City & Guilds

GROW YOUR BUSINESS

TECHNO-LOGIC – USING TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY

A SURVEY OF OPERATIONAL STAFF AT TRAINING PROVIDER ORGANISATIONS

MARCH 2015

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FOREWORD

Kirstie Donnelly MBE, Managing Director City & Guilds UK

2014 saw the launch of City & Guilds 'Grow your Business' an initiative designed to support training provider organisations in exploring ways to save time and money, increase productivity and attract more learners and employers.

This is our first report, which we commissioned to help management teams within your organisation better understand the problems being faced by operational staff at the coal-face and consider how these problems might be overcome.

We know that many in vocational education are still scratching their heads about how best to enable their organisation to meet the OFSTED directives around the use of digital technology and how to capitalise on the opportunities and address the barriers that the FELTAG report have placed on your businesses. This report comes on the back of these changes and specifically contemplates the effectiveness of e-portfolios and e-learning available to training provider organisations. It looks at how these tools can be better used, where they are available, and highlights where staff simply do not have access to them at all.

We ultimately hope that these findings will help you to implement more effective digital strategies in your own organisations and that it will enable City & Guilds to ensure that 'Grow your Business' offers you support that is both valuable and relevant.

Findings from the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) tells us that many training provider organisations are already ahead of the game compared to many of those delivering qualifications in the FE market. The findings of this report highlight that there is still work to be done with 37% of respondents telling us that they still don't have adequate access to digital technology and e-tools. Despite the lack of adequate tools there is still a high expectation on staff to deliver more for less, with 46% telling us that they are under pressure to make financial savings in the way teaching, learning and assessment is delivered. There is one clear solution here. If we can work together to uncover digital best practice and consider which are smart investments then training providers will be much better able to streamline their operations and become more effective and efficient delivering those much needed savings without impacting on the quality of the teaching intervention.

Clearly having a better approach to digital won't be the answer to all the issues we face but the collective impact of all of the issues highlighted will be to help your staff to deliver quality to your students. And after all as AELP tell us quality is absolutely key to maintaining a profitable business for training provider organisations. Using e-portfolios and e-learning, as this report suggests, can play a role in helping you deliver that quality.

I hope that you find this report useful and that by highlighting common trends amongst businesses like yours we will be able to get the ball rolling on resolving these issues together so that we can help you make your businesses scale to be more efficient and effective – at the end of the day our success is dependent upon yours and so working together to create effective solutions is ever more important for us all.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

City & Guilds conducted a survey with 118 operational staff at independent training providers and work-based-learning units within FE Colleges, also referred to in this report as training provider organisations, to try to understand more about three key areas:

- The current issues faced by operational staff
- The extent to which existing digital support is helping to overcome some of those issues
- How that support is perceived by those who use it

The research is intended to help training provider organisations develop effective digital strategies and to inform the development of City & Guilds' Grow Your Business offer.

DAY-TO-DAY ISSUES

The most common issues faced day-to-day by staff were identified as:

46% The pressure to make financial savings in the way teaching, learning and assessment is delivered

46% Finding time for Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

37% Having access to digital resources

36% Having access to the latest resources

Out of all of these, financial pressures were recognised as having the biggest impact, but the collective impact of all of these issues was on the ability of staff to deliver quality to their students.

It is clear from the survey that time is very squeezed across the week, and staff can struggle to find time to prepare fully for lessons by researching the latest resources, and for CPD.

As such, it was felt that having better access to digital resources would be the biggest advantage of external digital support, as this would reduce the amount of time staff were forced to make or look for their own, and just help them feel they can focus on what is important.

This is something that can be addressed by platforms such as e-portfolios and e-learning tools. Furthermore they could also help tackle some of the other issues identified.

E-PORTFOLIOS

Overall, e-portfolios were viewed very positively by those who had used them. The key benefits were seen as:

80% Allowing greater visibility of student progress

69% Allowing tutors to work in more places, including offline

62% Improving quality assurance

63% Receiving real-time feedback

60% Encouraging greater learner participation

Those who used an e-portfolio also demonstrated a greater appetite for more digital support, being almost twice as likely to request this. Significantly, they were also far less likely to feel that financial pressures were the most important issue they faced, suggesting that introducing an e-portfolio system could go some way to alleviate this pressure within departments.

