

Marketing Innovation Awards 2014

Target Market: ESOL Students and Mainstream Students

Objective: To provide a Basic IT Skills Club to students with little or no IT experience

Originality of concept and its suitability to the target market

It is recognised that there are some learners across the College who have either low level IT skills or those without any previous IT experience; in this day of high levels of technology, mobile devices and social media use these low level IT skills can be neglected. The learners we particularly wanted to focus on are the ESOL learners, mostly mature learners but not necessarily, returning to education to improve their language skills. These learners are often refugees and asylum seekers, with many not having had access to computers before, their need for help was apparent.

The lack of IT skills is a real barrier to learning for a lot of our learners and this club helps break down that barrier. In the classroom these learners were taking a lot longer to complete their coursework than their peers and were having difficulty keeping up in class. Some were even thinking of leaving their course because they could not get to grips with the amount of IT they had to use in class.

The project therefore focused on giving those learners the opportunity to concentrate their efforts on gaining and improving their IT skills, which they could then transfer to all aspects of their College work. In the long term the Club was seen as being able to benefit them not only with their College work, but with their families and in their home life. In addition, as with gaining any new skills, the self-confidence that mastering these skills brings is hugely beneficial.

The Basic IT Club was initially to run for 6 weeks from October 2013 until the end of the autumn term as part of the Enrichment programme offered by the College on Wednesday afternoons.

Creative thinking and innovation

We were keen for the IT club to be as informal as possible; we wanted the learners to enjoy themselves while attaining new skills. For this reason we created sessions that involved using images as well as text, such as creating menus, posters and invitations. As a result, students could be as creative as they wanted and put their own personal touches to their work.

Each week the sessions were evaluated to identify areas of improvement, and a different approach would be made and at times sessions were adapted at the point of delivery when

staff felt it would be more effective. It was a learning curve, which would benefit future clubs.

Effective partnership working

We were keen for the IT club to be relevant to the work students were doing in class, so for this reason we collaborated with the IT tutor. One of our team also works in-class supporting ESOL learners and was able to liaise with the IT tutor to make sure that any posters, presentations and brochures created in the IT club were on a similar topic to that planned to be covered in class. For example, the poster the learners created was to advertise an end of term concert, which was relevant to an event due to happen in College and a planned IT lesson. This helped the learners identify the type of information they should include and where to find the most relevant of images to use.

The communication between us and the course tutors has helped us plan our sessions by sharing information about their future projects, and what IT skills learners would need to complete the work. We reciprocated by giving her our plans for the future sessions, and if appropriate she in turn created lessons along the same lines to use in class. This has enabled newly learned skills to be reinforced.

Attracting new audiences

The IT Club was initially aimed at ESOL students, although it was promoted via the College 'widget', word of mouth and notice boards to all learners at the City Centre Campus only ESOL learners have joined so far. Due to its success and popularity it would be worth re-advertising/publicising it to learners on all courses, this time though we would have evidence of the benefits to use in the promotional material – realistically though, most learners coming straight from school have high levels of IT skills already and it would be the mature ESOL learners who would be our target audience. The club currently only takes place at the Parade campus, but the target for the next club would be at one of our smaller campuses where the delivery ESOL courses is also high. Once fully established and sustainable, information about the IT Club could be included in student induction, to ensure a lot more students know about it.

Effective use of a combination of promotional activity e.g. design & print, online

Before starting the IT club we were eager to get an idea of how many people were interested. We set up a small stand in the corridor by the college refectory and displayed posters to promote the club. We encouraged learners to come and chat to us and let us know if they would be interested in joining us and what they would like to get from the club. We had a great response with a lot of learners signed up for the club.

When we were ready to start we emailed the learners who had shown an interest, giving them the times and dates of the club and inviting them to join. We also notified tutors that

the IT club was starting, this was to encourage them to remind their learners about the start date, time and location, in the classroom situation it would include those who may not have already been aware the club was being formed. Messages were again put on the college widget to confirm the start date/time and venue of the club.

Success of the project in terms of attendance/feedback

The project has increased in popularity as it's gone along, with new learners joining each week. Initially the club was due to run for just six weeks, but it was clear early on that the students wanted to continue into the next term. Not only did they feel it was helping them a lot, they also really enjoyed coming, and being part of a group. Therefore the club is still running and attracting new members at this time.

