

Epping Forest College:

Unleashing student creativity

Background

Epping Forest College (EFC) (efc.ac.uk) is a sixth form and further education college serving learners in Essex and North London. It offers a wide range of AS/A2 Levels and vocational qualifications. In the past, EFC has been involved in Jisc initiatives around e-safety, the learner voice, and student digital partnerships. It took part in phase three of the **Molenet project** (molenet.org.uk) when a student e-Mentoring scheme was launched.

Providing a safe and harmonious environment for its diverse learners is one of the areas the college has focused on in recent months, and **Safer Internet Day** (<http://ji.sc/EFC-safer-internet>) has been a focus of activity for some years.

Strategic priorities

The college has a new principal Saboohi Famili, who plans to make EFC a sector leader in digital capability by 2020. The **2020 Vision** (<http://ji.sc/EFC-strategic-aims>) for the college aims to: *'provide resources and facilities that promote and embrace emerging technologies, support a professional environment and enable outstanding learning'*.

After significant investment in IT and network infrastructure, and a relaunch of the college Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), (ERIC) in 2016, the college **Response to the Learning Technology Challenge** (<http://ji.sc/EFC-national-priorities-learning>) states that the priority now is to *'upskill and build confidence in our teaching staff ability to use Information learning technology (ILT) in all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment'*.

Leadership of change

A major restructuring of services in 2014 led to the creation of a new department called Digital literacy, voice and innovation from what was previously e-Learning, Learning resources centre and Student survey services. The head of the department leads on student digital literacy and e-safety issues, while the Curriculum manager for IT leads on ILT in the classroom.



I very much share the Jisc vision in terms of digital literacy being key to moving on from study to working in a globalised digital economy, to becoming 21st century citizens.

Actions for digital capability

The **Learning resources centre** has been transformed from a place of printed books to a centre for digital access, where students can work collaboratively in different configurations, using their own devices alongside college resources and services. At the same time, the role of the Learning centre support team changed from supporting traditional study skills to being digital learning advisers. By 2015/16 a whole new induction process was in place, introducing students to the different learning spaces and the technologies available, and ensuring all learners were thoroughly trained in e-safety and online responsibility.

Jisc subject specialists helped the college to draw up a digital action plan to address digital capabilities in the curriculum. Using the six elements model, the team identified activities that could be used in different subject areas, and digital tools that could be used to support the different capabilities – such as blogs and presentation tools for communicating ideas. The VLE and student desktop have also been redesigned in response to staff and student feedback.

The student voice programme has been reconfigured around students as digital mentors. 'Digital Voice Xperts' (DVX) now support teachers and learners with any use of new technology that is challenging them, whether in teaching, learning, assessment, or just getting online. This has unleashed a lot of creative energy as DVX learners bring new tools into the classroom, including **Voki (voki.com)** to explore the internet with customised avatars, **Padlet (padlet.com)** to collect ideas about the future of learning, and word clouds. Their role also includes talking to learners and collecting data about their digital learning experience.

Increasingly they will take forward digital development projects in partnership with staff. EFC already runs its own **Make a difference digital challenge (http://ji.sc/EFC-mad-digital)** using Jisc elevator technology for students to put forward development ideas for discussion and voting. A **video about this project (http://ji.sc/EFC-mad-digital-challenge)** is available.

The college has always had a strong focus on digital safety and wellbeing, and **Safer Internet Day (SID) (http://ji.sc/EFC-Safer-Internet)** provides an annual opportunity to share and showcase some of that work.

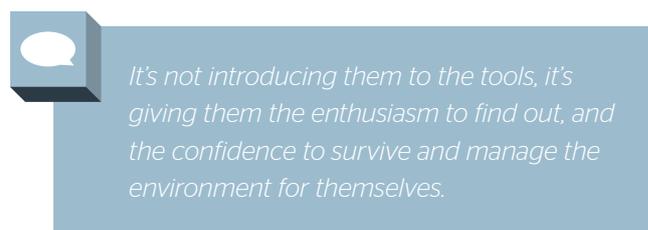


We have created a number of exhibitions, events and activities in the learning lounge and across college. We use interactive technologies, QR codes and augmented reality in a very creative way.

In February 2016 students were given the opportunity to develop an animation around e-safety using **PowToon (powtoon.com)** (a new presentation and animation tool): 64 entered the competition, seven were shortlisted and displayed during SID16, and students voted on the winners. The first prize was £300, with £100 each for two runners-up and a £10 voucher for everyone who met the entry criteria. The attention has paid off, with e-safety induction completed by 88% of students in 2016 (workshops have been targeted at the remaining 12%) and 84% of staff having completed awareness training on the issue.

Moving ahead

Due to a more complex digital landscape, with a diversity of devices and services in use, the department is finding that it can no longer support everyone in all their technology choices. Instead, the aim is to build 'e-confidence' first, followed by access to self-directed materials through **Lynda.com** and other online guidance.



It's not introducing them to the tools, it's giving them the enthusiasm to find out, and the confidence to survive and manage the environment for themselves.

Training on the basic tools will remain in place, but for everything else, staff and students will access the resources they need, at a time, place, and pace to suit them.



That is very important, 'any pace', because we can offer training but the differentiation we need to provide is huge in terms of digital confidence. We give a lot of training, but I don't think at the moment we are meeting everybody's specific needs.

Opportunities and challenges for the future

There is now an opportunity to embed digital literacy across all LTA processes, so for example in lesson observations there will be prompts to consider the six elements of digital capability and how they are being addressed, and the same will be true in curriculum planning.

Digital capability is now seen as an integral part of the college's responsibilities to its learners:



For employability certainly but also to be able to function and to survive in this increasingly fast-changing world. It's not just learning to use PowToon but being able to differentiate fake news, to look after their identity online, building that critical analysis: it's about really helping them grow and manage themselves in such a world.

There are opportunities here, for example through the Safer Internet work, to really make a difference to learners' lives and chances. On the other hand there is the risk that for some staff and students, 'digital capability' may become a source of stress and even failure. While the digital divide is getting narrower – fewer people are disadvantaged – the consequences are becoming deeper.

The opportunity to integrate digital support into a single department has allowed a great deal of progress to be made in the last 12 months. In a further restructure, digital literacy, the learning lounge and student voice will be incorporated into the IT department. This has the potential to make the digital literacy support even more coherent across the college.

Lessons learned

- » It is important to have a strategic vision for the college and for that to be driven at a very senior level. EFC's new principal (September 2016) is a digital leader and has a strong digital vision



In my view digital capability is a key skill for the current and future of our young people. It is at the heart of transformation of learning and enables learners to maximise their success not only with their studies but throughout their life and work in the future. We are keen and on our pathway to developing innovative products and provisions that embrace emerging technologies at EFC.
Saboohi Famili, CEO and principal

- » There also needs to be a 'one college, one team' mentality whereby practices are openly shared, and collaborative initiatives can go forward



[Otherwise] you have a team culture at curriculum level which may not be sharing and collaborating with others. That means duplications, miscommunication, basically a culture that is not as constructive as possible to address the challenges we are all experiencing because of globalisation, technology and the information revolution.

- » Safety and respect are the foundations of digital participation, whether that is for learning or any other aspect of contemporary life. However, these do not have to be dull issues. EFC has shown that Safer Internet Day can be a festival of creative ideas



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Any unattributed quotes in the text were provided and have been approved by the contacts above.



For more information

on all related resources please see the Building digital capability project page.
<http://ji.sc/building-digicap>