The drawbacks to using e-portfolios were identified as:

83% Being reliant on the internet/network connection

51% Time needed for training on how to use it effectively

34% Inconsistent usage across staff/ departments

This underlines the already known issue around ensuring consistent access to digital resources – including internet connection – across the sector. Although, interestingly, 69% of respondents argued that one of the benefits of an e-portfolio was that it allows tutors to work in more places, including offline. This may not be so surprising though when you consider the rise in popularity of mobile apps. It also highlights an opportunity to offer packages with full training to help staff implement usage effectively.

E-LEARNING

Like e-portfolios, e-learning was also viewed very positively and the key benefits were seen to be:

88% Makes training more accessible to students

72% Encourages independent learning

72% Encourages learner participation

72% Helps bring training to life

Those who used e-learning tools were also less likely to highlight lack of access to the latest resources and financial pressures as key day-to-day issues, indicating that these tools may go some way to alleviate these issues.

However, there were some areas where e-learning tools were polarising, notably in relation to improving communication with students and improving creativity through online sharing. This indicates that the context to usage is important here, and underlines the significance of making sure that e-learning tools are used as a complement to other forms of learning, such as face-to-face.

The key drawbacks identified were:

75% Being reliant on the internet/network connection

50% Not enough contact with students

38% Time needed for training on how to use it effectively

This again highlights the ongoing issue of ensuring consistent access to digital resources and namely the internet across the sector.

CONCLUSIONS

There is a recognised issue with the consistency of access to technology across departments within the sector, often relating to funding, and this research acts as a reminder of this. However, it also highlights that there are tools that exist that may go some significant way to alleviate many of the key pressures felt by staff at training provider organisations, and contribute to a higher quality of delivery at the same time. As long as correct training can be provided, these tools could make a significant impact.

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2014, City & Guilds launched Grow Your Business, an initiative designed to support training provider organisations in exploring ways to save time and money, increase effectiveness and attract more learners and employers.

Towards the end of 2014, research was conducted to share insight with management teams within training provider organisations on the issues operational staff in the sector are facing and the effectiveness of existing support tools to help overcome those issues. Tools, according to previous research, that many in the sector still do not have access to. We felt this insight could prove helpful in supporting providers develop their digital strategies.

We wanted to gain insight around three specific areas – ones that we felt would generate findings that management teams would find useful for their digital strategies and also ensure the Grow Your Business offer provides the best and most relevant service possible. These areas were:

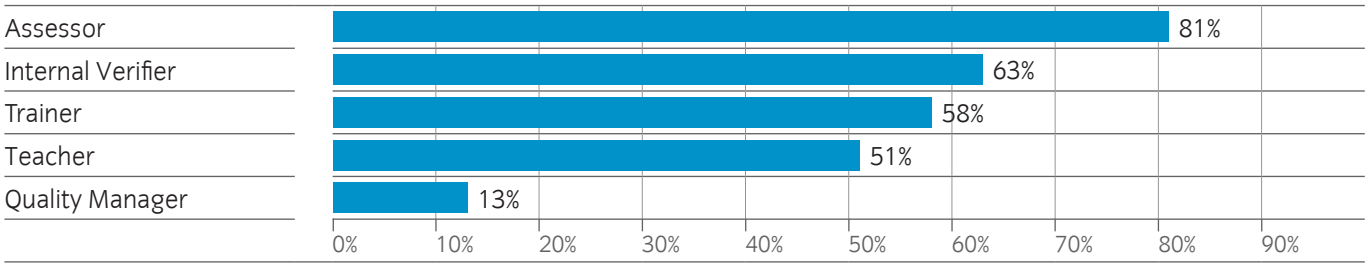
- The current issues faced by operational staff at training provider organisations
- The extent to which existing digital support is helping to overcome some of those issues
- How that support is perceived by those who use it

Finally, we wanted to follow up our special report on **Technology in FE**, published in June 2014, and examine specific issues around use of digital technology that relate to independent training providers and work-based learning.[1] In light of recent changes to the Ofsted requirements for digital technology, and the recent FELTAG recommendations addressing some of the key barriers to using technology in further education and training, this research helps us build a fuller picture of what can be done.

1 http://www.cityandguilds.com/news/July-2014/technology-in-FE#.VDO_n_ldU9Y

This report explores the results of our research with 118 respondents from over 97 independent training providers and work-based learning units.[2] The overall sample was broken down as illustrated below in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Job roles represented



The report is split into two key sections. The first section looks at the issues that operational staff experience on a day-to-day basis at independent training providers and work-based learning units.

