students have been able to continue to collect data before and after food enrichment has taken place, as part of their Wildlife/Ecology units.

Results

Attendance across each of the cohorts and each of the campuses remains high at 94+ % and feedback from student focus group meetings identifies high levels of satisfaction with the adaptations the team have made.

"Even with the current restrictions of having classes online, we were provided with interesting and relevant examples, case studies of specific animals and material that will be beneficial and relevant when working with animals. Online classes were delivered in a way that felt like being 'in class' and helped to make the learning experience from home more enjoyable." Michelle Cleary L2 Animal Care student

The embedded e-portfolio has helped develop the Transversal (Digital Literacy) skills of the students across the campuses. It has also served to streamline the standards verification procedure with the Awarding Body.

Conclusion

The Animal Management team continue to respond to the needs of their learners across each of the campuses. In difficult circumstances they have innovated in the areas of pedagogy and digital literacy bringing tangible benefits to both students and the staff themselves. Through the promotion of collaborative learning and the use of technology to better connect with students the Animal Management department continues to successfully deliver its commitments to our current cohorts.

Picture of Goldfinches and a Greenfinch feeding from a SERC home based feeding station.

"Really enjoying the course so far, all the tutors try their best to keep us engaged in the work and to make it interesting. I've learnt many new things and I am still expanding my knowledge on the subject...... I've improved on many skills like my organisation, my dedication and my time management has improved. Overall, I'm enjoying the course and hope to progress further."

Liam Wright L2 Animal Care student.

CASESTUDY

23

SPORT AND APPLIED SCIENCE
"WE STILL GROW AT SERC" – HOW HORTICULTURE AND FLORAL DESIGN TEAMS HAVE ADAPTED TO ONLINE LEARNING

Author
Colin Atkinson
Deputy Head of School

Motivation
Love of the great outdoors and nature often attracts students (and staff) to the world of Horticulture and Floral Design. Our Horticulture courses are designed to bring out student attributes such as problem solving, creativity and enterprise. Project Based Learning (PBL) has been a natural fit for this subject area and the course team have effectively delivered a range of long and short courses to a diverse group of mainly part-time cohorts.

Problem
The Horticulture team have, for a number of years, consistently delivered engaging, active and enterprising learning activities. One such activity is the annual plant sale that raises

significant funds for College resources (2019 Plant sale - Holywood Campus Open Day and Plant Sale - YouTube). This sale is the culmination of a year's planning, organisation and practical activity. Day to day teaching activities involve a lot of teacher demonstration followed by collaborative practical activity outdoors or in greenhouses and potting sheds etc. The challenge facing the team was to deliver this level of service in these unprecedented times.

Approach
Moving classes online for such practical based subjects was always going to be a challenge. Following some internal staff development in the use of online technology the staff team quickly moved delivery of classes onto the MS

Teams platform. Through the use of their own camera phones the team were able to quickly produce high quality instructional videos from their own gardens. Students were able to access these interactive (and fun!) videos at their leisure to follow the step-by-step guides. The team also wanted to move the very successful plant sale to become a virtual event.

Results
Attendance in both Horticulture and Floral Design courses have remained remarkably high (90%+) given the challenges arising from the use of technology and the particular cohorts in question. Given that the vast majority of students pay fees to attend classes that they cannot attend on site is a tribute to the quality of the online resources the teams have produced.
"The online class has brought some structure to my week and given me the opportunity to meet with like-minded students who share a passion for gardening. I look forward to the class and I am always learning something new from the tutor and my fellow students." Maud Truesdale - Leisure Organic Fruit and Vegetable Growing Class

Another of the outstanding achievements was the May 2020 virtual plant sale where all the advertised stock was successfully sold.

Conclusion
The Horticulture and Floral Design team continue to respond to the needs of their students in an innovative and practical way despite the challenges of prolonged periods of lockdown. As the students and staff team aim for a timely return to face-to-face classes they can look forward to an enhanced Holywood campus boosted by the delivery of a new bespoke potting shed. Pandemic or no pandemic the Horticulture and Floral Design team continue to "Grow @ SERC" – Please keep an eye out for the May 2021 virtual plant sale!

SERC Lecturer Claire Dunwoody delivering practical classes from her home garden.

Staff and students preparing for the 2019 Plant Sale

"There has been a range of positive benefits identified while delivering the RHS L2 Certificate online. Student attendance remained very high (99%) and retention (90%) is higher than in any previous year, and positive feedback has been received around the flexibility that blended delivery has offered and will allow us to recruit students from further afield in future years".

Horticulture lecturer Claire Dunwoody on moving the RHS Level 2 course online

CASESTUDY

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WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH PART B

COLLABORATIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT EVENTS WITH FORTH VALLEY COLLEGE

Authors
Paula Philpott
Head of Learning Academy

Fiona Cullen
Deputy Head of Learning Academy

Motivation
Traditionally staff development events have taken place face to face across two campuses. The pandemic has created both challenges and opportunities in the delivery of staff development. Previously SERC has worked on a parallel delivery model for staff development with Forth Valley College (FVC), a partner Further Education College in Scotland, with 14,500 enrolments and over 600 staff. The partnership set up in 2017 allows staff and students to engage in reciprocal visits and to share best practice. FVC welcomed the opportunity to collaborate and build on the existing relationship to strengthen support and training during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Problem Definition
Most staff at SERC have been working online to varying degrees during the changing restrictions as a result of the pandemic. This has had an impact on their wellbeing, with staff expressing a loss of the sense of community in the online environment. The challenge arose to create meaningful staff development to encourage staff to look up and out. Online staff development in collaboration with FVC would be an opportunity to support staff in the digital environment, foster links with colleagues in another FE college and support their mental health and wider wellbeing.

Approach
Planning is key to a successful collaboration. At the planning stage, a group of eight staff comprising members of SERC's Learning Academy and HR alongside the Learning and Quality team at FVC, met on a fortnightly basis in the first instance to identify the themes for online academic Staff Development in August 2020 and corporate Staff Development in January 2021. Nearer the launch date of each conference the teams met weekly. In conjunction with managers and in response to the earlier training needs analysis, identified areas of focus were established and a training programme designed to reflect these emerging needs. The academic staff development conference with Forth Valley College entitled: Create Adapt Reinvent Engage (CARE) took place on August 12th and 14th 2020, using Microsoft Live and Teams.

Results
364 SERC staff were in attendance during the 2 half days. 519 staff in total attended from the two colleges. This was the first time the college had full attendance at a staff development event. Positive feedback was received from staff through 'Have Your Say' and in response to the staff development evaluation form.

Staff noted:
"Really informative sessions. I very much appreciate the hard work that was put into creating this."

"A very useful and informative two mornings of staff development. Well done to all those involved from SERC and Forth Valley College."

"Thanks very much for allowing me to attend this course, it was really enjoyable and everyone was incredibly helpful. I really hope that the sessions I could not attend were recorded so that I can watch them at a later date, as everything looked so interesting!"

Corporate staff undertook their staff development on the 26th and 29th of January 2021 with FVC. This was FVC's first corporate focused staff development event. The title of the conference was "Building Digital Connections" and had the dual theme of digital and wellbeing.

319 staff attended the opening session on day one (204 from SERC, 115 from FVC). Further staff joined later workshops as some experienced initial technical difficulties. Staff noted:

"Thank you for such a well organised event. Very useful workshops and I really appreciate the work that has been put into these."

"I did not know how this would go, I really enjoyed the two days workshops and the wellbeing sessions. It was a good break from the daily routine in having to work from home."

"Thoroughly enjoyed it- everything was easily accessible and the activities were great. Thank you"

Conclusion
Following on from the success of the initial staff development event, a three-year strategic plan with Forth Valley College has been developed. Conversations started at the event between staff across both colleges are continuing with some areas of business scheduling joint meetings. Marketing teams have scheduled meetings and the mentoring teams in both colleges have already met and planned joint continuing professional development activities for the coming months, building on the relationships forged during joint training sessions. Two members of the FVC mentoring team have joined the Level 5 in Leadership and Management delivered online at SERC.

A joint board meeting was held between the two colleges to decide the future direction of collaboration within the partnership. The feedback from staff has been positive with staff noting they value the partnership.

