

Student digital experience Tracker

Case study: Barton Peverill Sixth Form College

Context

Barton Peverill is a thriving sixth form college in central Hampshire, offering a wide range of academic and vocational courses to over 3000 full-time students. Courses include over 40 A-level subjects, a post-18 Foundation Diploma in Art and Design endorsed by University of the Arts, London (UAL), leisure courses, access courses, and a broad range of vocational qualifications.

Why the Tracker was used

Barton Peverill is in the process of developing a new digital learning strategy and reviewing how e-Learning is delivered. The Tracker pilot offered an evidence base to move this forward, especially in developing the digital learning environment and putting in place systems to support staff and students. The college places a high priority on digital learning so these were crucial decisions for the future.

Many departments have been provided with Chrome books, and students have been offered rewards for suggesting the best learning apps and online resources. It was hoped that the Tracker would engage a larger number of students in digital learning issues. Most, if not all, teaching staff at Barton Peverill College already recognise the usefulness of digital learning, and the Tracker was seen as a way of demonstrating that strategic decisions in this area are evidence based and focused on learner needs.

Engaging key staff and learners

The decision to take part in the pilot was supported by the Senior Leadership Team and by senior staff involved in the new digital strategy: the Head of the Learning Resources Centre, Head of IT systems, and Head of Curriculum. It was discussed in meetings with teaching staff from each area of the college

and members of the student committee to ensure a broad base of awareness and support. The project was led by Andy Taggart, Head of Web Development.

During the weeks that the Tracker was running, students received a prompt to complete it and a link to the survey when they logged onto a college computer. Posters were put up in popular student areas with a QR code linking directly to the survey. The College's Twitter account and Facebook page were also used to emphasise the value of the survey: as well as the intrinsic benefits, students completing the survey were entered into a draw to receive one of four Amazon vouchers. The Tracker team asked tutors to discuss the Tracker with their tutor groups and encourage students to respond.

Andy worked hard with the team at Jisc to ensure the questions were appropriate to the needs of sixth form students. For example, because students can be studying a number of different subjects, the relevant question was adapted to ask about their main area of study rather than a specific subject. This was valuable feedback for future development of the Tracker.

What the Tracker found

Over 700 students completed the survey, almost twice the number required for a statistically robust set of data. Generally the findings were very positive. For example, the number of Barton Peverill students saying that they could access digital services '*most of the time*' was very much higher than the rest of the FE sector in all the areas surveyed: college computers and printers, wifi, file storage, online course materials, other learning resources, and access to personal information. Access to guidance on digital issues was broadly in line with the rest of the sector. In terms of teaching staff use of digital technologies, 70% of students who responded agreed that where it was used it was helpful to their learning, and again this is in line with (slightly above) sector average.

Looking at the free text responses to questions about what the college should '*stop*', '*start*', and '*keep*' doing, many students appreciated the use of technology and the current direction of travel, but felt that even more could be done in making resources available online. Many respondents asked for interactive resources, with Kahoot mentioned several times. The only area in which the college scored below sector average was in support for e-portfolios and building a positive reputation online, and this is something the College is exploring further. The other area of challenge is to improve the level of student engagement, with only 34% agreeing that they are currently involved in decisions about digital learning and the digital environment.

Responses and reflections

The Tracker pilot has formed part of the annual review of IT services, adding detail to the findings of an internal survey which identified some of the same strengths and weaknesses. In particular, focus groups are being used to identify how digital technology can be used more effectively in lessons, including the use of students' own devices. Building on a very strong 'Learner Voice' in the college, students are now being consulted about how they would like to be engaged around digital issues.

The Tracker has helped to demonstrate that strategic decisions about the digital environment are based on evidence about what works for learners. From the Tracker findings it is clear that learners do want teachers to use technology more and see it as a key element of their learning. Staff at Barton Peverill have invested time and effort in developing their digital skills and in building online resources, so it is really important that these efforts are not just recognised but are shown to be bearing fruit for learners.

The Tracker has helped confirm assumptions that our digital learning programme is not only effective but highly appreciated. The challenge for us now is to pick up on issue raised by the Tracker and to address them.

Andy Taggart, Head of Web Development

"The tracker was quick and easy to do. Our tutor explained why we should complete it and if it helps the college provide more of the IT we actually need then that can only be a good thing."

"Its good the college is asking students what actually works and is useful – the tracker seemed to cover everything I think is important in terms of our digital learning and hope the results are used by the college."

"It was good to have the opportunity to say what I think about IT in college and how technology is used by teachers – this should be done more often."

Student viewpoints

"The tracker came at a very opportune time for us as we are in the process of re-writing our digital learning strategy and making key decisions on IT provision across the college. With budgets across the sector tight, it is vital we make the right choices in terms of the services we provide to our learners. The Tracker has been very useful indeed in helping us make informed decisions."

Peter Horner, IT Operations Manager

Key lessons

1. The Tracker can be used effectively alongside internal surveys and other annual processes (IT services review etc) to build a more detailed picture of what students expect from their digital experience.
2. There is real value in demonstrating to staff that decisions about digital learning are based on evidence – and for staff to see that their efforts are being recognised and are meeting learners' needs.
3. Sector benchmarking is valuable, but not the only use for the Tracker – e.g. it can focus in on issues that require further exploration in focus groups and Learner Voice initiatives.
4. Future iterations of the Tracker need to be tailored to reflect the academic environment of sixth form colleges, where each student is likely to be taking a wider range of subjects.