The second examines two digital resources – e-portfolios and e-learning – in terms of the benefits they bring and the extent to which they may be able to address some of the key issues.

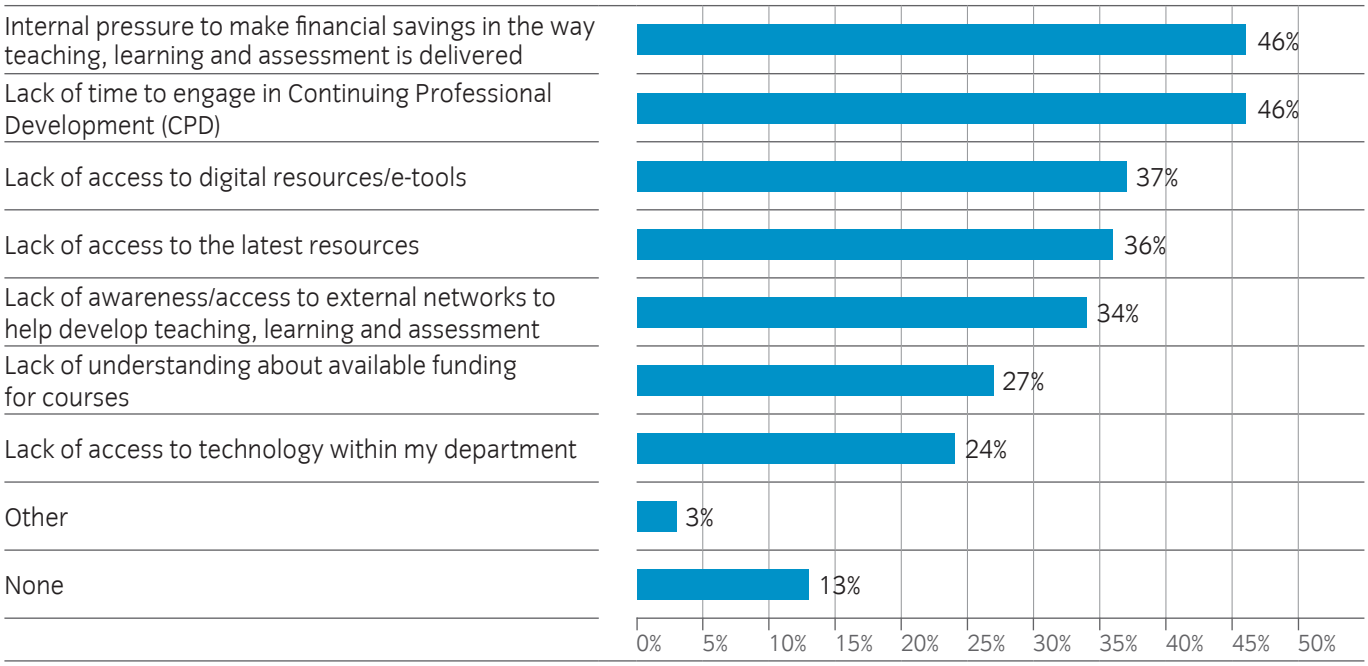
2 Research was conducted by Toluna, an independent survey provider, and via the use of City & Guilds' own database. No quotas were set within the sample but overall a spread of teachers, trainers, assessors, internal verifiers and quality managers were included. Due to overlap of role, all respondents are referred to in the report as operational staff unless there is a particular focus on findings by job role

2 PART A: DAY-TO-DAY ISSUES

Operational staff in training provider organisations are facing heavy demands in their day-to-day roles. Money pressures are having an impact on the delivery of learning across the board, with access to digital resources coming through as a key issue.

One of the key objectives of this research was to gain a greater understanding of the specific challenges faced by operational staff in independent training providers and work-based learning units. We asked respondents to tell us what challenges they were facing day-to-day within their roles. Figure 2.1 below illustrates their response.