Figure 1: Academic staff development conference logo

"SERC and Forth Valley College share many of the same values and aspirations in relation to learning and both have strong and clearly expressed strategic commitments to "future skills" development through innovative curriculum delivery. It is through partnerships such as this that both our colleges can flourish and thrive and we can help each other to Make Learning Work."

Dr Ken Thomson, Principal of Forth Valley College

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WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH PART B

SAFEGUARDING THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF STAFF IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT DURING WORKING ONLINE

Authors
Emma Carson
HR Services Manager

Maureen McKay
HR Business Partner

Motivation
SERC considers employee health and wellbeing to be a critical key driver for excellent organisational performance and this has been a substantial part of the human resource provision for the past five years. The sudden move to online working, set amongst the restrictions of lockdown and with many staff undertaking home schooling for their children, created an immediate need to support staff. Health and Wellbeing services were required to ensure staff were engaged and their health and wellbeing was not negatively impacted by the new working environment.

Employee health and wellbeing already played a major focus in the College with

the support and assistance driven by Human Resources through the Mind Yourself Campaign, implemented in 2017. Immediate measures were put in place to help staff adjust to the new working environment. It was vital to support and recognise alternative and new approaches were needed, not only to support employee wellbeing but to increase motivation which would have a positive impact on the productivity and delivery of services.

Problem Definition
Yearly Action plans for the Mind Yourself campaign are devised and delivered based on employee feedback, focus groups and absence data and these are then addressed through wellbeing and resilience activities throughout the year.

The action plans, services, and events for 2019/2020 were already well underway with many activities taking place onsite throughout the academic year until the period of lockdown commenced in March 2020. At this point the nature of the delivery had to change to meet employee needs given the move to online working. This experience allowed the development of some new and innovative approaches during the period of lockdown. Similarly, the way in which we work with many of our partner organisations changed, introducing accessible platforms with a greater reliance on the use of online technology within a virtual environment.

It was recognised that Staff and Student wellbeing are intrinsically linked and hence wherever possible staff and student activities were designed to coincide and support each other, and this is reflected in the Mind Yourself programme.

Approach
College Management encouraged an adaptive and flexible approach to working following the move to online working to support staff with added pressures such as home schooling, caring responsibilities and shielding. Human Resources supported this approach ensuring that all managers and staff had access to the support services and resources they required to look after their own and their teams' health and wellbeing. The Mind Yourself newsletter moved from a monthly to weekly programme, with articles to inform staff how to nurture their health and wellbeing while working online. Support and advice was also issued to line managers to help them support their staff during this unprecedented time. The weekly articles in the newsletter and the staff intranet included a wide and vast range of areas not included in the original 19/20 action plans such as dealing with domestic violence, promoting good mental health, tips, advice, and activities for children during lockdown, how to cope during a pandemic and updated information provided by external health providers promoting services available.

We worked quickly with external wellbeing agencies such as our Occupational Health provider, who provided virtual appointments and reviews, pastoral care visits moved online, Inspire Wellbeing services were offered online, and we ensured this information was quickly disseminated to staff along with reassurance that the Colleges Mental Health First Aiders were still accessible online.

The Mind Yourself App was developed and launched to staff within 6 weeks of moving to online working. The App is a centralised resource for staff to access support and information relating to health and wellbeing including financial wellbeing, mental health wellbeing, physical activities, policies to promote work life balance and general information to enable staff to look after their own health and wellbeing.

Results
New and exciting initiatives were launched, and the support offered was varied such as virtual delivery of the Feel Good Fitness programmes via MS Teams, live and pre-recorded physical activity sessions ranging from Yoga, Tai chi, Stretch and Tone, Personal resilience sessions and coping with stress webinars. We also delivered supportive training for managers on how to cope with employee mental health, employee financial support with will writing and budgeting, wellness programs, several stepping challenges for individuals and promotion of the

virtual recipe site with cooking demonstrations undertaken by staff from the hospitality department.

Conclusion
Management and Human Resources have been fully supportive and responsive in planning actions to ensure the health and wellbeing for all staff.

Staff have been able to readily avail of and access support services and the Mind Yourself App is continually updated with new and relevant information.

There has been no reduction or detrimental effect in delivery of the wellbeing services with the move to online working, in fact there has been additional support and activities made available through the Mind Yourself programme with increasing numbers of staff engaging.

The HR team will monitor the ongoing changes to the working environment and plan responses to help and support staff returning safely to the College when the time arises.

MIND YOURSELF

'The fitness/exercise classes organised during lockdown were excellent. The short 30-minute live sessions allowed me the opportunity to switch off from work, get active and improve my well-being.' 'A huge thank you to all involved in the setting up of the well-being events and for a super delivered session yesterday. Working from home has had its ups and downs and while we are very lucky to able to do so, the missing social aspect and face to face contact as well as lack of exercise and moving around can be tough. Being encouraged to take the time out and away from the desk (kitchen table) yesterday was so beneficial.'

Quotes from Staff

CASESTUDY

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WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH PART B

THE STUDENTS UNION AT SERC, DELIVERING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

Author
Catherine Shipman
Student Engagement Manager

Motivation
The Students Union at SERC exists to enhance and support the student experience through effective representation, the provision of enrichment opportunities, and the delivery of wellbeing and resilience activities. The Students Union is an integral part of student life at SERC, providing a platform for the student voice to shape the learner's experience. During a sustained period of lockdown, students have been faced with many challenges. As students adjusted to a new learning environment, it was vital that the student's union were able to adapt and create new working methodologies to continue to engage with the learner voice, provide effective feedback mechanisms for elected representatives and support the mental and emotional wellbeing of learners through the continued delivery of resilience and health activities.

Problem Definition
The move to online teaching in March 2020 meant that students union activity would have to adapt and change to meet the needs of students working and learning in a virtual environment. The need to restrict contact through social distancing measures and the resulting lockdowns meant that we could no longer continue to deliver a diverse and wide range of student engagement activities through face-to-face delivery methods. Rather, we had to innovate and develop new ways of thinking, working, developing, and implementing

an exciting range of student opportunities that would continue to engage and support the diverse student population across SERC.

Approach
Our approach was to develop an online SU Hub where students could access events, activities and SU democracy. We began by consulting with the student community through the Class Reps and SU Officer meetings. We asked them to identify the digital tools and platforms that they would most likely engage with. The students highlighted that the SU Hub should provide a sense of instant access, be a platform that was simple to use, and familiar. Students demonstrated that they were most at ease with social media platforms but that they would also like to have a space where they could refer to help and support as and when they required. The decision was taken to develop the Hub using Microsoft Teams and make use of social media to promote and host live events where possible. This included a Health and Wellbeing Hub, a 'Have Your Say' feedback space, a general News Feed space and a Volunteer Space to support and promote volunteering opportunities. To grow the membership, the team created digital posters with QR codes. This approach has enabled us to attract over 400 members with high levels of weekly active users and engagements across the platform.

Health, wellbeing and resilience.
The Health and Wellbeing Hub has facilitated the continued delivery of outputs within the student resilience and wellbeing framework. This takes place through twice weekly, Mindful Mondays and Wellbeing Wednesday activities. Highlights have included, live webinars with guest speakers, the creation of a resource library of support services, direct links to the Inspire counselling services as well as weekly blogs from elected student reps on health issues. The student blogs are written by SU Officers address personal stories of mental ill health and the importance of self-care. Other contributions include, self-checking,

cancer screening and personal experiences of living through the pandemic. This has given students a space to identify with others.

A programme of Health workshops is delivered by external partners, including Action Mental Health, ASCERT, Common Youth and Positive Life. The workshops develop resilience and life skills with students and 33 sessions have been delivered via teams with 840 students. Online health and resilience support was developed through a student engagement taskforce. Which in partnership with curriculum leads, a six-week programme of 'Feel Good Fitness.'' Was developed. This innovative programme brought together qualified staff and students to host live weekly sessions of Yoga, Tai Chi and Cardio and Core workouts to improve student health.

Clubs, societies, and student led content.
Students have developed and lead their own clubs and societies online by building cross campus connections. Students shared their skills and created platforms using Discord to host a cross campus gaming club with 76 members, recruited through the hub. The games club ran a successful cross campus e - sports competition. This brought together students in a virtual social setting, supporting them through isolation. The Students Union hosted monthly Facebook live quizzes for those students who have had to isolate. Student led support groups grew with the creation of an LGBTQ+ Pride

alliance and a parent learner support group. Contributing to the ongoing student engagement calendar of activities, developing content for LGBTQ History month and creating a new team site to support parent learners at home.