The excitement shown when they learned how to format text, draw shapes and add page borders/colour and animate PowerPoint presentations, was evidence enough that we were on the right path to the club being a success. Learners who were anxious about using PCs are beginning to feel much more confident now.

Several students use the hand-outs that we prepare for the club to practise at home and often bring their work to the group to show what they've done. Improvements in the learners' ability since joining the club are visible and some of those attending are now more confident and able help others.

Feedback from students was very positive, and they feel that the club is very important to them because today IT is a basic requirement for every job. They find the club fun, as well as useful/helpful when learning new skills. The fact that *'IT Club staff and students are very friendly and nice people'* was also mentioned in feedback.

Feedback from the tutor has been very pleasing – she has indicated that as a direct result of the Club those attending have shown that they are now much more competent in using IT and producing independent work. In addition, it has been noted that learners are now able to spend more time on the content of their coursework and less time struggling with the demands of completing their work in a Word or PowerPoint document.

'IT club has given the students skills and confidence. Some ESOL students had no experience of IT before coming to class and in a group of 21 learners, would be lost without some basic knowledge. Thanks to IT club they are now better able to keep up with the others in the class. This has made them more able to ask questions and feel part of the group, I think. It has also given them the space and time to experiment with their new IT skills. IT club has been running parallel with the scheme of work for the IT class and this has meant that the in-class support worker has been able to communicate student needs and progress, working together with the teacher to give the best support to those students who need it most.' **Louise MacLaughlin, ESOL Lecturer**

Amount of positive press coverage received

The IT Club has not had press coverage at present but will be highlighted in the Limelight, the staff magazine of Cardiff and Vale College.

Effective use of resources e.g. staff time, equipment, location, budget

The club takes place every Wednesday afternoon in the Learning and Skills Centre IT training Suite. The room has 14 PCs, a printer and an overhead projector which makes it ideal for our purposes. As this room is already available for staff use at the college there is no cost attached.

Step-by-step hand-outs are produced taking into consideration the level of English the learners attending has, this helps to ensure that the language is accessible for all. Each learner is provided with a hand out each week to take away from the group to practice and reinforce the learning for that session. There is a minimal cost for the hand outs which the department is able to cover. Folders were given to late starters which contained the hand-outs from previous weeks, so learners who wanted to, could catch up in their own time. This meant that club sessions didn't have to be repeated and progress continued. Staff had previously completed a level 2 Information Literacy course as part of CPD and we were able to transfer the skills and resources acquired from this course such as '*Searching for information online*' and '*Safety online*' to the IT Club.

At present the club runs for 1 hour with staff either giving up half an hour lunch break or working on half an hour, this ensures they are away from the main issue desk of the Learning and Skills Centres as little as possible with no effect to the service and to colleagues.

Sustainability of the project

As there is minimal expenditure involved in running the IT Club, the project could be sustained indefinitely. In addition to this, having created the session plans and resources for this pilot scheme from scratch, they could be used again as they stand or adapted if necessary, for subsequent clubs. The resources would be made available via the College Moodle pages, to staff based at other campuses, enabling them to start an IT Club with minimal effort.

The IT Club will equip students with IT skills and knowledge that they can use in the future. This will enable them to contribute more efficiently and effectively in class, and where IT skills are needed to complete their course work both in college and at home. It will also give them the skills and confidence to move forward to gain a recognised qualification and to use in the workplace.

There are additional benefits to the IT Club; it helps to improve the IT skills of the learners in attendance, it also develops their skills in reading, comprehension, speaking, listening and general communication; along with the added wider skills of working and supporting each other.

Because of the popularity of the IT Club and its immediate success we will definitely continue to run the club in the future for new students.



Trudy with one of the attendees.

Denise Jones
Trudy Rees
Learning and Skills Centre Assistants
Cardiff and Vale College

Learning and Skills Centre



Do you need help using a computer?

The Learning & skills Centre is running a basic IT club on Wednesday afternoons.

If you would like to come along, fill in the form and tell us your name and what you would like to learn.

We will let you know when the club is going to start.