Figure 2.1: Challenges Faced



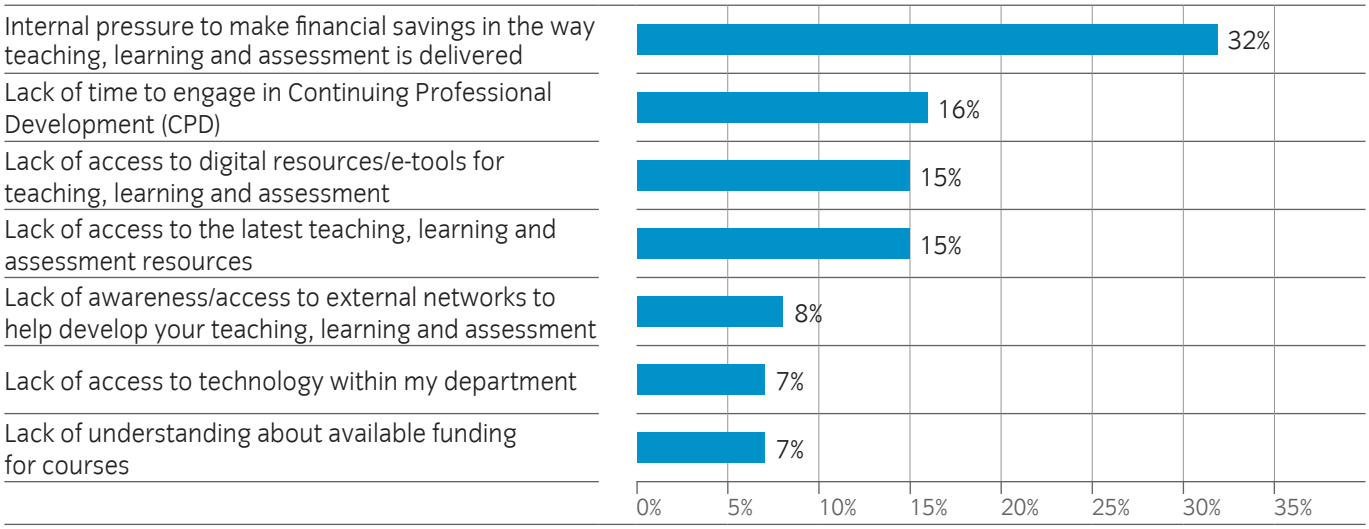
QUESTION: Which of the following challenges, if any, are you facing in your day to day role? (Base: all respondents; n=118)

Across the whole sample, pressure to make financial savings in the way teaching, learning and assessment is delivered and lack of time for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) came up as the biggest challenges being faced, with 46% of operational staff highlighting these each as key issues. Trainers were the most likely to feel this with over half highlighting these two issues in particular (52% financial pressure; 51% time for CPD).

Trainers were also the most likely to feel that access and awareness to external networks was an issue, with almost half (45%) of this cohort selecting this. Meanwhile, teachers were the most likely – perhaps unsurprisingly given their role in the classroom – to identify lack of access to the latest resources as an issue (43%).

But what kind of impact do these issues have on day-to-day roles? Having identified the key challenges, we wanted to understand more about their impact. Figure 2.2 below illustrates what we found.

Figure 2.2: Greatest Impact



QUESTION: And which of these impacts you the most? (Base = all affected by more than one issue; n=73)

Although there is no overwhelming majority, it is clear from this data that financial pressure to make savings in the way teaching, learning and assessment is delivered remains not only the most common issue, but the concern that has the biggest impact on day-to-day roles at training provider organisations. This is consistently recognised across all job roles as the most important issue.

Access to CPD and resources have the next biggest impact, as staff feel unable to perform their roles to the highest standard. This is an obvious issue but becomes especially pertinent in light of many perceptions that exist around independent training providers being driven purely by profits. In fact, recent analysis from the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) has suggested that quality is absolutely key to maintaining a profitable business for training provider organisations, and so the two have to go hand in hand.[3] If quality is being compromised, then that is bad news both for the students and the business.

'The evidence we find is that delivering a sustainable economic model is only possible when they deliver high quality programmes.'

– Stewart Segal, Chief Executive, AELP

Happily, recent Ofsted results indicate that the effectiveness of delivery in the independent training provider sector overall is currently very good, and slightly higher than in FE Colleges overall.[4] But our survey shows that the challenges faced by staff in achieving this level of quality are still very real, and is the case in work-based learning units as well as independent training providers. Staff commented on how some of these issues were affecting them:

'Financial constraints from management make it difficult to run quality courses as there is no time built into my work day for assessing, preparing of lessons, etc.'

– Teacher/Trainer/Assessor

'Because IT is changing all the time, we have to create most of our resources. Some of which are probably available elsewhere but we do not know where to find relevant information.'