Cross Campus Events
The Freshers Fair is the largest event of the student calendar bringing together a network of community and voluntary organisations, access to support, discounts, and gifts to welcome students to the SERC student community. The online HUB acted as a portal for virtual stalls in an online exhibition and was made available to staff and students to view alongside induction activities to support students in finding their feet in the first weeks of term.

SU Democracy.
The SU elections took place in Sept 2020 online for the first time, attracting the largest number of nominations, student votes and elected officers in a single election to date. We have been able to ensure representation across all of SERC Campuses and ensure accessibility for all students across the college.

Conclusion
The success of the SU virtual hub is evidenced by the number of activities and resulting student engagements that we have continued to deliver throughout this academic year. The creation of a virtual space to facilitate student engagement has seen an unexpected growth in the number of students Union officers elected in 2020/21.

Having an online presence has supported the Student Engagement team to raise awareness of the ongoing programme of enrichment activities and support available. We have seen the growth of student led initiatives, clubs, and societies with a fourfold increase. The good practice and learning that has been developed throughout this period will inform new working practices as we move into the future and support Student Engagement and the Students Union to continue to innovate and develop sector leading practice.

Quotes from Staff

CASESTUDY

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WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH PART B
INNOVATIVE SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES AND EMPLOYEES AT RISK DURING THE PANDEMIC

Author
Elaine Flynn
Head of Business Services

Motivation
SERC's Business Services Team have been quick to respond to the recent COVID-19 crisis and have been the leading FE college in being responsive to the needs of local business and individuals at risk of losing employment. Flexible learning options like online learning, blended learning and virtual classes have been tailored to fit in with the 'new normal'.

Problem Definition
The pandemic has resulted in 106,000 people furloughed in Northern Ireland under the UK Government's Coronavirus job retention scheme (31st January 2021) to enable the economy to reopen, recover and rebuild. Key sectors such as Manufacturing, Hospitality, Arts and

Tourism have been the worst affected. SERC recognise that to enable sustainability and 'bounce back', NI businesses and individuals will need accessible upskilling, reskilling and innovative support that is responsive and agile in approach. Unemployment was at an all-time low of 2.4% pre pandemic and has rapidly increased to 3.6%. However, the true impact will not be realised until September 2021 when the coronavirus job retention scheme which is protecting jobs from the full effect of restrictions on business comes to an end.

Approach
SERC's Business Services Training Consultants have a wealth of experience in their specific vocational areas in the

delivery of upskilling, re-skilling and mentoring in innovation activities. Video conferencing, virtual classroom delivery, virtual interaction tools and virtual storage facilities all form part of the new delivery models for SERC's Business Services team. All staff have access to ILT pedagogy mentors and have all recently completed training in best practice in distance learning activities. SERC students have full access to the Moodle Virtual Learning platform and the Learning Assist 'online e-portfolio' for online submission of work. These products provide a safe environment for resource storage, virtual feedback and marking of course assessment.

SERC has the widest range of virtual training courses in the FE Sector. These address the anticipated skills deficits in the key areas of Digital Skills, Leadership and Management and Health and Social Care and more. There are 52 fully accredited online courses currently available from Level 2 – Level 7 through the Skills Focus Provision.

Results
SERC have adapted its delivery model to enable continuous provision of the DfE Employer Support Programmes. Delivery and communication have been converted to support online learning whilst ensuring a quality service is still provided. SERC Business Services team have upskilled a total of 2553 individuals during COVID recovery period to the value of £2.3 million.

We have recruited 811 learners through the Skills Focus programme to value of £765,000 since April to date. We currently have recruited 207 InnovateUs mentoring projects to the value of £663,000 and 687 individuals have been upskilled through the Skills Intervention Programme to the value of £835,000.

Conclusion
The upskilling and mentoring provided by SERC Business Services has been critical in supporting Northern Ireland Businesses to remain buoyant throughout the pandemic. The team

have supported new innovations and alternative working practices in the transition into digital working practices. Critical mentoring has been provided in the in the areas of Analytics, E-commerce, SEO, UX/UI, diversification and digital strategy.

The provision of alternative skills (from L2-L7) for individuals on furlough and/or at risk of redundancy will be key in

future proofing the skills requirement of the NI economy across the priority skills area.

SERC have also taken a sector leading approach to designing Graduate programmes which include accredited training, soft skills and work experience in the areas of Cyber, Data Analytics, Leadership and Management and Digital Marketing.

Funding Stream	No of people upskilled	Level of qualifications delivered
Skills Focus	811	2-7
InnovateUs	207	Mentoring up to Level 7
Skills Intervention Programmes	687	2-5
Other – (DGA, Fusion, Innovation voucher)	455	Non accredited mentoring - Level 3 & above
Webinars and 1-1 non funded advice for clients with employers	393	-

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'The Graduate brought a skill level to the role that exceeded our expectations. Delivered insightful reports, with a different approach that contributed to our analysis for decision making and performance evaluation'

Data Analytics Graduate placement provider and Employer - 'Irene McAleesee' Co founder and CSO, See.sense (Limeforge Ltd)

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WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH PART B
ADAPTING THE INTERNATIONALISATION MODEL USING ONLINE DELIVERY

Authors:
Elaine McKeown
International Development Manager
Claire Henderson
Head of International, Quality, Excellence and Development
Andrew Megarry
International Development Manager

Motivation

SERC's Internationalisation Strategy underpins our international work focussing on developing mutually beneficial international partnerships to enhance teaching and learning by providing staff and students with new personal and professional development opportunities.

International activities help students to improve their intercultural awareness and soft skills, increasing their employability chances in today's globalised workplace whilst facilitating knowledge sharing amongst staff, leading to improvements in teaching approaches across the globe. The benefits of having a strong international dimension are:

1. Enrichment of the student experience
2. Supporting professional and personal development
3. Sharing of good practice and innovation
4. Development of a relevant enhanced curriculum
5. Enhancement of SERC's global profile, reputation and brand
6. Ability to be responsive to global issues and challenges

Student and staff exchange programmes have relied upon in-person, in-country experiences where they can immerse themselves in the country's culture and language whilst improving skills and knowledge. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on

international travel requiring the College to move to online project delivery. As the only registered IELTS testing centre delivering tests in Northern Ireland during the pandemic it was incumbent on the College to offer the tests in a safe, cost-effective way, to ensure continuity of service in direct response to student need.

Problem Definition

The College has been successfully delivering international projects for more than 13 years in collaboration with its strong network of international partners. However, the pandemic threatened the continuation of these projects as they are delivered in-person. The College had to seek alternative delivery methods for its projects and student exchanges to maintain strong relationships and facilitate an increase in the demand for IELTS testing. Partner availability of technological devices, software platforms and global timeframes created significant challenges to online project delivery. Whilst social distancing and other safety measures resulted in the need to significantly reduce IELTS candidate numbers whilst considering increased demand.

The College responded to these challenges by developing a portfolio of digital Continuous Professional Development (CPD) teacher training courses, virtual student exchanges and project delivery, increasing the number of IELTS tests and moving to Computer Delivered IELTS (CDIELTS) examinations.

Approach

In Spring 2020 SERC commenced work on developing a digital CPD portfolio working with the College's English Language (EL) team to create an agile EL programme that is tailor-made to staff and student needs incorporating a flexible curriculum combining General English, Academic English and digital pedagogical approaches. The EL programme was piloted with a group of students from Atika College, Japan using a combination of "live" classes and specially adapted offline resources. The success of the pilot programme led to

the delivery of a bespoke EL programme for 15 students and 15 teachers from Lahore Garrison University, Pakistan. SERC delivered a 10-week EL programme to 14 tutors from Tajik State University of Law, Business and Politics incorporating Academic English and pedagogical models to support their delivery of classes in English.

SERC also adapted its Project Based Learning (PBL) model for online delivery and has worked with British Council to share its expertise with 80 Vocational Training Colleges in Hong Kong and businesses from the creative industries in Ghana, India, Malaysia and South Africa. The CPD PBL courses are delivered "live" facilitating group work, continuous feedback and improved learning.

Further enhancement of the online portfolio has seen the development and implementation of an online CPD course focussing on effective teaching and learning pedagogy including the PBL approach to curriculum delivery. SERC is working with charity "Fields of Life" to support the development of a Vocational Training Institute in Gulu, Uganda and the upskilling of 19 teaching and managerial staff for the College. SERC is also providing online consultancy services to support the Department for Higher Education and Training, South Africa in the development of a TVET Quality Assurance Model.

The impact of COVID-19 and related social distancing restrictions resulted in SERC being able to offer the IELTS tests to fewer people even though demand remained high. Moving to CD IELTS enabled SERC to operate within the health guidelines whilst increasing capacity and frequency of testing. CD IELTS is not only efficient but also safe and has resulted in an additional 142 candidates being facilitated.

Impact

The results of these online interventions has led to the further strengthening of SERC's international partnerships, underpinning its commitment to deliver quality programmes in direct response to partner need and clearly demonstrating its ability to overcome the challenges highlighted by the pandemic. Excellent customer feedback has been received on the initiatives including:

"A very informative and enlightening presentation! Thanks a lot." Angela Yee, VTC, Hong Kong

"Thank you very much for the wonderful lecture! I would like to encourage more students to participate in the class." Student, Lahore Garrison University, Pakistan

"I hope PBL can improve our institute education system for the future." Izreen, Malysian Handicraft Development Corporation, Malyasia

"We enjoyed all the sessions, and we are looking forward to more of such interactive sessions. The session on feedback to students was a blast, many of us had not perceived feedback as an important part of teaching and learning. I liked very much the idea of a flipped classroom and reaching out to students online and WhatsApp."

James Akena, Principal Archbishop Janan Luwum VTI

CASESTUDY
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WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH PART B
APPROACHES TO LEARNER SUPPORT THROUGH COVID 19

Authors

Paul Walsh
Head of Learning Support

Heather McKee
Director of Strategic Planning, Quality and Support

Motivation

Learner support is a key component of an effective learning environment and focuses on supporting students beyond formal teaching. It includes supporting those with additional needs as well as facilitating activities to enhance the well-being and resilience of all students. This support is provided within the wider context of our Pastoral Care ethos in ensuring both the physical and emotional well-being of our students. The onset of the Covid 19 pandemic in March 2020 and the ensuing lockdowns meant that all students were faced with a new set of challenges as they adapted to learning on-line and not having immediate access to the traditional support structures. To ensure learners at SERC were not disadvantaged or put at undue risk due to the emergence of the pandemic, new approaches to learner support had to be quickly developed, implemented and refined to reflect the evolving student need.

Problem Definition

From a student care and welfare perspective, the emergence of Covid 19 brought a range of challenges which have evolved during the pandemic. The challenges broadly centred around:

Preparing learning support staff and the students that they support to be able to engage meaningfully online

Ensuring that student well-being needs were being addressed to assist them to achieve their qualification

Ensuring that adequate monitoring and support arrangements were in place for students returning to campus in September 2020 including arrangements to reduce the risk of the spread of infection.

Approach

Learning support provides a service to students with additional educational needs with the objective of minimising the effects of these on their learning experience. The following steps were identified as being critical to the success of the continued support of students with additional learning needs:

Ensuring that Learning Support Assistants had access to appropriate technology

Ensuring that Learning Support Assistants were trained on the use of online technology

Having in place appropriate on-line guidance to ensure safeguarding arrangements were maintained

Learning Support Assistants were provided with the appropriate technology such as PCs/laptops and in mid-March online training was provided to this group which used materials prepared by the Learning Academy together with some additional training materials that had previously been prepared for other purposes. Guidance was also developed and circulated to ensure that safeguarding arrangements were maintained throughout the period of lockdown.

It was important to ensure that students were made aware that College support services were still available to them despite the move to an online environment. Communications were sent out to students to remind them that support such as Inspire Students counselling and Youth Health Advice Services were still accessible to them. In addition, to enhance the level of student support provided, a one-stop email address was established and monitored daily by the Campus Management team. Students were informed of this as an additional means of support open to them during this time. Case conferences were held which allowed senior staff to be kept informed on levels of student engagement, and for staff to highlight any issues. In addition, the Cause for Concern system remained operational for staff to raise concerns as necessary. Engagement also continued with the Student's Union and other agencies to develop activities to address student needs, for example details of foodbanks were shared with staff and students.

In addition, approximately 400 College PCs were loaned to students who did not have access to appropriate equipment. It was also agreed that students would be offered the possibility of additional one to one support if required, given the new and unprecedented situation faced by everyone. Prior to the return of staff and students to campus in September 2020 a new set of support guidance and procedures were developed with clear guidance on actions to take when dealing with a variety of Covid-19 related scenarios. This included online videos for training purposes. A process for capturing this information centrally was established through the Cause for Concern App which allowed the College to respond swiftly when cases were identified.

Results

Within the Learning Support team, support which was traditionally provided to students with additional learning needs on a face-to-face basis has successfully moved to online support. This has provided an opportunity to upskill staff in the use of online technology as a means of providing this support. The use of online support has also facilitated the sharing of support staff between campuses allowing the College to better match staff skills and experience to specific student need regardless of geographical constraints. The training activities which were put in place in March 2020 were well received.

Positive feedback has also been received from students in relation to the move to online support, for example:

I found it very difficult to adjust to working online. Microsoft Teams with video and audio was very intimidating for me. Having someone there to filter all the information coming from different tutors has really helped me understand what I have to do in my assignments without being overwhelmed. I feel confident now that I will be able to complete all the work set for me. The experience has demonstrated that taking a holistic approach to learner support has been effective in dealing with one of the most extreme challenges that learners within the FE environment have faced in recent times. As we move beyond Covid 19, it is clear that a co-ordinated and flexible approach by those leading on the safeguarding, care and welfare of students is paramount in providing appropriate support for all students at their point of need.

Effective learner support is key to enabling and empowering our students to complete their studies, regardless of the challenges they might face, including those presented by Covid 19. Adapting how we deliver learner support while maintaining our care and welfare ethos meant that SERC could continue to meet the learning needs of its students while supporting their physical and emotional well-being needs.
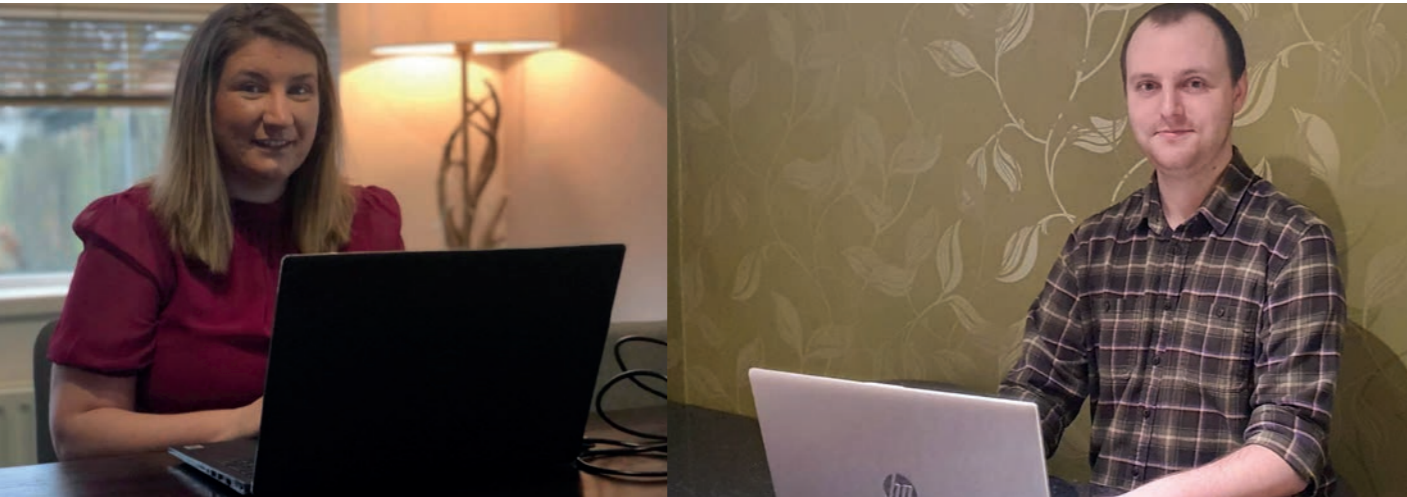
Quotes from Staff

CASESTUDY

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WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH PART B
PROCUREMENT IN A PANDEMIC

Authors:
David McCullough,
Financial Controller

Annje McKeag
Procurement Manager

Motivation
In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the College needed goods and services that would support the ongoing adaptation of the College's key functions (i.e. the provision of virtual learning / working) and then, going forward, the introduction of new delivery models that would ensure the continued safety of staff and students.