– Trainer/Assessor/Internal Verifier

'I would like to develop the teaching that I do to reflect the changing digital world but I am hindered by the inadequate infrastructure, e.g. access to reliable wifi in all venues and access for BYOD training.'

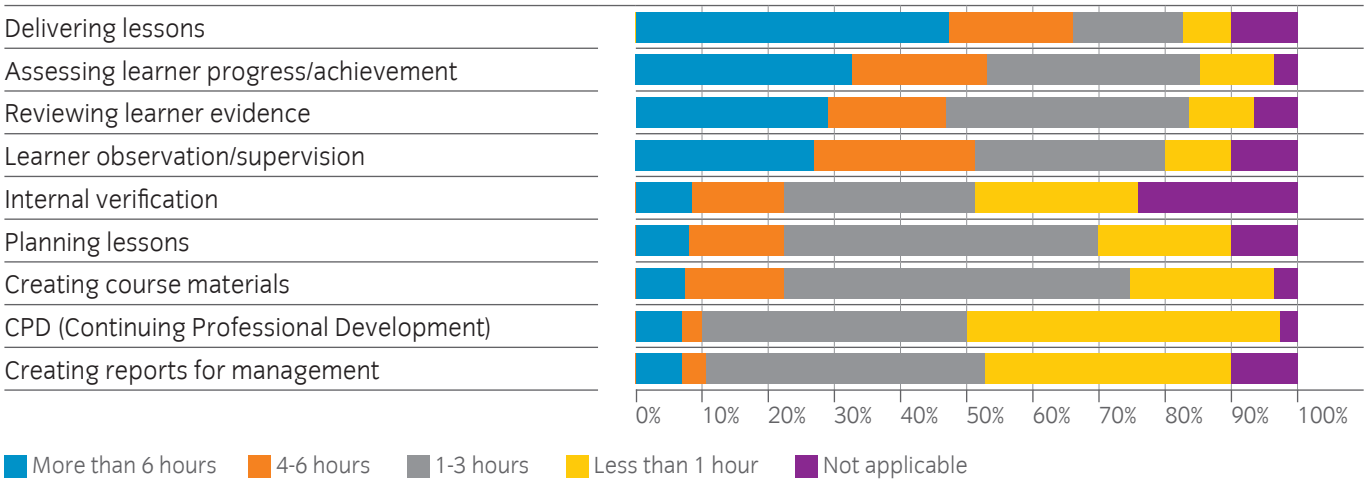
– Trainer

3 Countdown Issue 695, AELP, 29th October 2014

4 Countdown Issue 695, AELP, 29th October 2014

These issues are of particular interest when considered within the context of how operational staff spend their time across the week. We asked respondents about this and Figure 2.3 below illustrates the results.

Figure 2.3: Time Spent on Tasks



QUESTION. How much time per week do you spend on average on the following activities? (Base = all respondents; n=118)

Unsurprisingly, the highest amount of time was spent on delivering lessons with 48% of operational staff spending more than six hours a week on this. There are of course variations according to job role within this – teachers spend the most time delivering lessons (62% more than 6 hours); assessors and internal verifiers spend the most time on learner observation (30% more than 6 hours) – but, what the results of this question clearly illustrate is the amount of time spent on the range of different tasks that need to be carried out regardless of job role. In the context of this, other important activities such as preparing for lessons, creating materials and taking part in CPD are often afforded less time. It is no wonder staff feel these issues have the biggest impact on their day-to-day and their ability to deliver quality.

Some respondents commented on how much their time is squeezed:

'All staff are measured against their KPIs and this can mean that CPD is squeezed out of the schedule.'

– Teacher/Assessor

'It can be very difficult to find the time to develop excellent teaching resources that engage the students fully, this impacts on differentiation in the sessions.'