Procurement was, therefore, a critical part of delivering the aims of the Framework for the Safe Resumption of On-Site Educational Provision and Related Activity, as published by the Department for the Economy (DfE).

Problem Definition
The College's operations are ordinarily serviced by a range of contracts, established under competitive procedures. Whilst the existing contracts are diverse in nature, the response to COVID-19 resulted in requirements that were not, nor could have been, predicted in either scope or scale. What did this mean for the College? Very simply, this created a need to source goods and services outside the scope of existing contracts.

The problems, or more aptly put the challenges, presented by this situation were that goods and services were needed with extreme urgency, within a supply environment of unprecedented global demand and shortages, whilst

maintaining compliance with The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy (NIPPP), and minimising risk to public funds.

Approach
The first step in the approach used SERC's ongoing modus operandi: collaboration. The procurement function dedicated time to engage with colleagues in Information Technology Services, Creative Development, Health & Safety, Estates, Curriculum, Human Resources, and so on, in order to understand specific requirements. This understanding was vital in helping to identify potential routes to market, whilst also eliminating any duplication of requirements across different parts of the College.

The routes to supply, based on the understanding of the requirements, included variations of existing contracts; identifying new suppliers and creating new contracts (under the procurement regulations); utilising the Department of Finance's central PPE Hub; and finally applying appropriate exemptions under The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (only where entirely necessary).

The Procurement Function's collaborative approach extended outside of SERC by utilising its extensive network of relationships with Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD). This resulted in SERC being the first College in NI to avail of the central PPE Hub, which provided a range of options for the purchase of necessary equipment.

Once a compliant contract was established, the procurement function worked determinedly to build relationships with all suppliers. The relationships were key in obtaining an understanding of the supply chain, which allowed the College to adequately secure and manage delivery timeframes in line with our operational needs (e.g. completion of student practical assessments on College premises). Furthermore, the strong relationships provided the opportunity

to discuss and resolve any issues regarding functionality or quality, thereby ensuring the College received the appropriate level of service.

Finally, at all stages the approach was not focussed exclusively on short-term needs, but rather adopted the mindset that some requirements would form part of the longer-term response to COVID-19 and sustained changes to delivery. In adopting this foresight, the procurement function was able to establish compliant contracts that could provide ongoing, sustainable supply.

Results
The procurement function has secured and delivered goods and services with a value of over £1m. This includes (but is not limited to): IT equipment (e.g. laptops, Wi-Fi dongles), campus security, PPE (e.g. gloves, eye protection, branded face coverings), materials for screening (e.g. Perspex, fixings), equipment and material for signage production, and hand sanitiser.

The procurement of the goods and services delivered value for money and has: ensured students and staff remain connected; provided the necessary goods and equipment for the continued safety of staff and students on site; and contributed to the effective implementation of DfE's Framework for the Safe Resumption of On-Site Educational Provision and Related Activity.

Conclusion
The procurement function has enabled the College to respond, at speed, to the impact of COVID-19. In doing so, it has been critical to maintaining the functioning of all sections within the College, supporting staff and students, and has been critical to the overall implementation of DfE's Framework for the Safe Resumption of On-Site Educational Provision and Related Activity.

The College has benefited from the professional expertise of its procurement function, which includes maintaining regulatory compliance, understanding of supply chains, applying commercial awareness, sustaining relationships, and ensuring full collaboration with end users.

> "The assistance that the procurement team within Finance provided during the pandemic was invaluable in ensuring the continued safety of our staff and students."
>
> **Paddy McShane Head of School.**

CASESTUDY
31

WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH PART B
MARKETING, ADMISSIONS, CUSTOMER SERVICES

Authors

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Head of Communications, Engagement & Admissions

Madeleine Bridgman
Senior Communications Officer

Motivation:
The first lockdown was implemented at the outset of the overall 20-21 Admissions process. Open Days had just been held and applications for Higher Education & Further Education courses were flowing in.

We needed to continue to recruit new students; process existing applicants; to promote SERC as an educational pathway, with all staff including Customer & Community Services moved off-site.

Problem:
The lockdown denied the College access to the usual channels for engagement and recruitment. At the same time, schools moved to online home-based learning, limiting the opportunities for promoting SERC to pupils. Furthermore, there was an extended period of confusion over exams, assessments and results. For existing applicants, it was not possible under restriction to meet tutors for their Pre-entry Advice & Guidance sessions. Meanwhile, students eligible for free school meals had no access to campus canteens.

Approach
The Marketing team moved quickly to create a branding campaign around the message that SERC was "online, and open for business" and the team built on this when planning to introduce additional open day activity online including its use in an extensive recruitment publicity campaign. Whilst the college website carried course and application information, it was seen as crucial to create live online events to engage with prospective applicants. This process has been refined and developed, with input from academic and support staff, with repeated online engagement in November 2020 and March 2021. This material was kept live on the college website to ensure that all the information presented was continually available, and in addition other information of interest to potential applicants was signposted from an "Open Days" page.

Promotional presentations were recorded and sent to post-primary careers teachers to be shared online with pupils learning at home, with supporting materials to drive pupils to the SERC website.

Customer Services staff were allocated Skype numbers to allow them to take and make calls on a loop basis, so applicants and customers were able to make contact with the college via a range of methods. These included two new email accounts, Facebook messenger and an online enquiry form, each system being monitored on a daily basis. For those entitled to free school meals, in the absence of guidance from the Education Authority SERC agreed to make an online payment and the coordination of food parcel distribution was facilitated by Customer Services.

The Admissions team demonstrated flexibility in moving the PEAG appointments online to allow applicants to complete this immediate element of their admissions process, and planning then commenced to ensure enrolment days could take place in a socially distanced environment.

To achieve this a number of consultative meetings were held with relevant departments with close monitoring of the government guidance, which was frequently changing at that stage. It was agreed that HE enrolment could continue as before, with due cognisance to social distancing, and that a new FE admissions process be introduced. Each applicant was offered a pre-enrolment appointment in the week prior to results; this allowed them to access the building at an allocated time to ensure capacity figures were not exceeded and social distance maintained.

Corporate staff contributed to this process and to implementing health and safety measures through attending campuses to welcome and guide applicants. Schools were flexible in offering virtual or face to face appointments dependent on applicants' wishes / circumstances (such as shielding).

This allowed all the pre-enrolment checks to be carried out and applicants needed only to log on and upload their results when they were confirmed, in order to move to enrolled status.

Results
Over the year of lockdown, engagement with online open day events increased steadily, with 320 registrations for events in March 2021.

Feedback from staff concluded that the pre-enrolment approach which was developed was preferable, as tutors had the ability to meet with an applicant for an allocated time rather than having to rush through. As corporate staff were heavily involved in the administration, welcoming and guiding roles it provided an excellent opportunity for whole of college effort.

Recruitment has been challenging for the entire FE sector, but SERC enrolments held steady in Autumn 2020. Current figures show that first-choice applications in early March 2021 were 1438, compared with 781 at the same time in 2020 and 1278 in the corresponding week in 2019.

Online payments to students entitled to free school meals have continued throughout 2020-21 academic year, processed by Customer Services staff; this removes the stigma of physically requesting a voucher and so the number of students availing of their entitlement to free school meals has increased.

Conclusion
The marketing team swiftly established the SERC brand as responsive and agile, by promoting the online engagement activity. Although participation in online Open Days was lower than those on campus applications have been healthy in the face of challenging circumstances for the sector. In the future, whilst face to face engagement will be important, a significant portion of the college promotional and informational material will continue to be based online. The new admissions approach, which benefits both applicant and tutor in having dedicated space to complete pre-enrolment, is being continued.

> "Very informative . Should keep online option even when face to face opens up again . Handy if you're at work, can just take an hour as opposed to the afternoon. Thank you"
>
> **Online Open day participant, March 2021**

CASE STUDY

32

WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH PART B

DELIVERING CAREERS EDUCATION, INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

Authors
Shirley Moore
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Motivation
The Careers Service at SERC provides professional, impartial and confidential career guidance to existing SERC students, prospective students and individuals in the wider community. The service has held the Matrix Quality Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) provision since 2009, demonstrating the high-quality service provided to all clients. The team of Careers Officers support individuals in making informed career choices and planning their next steps. With the sustained period of lockdown and continued need to support students and individuals, the Careers Service had to adapt and implement new ways of working to meet this challenge.

Problem Definition
In March 2020, when the College moved to online learning, the Careers Service adapted its delivery model to ensure the service remained accessible to all who needed support. Traditional face to face guidance interactions, careers events and school and community visits were no longer possible due to social distancing measures and lockdown restrictions. The Careers Team needed to implement innovative ways to connect and engage with existing students to keep them informed of career opportunities and encourage them to seek advice on options and progression. There was also a continued need to support both prospective students and their parents to help them explore their career

options at key transition points, along with individuals in the wider community who were facing redundancy, furlough and uncertainty about the future, as a result of the pandemic.

Approach
Digital solutions were utilised to continue providing careers information and guidance. MS Teams, which was already being used college wide, provided an excellent platform on which to develop an online Careers Hub where students could access information resources, events and video call guidance appointments. Guidance interactions were also carried out by telephone and email for those who preferred these communication methods.

It was important to widely promote the online support and the Careers and Marketing teams worked together to create and share positive news stories, testimonials and promotional articles on social media and in the local press.

The careers team disseminated weekly enhanced e-bulletins to all staff and students, highlighting the support available, in addition to local job and volunteering opportunities and upcoming events.

A programme of online themed careers events was implemented and hosting on MS Teams. These included employability and progression webinars, drop-in sessions, UCAS week, Personal Statements week, Preparing for Virtual Interviews, and a 2-day virtual Higher Education Fair. Online support was adapted for nursing, midwifery and social work applicants through bespoke webinars, guest speakers and mock interviews. A 'Careers Myth Busting' webinar was delivered in response to student concerns around impact of the pandemic on the jobs market and post course options, which helped to alleviate fears around lack of opportunities. To date, the Careers Team have joined online tutorials for 68 L2 and L3 classes to support them in completion of a career plan enabling them to effectively explore options and plan their next steps.

Results
The move to online delivery presented new opportunities for service delivery and levels of client interactions and careers activities have remained high. The implementation of a new programme of themed online careers events has successfully supported clients as they explore their options and prepare to take the next steps in their career journey. The careers team have continued to seek feedback on the careers service, which has been very positive and complimentary. A range of client testimonials have been promoted online and in the local press and demonstrate the high levels of satisfaction with the service they received.

"I would advise any student who is unsure about what they want to do with their future to contact the Careers Team at SERC. My experience has been of a friendly and caring team who are passionate about helping students whether you are progressing from school to further or higher education, an adult returner or living in the local community and want to know what is available."

"During the COVID-19 lockdown, I availed of the services of the SERC Careers Department by partaking in a webinar on personal statement preparation. The webinar was engaging and thought-provoking. The presentation was concluded by question

time and both ladies were inundated with many questions, but all were answered with concise direction. I gained a lot of knowledge from this webinar and proceeded to send them my draft personal statement. I received a prompt response with guidance and advice on how to reach my final version. Since I returned to full-time education last September, I have nothing but praise for the SERC Careers Department - all staff provide an excellent service. Well done everyone!"

Positive comments have been promoted on the weekly e-bulletins and a 'You said - We did' Board has been replicated on Teams to demonstrate service developments as a result of client feedback. In June 2020, the service successfully completed an annual Matrix 'Continuous Improvement Check', which focused largely on the move to online service provision.

Conclusion
The use of MS Teams, particularly as an online information hub and platform for hosting events, has helped raise awareness of the careers service and support available to students. The site currently has around 800 members and this continues to grow. Much good practice has been developed and implement during the period of online delivery and will help inform future activities as we continue to provide a high-quality careers service which meets the needs of our clients.

"I would highly recommend contacting the Careers team at SERC whether you are progressing for further study and don't know what direction to take or starting off in employment. The support I received contributed massively to helping me secure my first job following graduation."
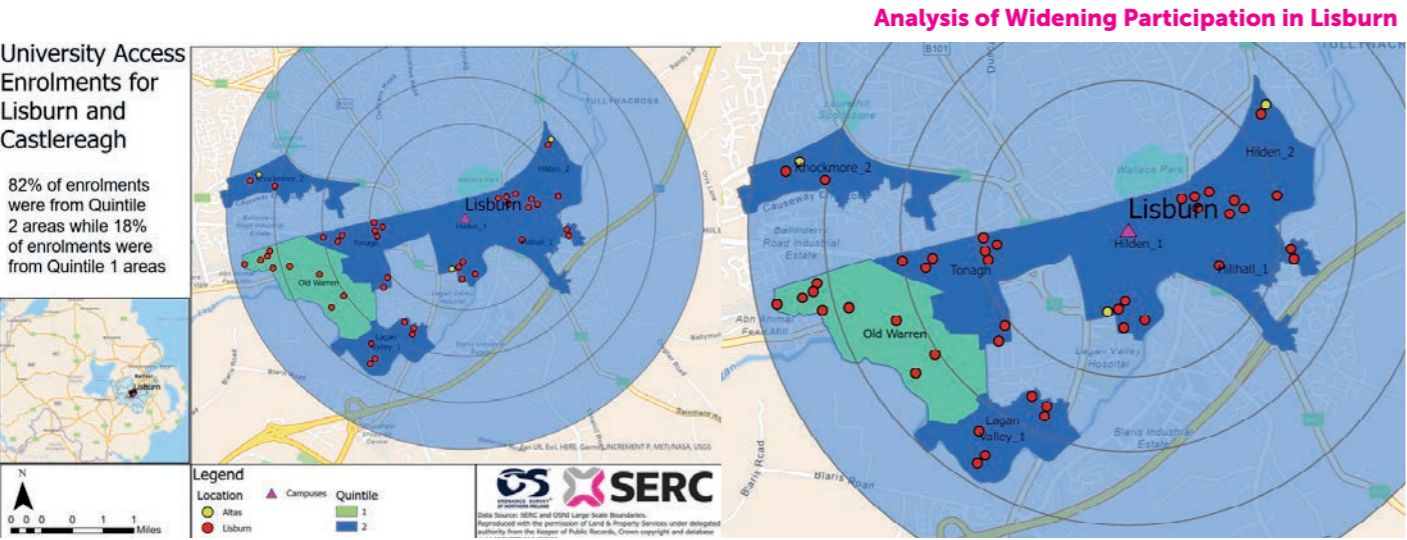
Quotes from Client

CASESTUDY
33

WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH PART B
PROVIDING INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES DURING LOCKDOWN

Analysis of Widening Participation in Lisburn

University Access Enrolments for Lisburn and Castlereagh

82% of enrolments were from Quintile 2 areas while 18% of enrolments were from Quintile 1 areas

Author

Noel O'Hare
Head of Business Transformation

Motivation
For final year Higher Education students 2020 promised so much. The challenge of focusing on a last set of examinations was to be followed by the prospect of exploring exciting career opportunities. March to May 2020 was to be the culmination of years of hard work. Suddenly that all changed. Examinations were cancelled, calculated grading was introduced, employers placed employees on furlough and opportunities for new graduates largely disappeared overnight.

Problem Definition
Seeking to support graduates SERC successfully secured funding through the Skills Intervention Programme to deliver a Data Analytics Academy for 12 students. However, as the pandemic continued to wreak havoc, and despite excelling in all taught elements of the academy, two of the most promising graduates had offers of placement withdrawn at the last moment. Seizing this as an opportunity to support them, SERC agreed to take academy students Ben McGavock and Zachary Duckworth on placement with its data analytics unit.

Approach
A skills gap analysis quickly revealed strengths and areas for development. An intensive online induction programme focused on developing skills in ArcGIS mapping, Pivot tables and Power Bi, whilst daily induction sessions provided an understanding of the context of Further Education and how it meets the needs of the Northern Ireland economy.

Results
Ben and Zachary have excelled in their placements.

They have successfully completed detailed analysis on student learning experiences during the pandemic; the impact of SERC in addressing social inclusion; student placements; and the impact that SERC has made in supporting business.

Whilst their mathematical skills have undoubtedly come to the fore, Ben and Zachary have developed and delivered detailed presentations on the Aspiring Managers programme and on widening participation within the Local Government Districts.
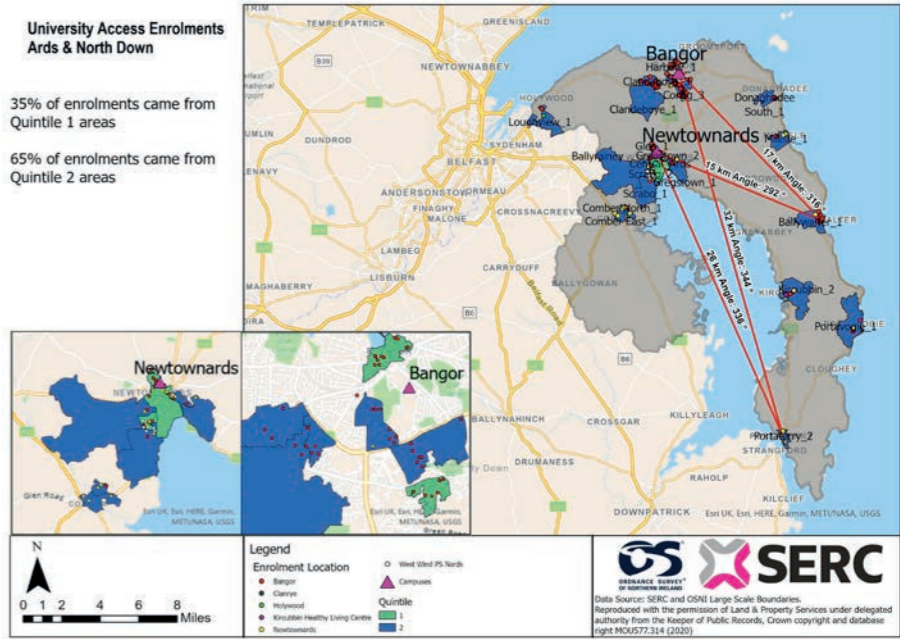

Ben McGavock

Zachary Duckworth

Conclusion
The graduates of 2020 are our future, and now more than ever, their skills, knowledge, ingenuity, and enthusiasm will be needed if we are to successfully rebuild our economy.

Ben and Zachary have shown that they have the skills and knowledge which will support SERC to critically analyse how we are meeting the needs of students and businesses.

University Access Enrolments Ards & North Down

35% of enrolments came from Quintile 1 areas

65% of enrolments came from Quintile 2 areas

"They have continued to enhance their analytical skills using Power Bi, Excel Pivot tables and ArcMap GIS software while at the same time developing a clear understanding of Further Education. Detailed analysis of student feedback on learning experiences, during the pandemic and on the effectiveness of widening participation have been undertaken and presented to members of the College Management Team. In addition, a comprehensive range of data has been developed which will support college managers to effectively plan provision for individual learners and businesses."

Ben and Zachary have now accepted internships within the SERC Data Analytics unit

CONTRIBUTORS

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Ken has worked at a senior level in UK Central Government, Local Government and the Private Sector. His roles have covered diverse areas from large infrastructure projects, through national advertising campaigns to product research and international sales in the Agri-food industry and IT consultancy. A qualified teacher and Chartered Accountant. He holds a number of qualifications from Queen's University Belfast, University of Ulster, Michigan State University and Warwick University Business School. In 2008 he was appointed as Principal & Chief Executive of SERC.
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Michael is the Director of Curriculum and Information Services he currently manages the entire curriculum within SERC as well as all computing and information systems. He has developed many international partnerships in the area of Project Based Learning (PBL) and Entrepreneurship. He works with the Edge Foundation and serves as a member on their international experts group on PBL
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Paddy been recently been appointed as the Head of School for Applied Science & Sport. He has 20 years' experience in the FE sector teaching at all levels from Level 2 to HND/Foundation Degree. As Deputy Head of School Partnerships for 15 years Paddy has helped grow and sustain the College's Entitlement Framework provision. In the Summer of 2020 Paddy was responsible for co-ordinating the College's Campus Covid response.
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Catherine is Deputy Head of School for Travel and Tourism, with teaching experience spanning across the Tourism, Hospitality and Business sectors. Catherine is also a Pedagogy Mentor for the Learning Academy at SERC and has been assisting the implementation of the PBL strategy across all curriculum areas at SERC.
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Elizabeth is an Innovation Advisor for the school of Hospitality and Catering at SERC. Progressing from the SERC Intern Academy, Elizabeth now works closely with staff and students on the development of enterprise and entrepreneurship, Project Based Learning, and a range of culinary competitions.
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Gary has almost 20 years' experience working in technical, consultancy and education roles across a broad range of industries that includes computing and IT, construction, manufacturing, and media. Gary is currently employed as a Deputy Head of School for Computing with responsibility for all higher education computing programmes.
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Richard is a Deputy Head of School in the School of Computing and Engineering. He has responsibility for all Higher Level (4 and 5) Engineering programmes including HNC, HND and Foundation degree. Richard has extensive industrial, consulting and teaching experience both home and overseas. He is a Chartered Engineer and Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Authority.
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Michael Simcock
Michael is a Deputy Head of School within the School of Computing and Engineering, with responsibility for the development, delivery and management of computing programmes at levels 2 and 3. Michael has gained over 20 years' experience within the IT sector, specifically IT infrastructure, in both the public and private sector, before commencing teaching 12 years ago. Michael continues to deliver industry standard curriculum and qualifications with Cisco, Juniper, AWS and Microsoft certified instructor status.
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James Cully
James has worked for SERC for 18 Years, and has experience as a Technician, Lecturer and now Deputy Head of School for Engineering. He is responsible for Further Education programmes and school link provision. James was a previous student at the college having completed his Level 3 and 5 qualifications.
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Stuart is the Deputy Head of School for Construction, Engineering Services and Skills for Work where he manages Electrical, Plumbing, Fire and Security and Refrigeration and Air Conditioning. He also delivers on FE/ HE provision for Construction and the Built Environment with particular interests in CAD and digital technologies. Stuart has also worked as a Project Based learning Mentor (PBL) and ILT Pedagogy Mentor within the college and has delivered Technology Enhanced Learning both internally and internationally.

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Julian is the Curriculum Manager for Construction, Engineering Services and Skills for Work where he manages Plumbing, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning. He also delivers on the level 2 and 3 NVQ plumbing diploma. Julian has also worked on developing the new digital portfolio for plumbing and embedded the PBL learning into the programme.

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Annette is the Deputy Head of School for literacy, numeracy, ICT and GCSE English and mathematics. She is responsible for leading her team in the development of standardised teaching and learning resources across all subjects. Her leadership has ensured an inclusive approach that meets learners' needs using a range of online interactive and classroom-based tools.

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Eddie Conlon

Eddie was appointed the Curriculum Manager for Essential Skills Numeracy and GCSE mathematics. He continues to develop the teaching of numeracy through problem solving and the standardisation of the GCSE mathematics delivery. Since his appointment, the achievements rates for Essential Skills numeracy have increased by approximately 20% with a 30% increase for GCSE mathematics.

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Frank Carter

Frank is Deputy Head of School for Health, Early Years & Adult Education. He is responsible for Higher Education Healthcare Practice and Social & Community Work. Having supported over 400 SERC students into University for Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professions, his focus remains on developing competent and confident future professionals.

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Elaine Bradley

Elaine has a background in social policy, social inclusion and community engagement and has been teaching social sciences - Psychology and Sociology - to Adult returners on the Access and Restart Education programmes for over twenty years. One of the Mental Health First Aiders Team in the college.

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Lizzie Buick

Lizzie has been employed at SERC for 16 years initially as a part-time lecturer – latterly as Deputy Head of Enterprise and Entrepreneurship - a role which has give her the opportunity to help develop a ten strong team of dedicated staff which currently supports 84 student companies. Her approach to learning, which we now identify as Project Based Learning was recognised in 2014 when she was named Lecturer of the Year Northern Ireland by he Pearson Organisation.

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Karen Orme

Karen is the Deputy Head of School for Applied Science and Sport where she manages Applied Science, Animal management and Pharmacy Services courses. She has twenty plus years experience delivering both FE and HE courses at SERC. In her role as Deputy Head of School she has introduced the Pharmacy Services courses, which to date have trained over 100 Pharmacy technicians across N.Ireland and helped shape a relevant, skills based science and animal management curriculum.

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Jonathan is Curriculum Manager for Applied Science and Animal Care, with 14 years teaching experience spanning across the Science and Animal Management sectors. Jonathan has also had extensive experience as a Pedagogy Mentor for the Learning Academy at SERC. Within this role he has assisted with the implementation of Project Based Learning (PBL) across a range of curriculum areas.

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Colin Atkinson

Colin has been the Deputy Head of School for Applied Science and Sport for five plus years. He manages Sport and Horticulture courses with offerings on seven different SERC campuses. Colin strives to create a supportive and progressive environment for his teams which has ensured a relevant and industry standard curriculum offering.

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Emma Carson

As HR Services Manager, Emma Carson is responsible for leading, managing and developing an effective and efficient Human Resources service across the College in line with current legislation and good employment practice. Emma is dedicated to providing a supportive, dynamic and credible human resources service to enhance the employment experience of all College staff. Emma's work, through her committed team, has led to the creation of a successful Health and Wellbeing strategy with the launch of the Mind Yourself campaign and the achievement of the Family Friendly Employer Awards 2018 and 2019.

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Elaine Flynn

Elaine has grown and led the team to become the most successful in the FE sector. She has excellent leadership and change management skills. Elaine brings the whole team with her on her vision for success and ensures her staff realise their full potential. She has strong business networks and relationships with stakeholders throughout Northern Ireland. She is highly driven and resilient with impressive negotiation skills used to acquire suitable funding to support upskilling, reskilling and Innovation.

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Catherine Shipman

Moving our services online has increased engagement in the student enrichment activities and support available through the Students Union. We have seen a fourfold increase in student led clubs, and societies, increased participation in SU democracy and developed new and innovative online delivery models for the student voice.

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Andrew Mearns

Andrew is one of the Creative Developers that produces and designs content for the college. He has over 15 years of creative skills experience and has been working at SERC for 10 years. His work consists of creating digital and printed marketing campaigns, digital multimedia video projects, photography and print.

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Claire Henderson

Claire is the Head of International, Quality, Excellence and Development at SERC. In this role and as a member of the College Management Team she has responsibility for providing professional strategic leadership in developing and maintaining a culture of continuous improvement and excellence in teaching and learning; In addition she has responsibility for developing and ensuring effective implementation of an international strategy; for leading, managing and developing a professional CEIAG service and overseeing the coordination of competitions and student placements.

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Shirley Moore

Shirley is the Senior Careers Officer at SERC and has 19 years experience of delivering CEIAG within Further Education. Shirley has responsibility for the operational management and delivery of an effective Careers Service at SERC. She is dedicated in ensuring that all individuals have access to professional, impartial, and confidential career guidance in making informed career choices and planning their next steps. Shirley's work has been instrumental in securing the Matrix Quality Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) provision since 2009.

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Elaine McKeown

Elaine is an International Development Manager at SERC and has been managing SERC's Erasmus+ projects for the past 4 years having secured over €2m funding whilst managing end-to-end delivery across multiple projects and funding streams. She also has responsibility for developing strong alliances with stakeholders and partners and raising the profile of the unit through social media platforms

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Paul Walsh

Paul has worked in Further and Higher Education for almost 30 years. Since 2015 he has been the manager of the Learning Support Unit at SERC and has additional responsibilities for the Pastoral Care of SERC's 10,000 + students. During this time Paul with his team has built up a wealth of knowledge of the needs of all types of students especially those with additional needs (both seen and hidden) and has acquired a great deal of experience in developing and implementing practical solutions to facilitate their learning and achievement.

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Annje is SERC's Procurement Manager. Annje, who joined the College in 2017, is a qualified member of the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS). Annje's career to date has included various roles in both the private and public sector across a range of industries.

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Andrew Megary

Andrew has been at SERC for 8 years and in the International Department for the past 2 years previously working in Business Services. As part of this role Andrew helps to seek and manage commercial and funded opportunities to help contribute to SERC International objectives. Andrew has recently completed his Chartered Manager Award through CMI at SERC.

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Paula Philpott

Paula is the Head of SERC's Learning Academy and has worked within Further Education for over 15 years. She has spoken at conferences and delivered workshops on, peer mentoring, technology enhanced learning and project based learning, in the UK, Europe, Singapore, Thailand, Japan and Uganda. aula set up a pedagogy mentoring programme which more than 500 teachers have completed. In 2017, Paula was awarded an MBE for services to Further Education.

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Maureen McKay

Maureen is a HR Business Partner, Maureen McKay is a member of the Human Resources Team with her main remits with the department being Health and Wellbeing and Equality. She is a chartered member of CIPD and has 24 years' experience working within Human Resources in the education sector, with 7 of these being in SERC Human Resources department. Maureen has worked closely with Emma Carson, HR Services Manager on the development and implementation of the Mind Yourself campaign in 2017 and is responsible for devising and implementing yearly action plans and delivery of the programme.

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Noel O'Hare

Noel is the Head of Process Transformation and Intelligent Analytics with responsibility for developing internal and sector business solutions including the SPICE CRM and self-evaluation and review systems. The intelligent analytics unit provides detailed analysis of business specific information to support improved outcomes for learners and key stakeholders.

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Fiona Cullen

Fiona is the assistant Head of the Learning Academy at SERC, Pedagogy Mentor and Vocal Coach. Fiona has trained staff nationally and internationally in presentation skills, Project Based Learning (PBL)and Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL). Fiona continues to work daily with a diverse range of subject teams at SERC to grow pedagogy practice, TEL and PBL.

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Stefanie Campbell

Stefanie is Deputy Head of the Learning Academy at SERC, with experience teaching a wide range of curriculum areas including Essential Skills, English Literature and Employability. Stefanie has been a pedagogy mentor for over 9 years and was recently recognised by Pearson as Digital Innovator of the Year 2020.

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Gary Chambers

Gary is the Head of Estates and Facilities Management. He is responsible for all construction projects and building maintenance aspects within the college. Gary has managed over £100,000,000 of new campus building projects and refurbishment works during his 17 years with the college. He has worked in the construction sector for over 40 years and is a member of the Chartered Institute of Building. Gary was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to Education in 2020.

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Michelle Devlin

Michelle is the Head of School for   Health, Care and Adult Education. She has 25 years working in Further and Higher Education, 13 of which are as Head of School. She manages Health and Care, Counselling, Early Years, Essential Skills, GCSE and Access to Education. She is Chair of the Essential Skills Further Education Sector Managers group. Michelle is a member of the Chartered Manager's Institute.

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Michelle Hickland

Michelle has worked in FE since 2004, in several different areas. My present role as the DHOS for the Foundation Skills Academy began January 2016. It has enabled me to grow and development my managerial skills in many ways. Out of all the roles I have undertaken it has been the most challenging, but also the most rewarding. Introducing the Duke of Edinburgh Award (Joint/Gaisce Award) to the programme three years ago, was a massive undertaking for me, but it has given the students massive opportunities to develop soft skills and integrate additional PBL.

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Lynda Robinson

Lynda has been Deputy Head of School of Applied Science and Sport and has twenty five year's experience delivering Sport and Public Services courses in SERC. Lynda is keen to enhance student opportunities in the community and further afield. The British Council and London 2012 rewarded this vision when Lynda together with Level 3 Sports student, Chloe Brown, attended the lighting of the Olympic flame in Athens to mark their commitment to sport and for promoting the Olympic values of friendship, excellence and respect within their college.

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Chris Mohan

Chris is the Deputy Head of School for the Adult Education programmes. He qualified as an Engineering graduate from QUB and worked in the industry for a number of years. He underwent additional training to convert career to teaching specialising in Mathematics and taught on Access, Restart, Science and Essential Skills programmes in the college since 2011.

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John Gault

John is currently employed as Head of The Health and Safety Department within SERC. A role that that is challenging and yet personaly I find very rewarding. I was origianlly employed within NDAI as a lecturer within the Building Services Sector for four years at Newtownards Campus, before becoming SERC's Head of H&S. Prior to joining the college some 20 years ago, I was the Head of The Careers and Marketing Department at CITB (Construction Industry Training Board N.Ireland) for 15 years. I had orginally been employed as a Senior Training Adviser to The Mechanical Services before being promoted within the company.

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