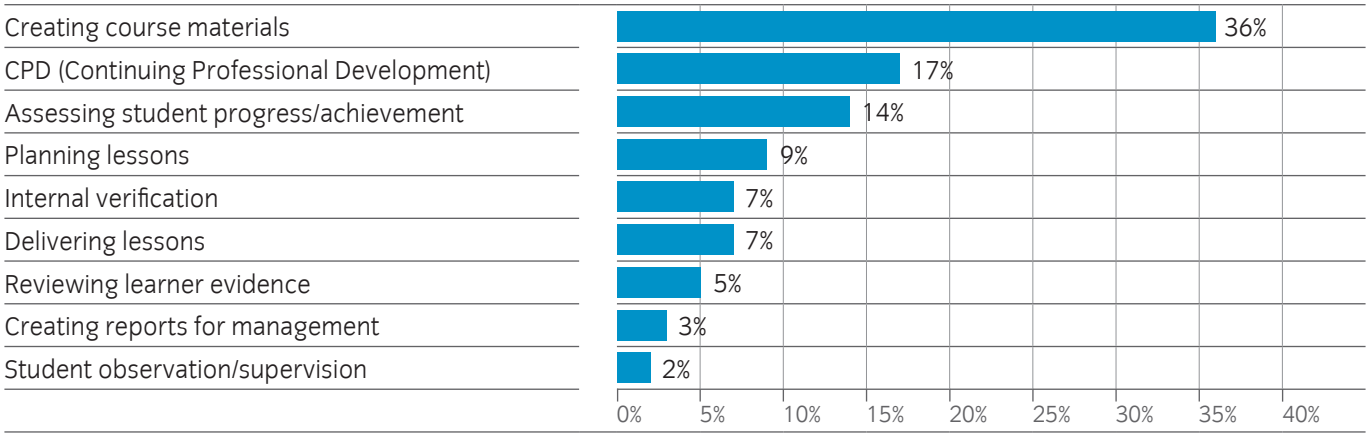
– Teacher

'The additional time needed for assessing and carrying out IQA on learner files, as these are all paper copies, means that teaching and observing hours are pushed.'

– Teacher/Assessor/Internal Verifier

So is there anything that can be done to help ease the burden here at all? One approach could be through more digital support, and this is a growing area of development. With this in mind, respondents were asked which activities would benefit most from external digital support. Figure 2.4 below illustrates what they said.

Figure 2.4: Activities Benefiting from External Digital Support



QUESTION: Which of these activities would benefit most from external digital support such as online platforms, networks or programmes?
(Base: all respondents; n=118)

While, again, there was no overall majority, there was significantly more desire for external digital support in creating course materials (36%), and this was, unsurprisingly, felt most strongly by teachers (43%).

The call for greater support here is not surprising given that the majority of respondents can only spare up to 3 hours a week on creating resources. However, it was also clear from respondents' comments that this is not just about these resources being available, it's about operational staff having easy access to them as well.

'Having no access to digital interactive resources makes ensuring the engagement of all learners a more difficult task.'

– Trainer/Assessor

'I feel that I am short changing learners when I am unable to give them well-produced, high quality materials and am always telling them to go away and find things on the internet for themselves.'

– Teacher/Assessor

'Without keeping up to date yourself, how are you able to give the most accurate and relevant information to your learners? Better resources and access would help me considerably.'

– Assessor

Indeed, we know from previous research that access to digital resources can be very inconsistent, even within the same organisation, due to the financial and practical restrictions faced by the FE market (see City & Guild's Technology in FE report, published June 2014).[5] It is clear from this research that training provider organisations are facing the same issues here.

So what existing support is there that could help address some of these issues? Tools such as e-portfolios and e-learning are being used by more and more institutions, and, indeed, City & Guilds is just one provider to offer products in these categories.[6] Of course these tools do not offer the whole solution, but instead could go some way to help ease the burden. The next two sections of this report focus on these specific interventions to understand more about how they may be able to address some of the key issues for training provider organisations in particular.

5 http://www.cityandguilds.com/news/July-2014/technology-in-FE#.VBmUe_ldU9Y

6 As part of the City & Guilds Grow Your Business offer, along with other services such as tailored consultancy. For more information visit http://www.cityandguilds.com/what-we-offer/centres/grow-your-business

3 PART B: DIGITAL RESOURCES

3.A: E-PORTFOLIOS

Those who used e-portfolios found they improved many aspects of their role and played a key part in tracking progress, engaging students and saving time.

From the sample of operational staff we surveyed, 47% said an e-portfolio was in use at their organisation, and 64% of these claimed to have used it.

Amongst those who didn't use the e-portfolio, the most common reason given for this was that it was not available to tutors in their department. This echoes the trend we have seen previously for inconsistent access to technology within institutions, and highlights an issue requiring attention (but, alas, too big to address fully in this report): how can access to digital support technology be made easier for staff across all sectors and departments within FE and training provider organisations?

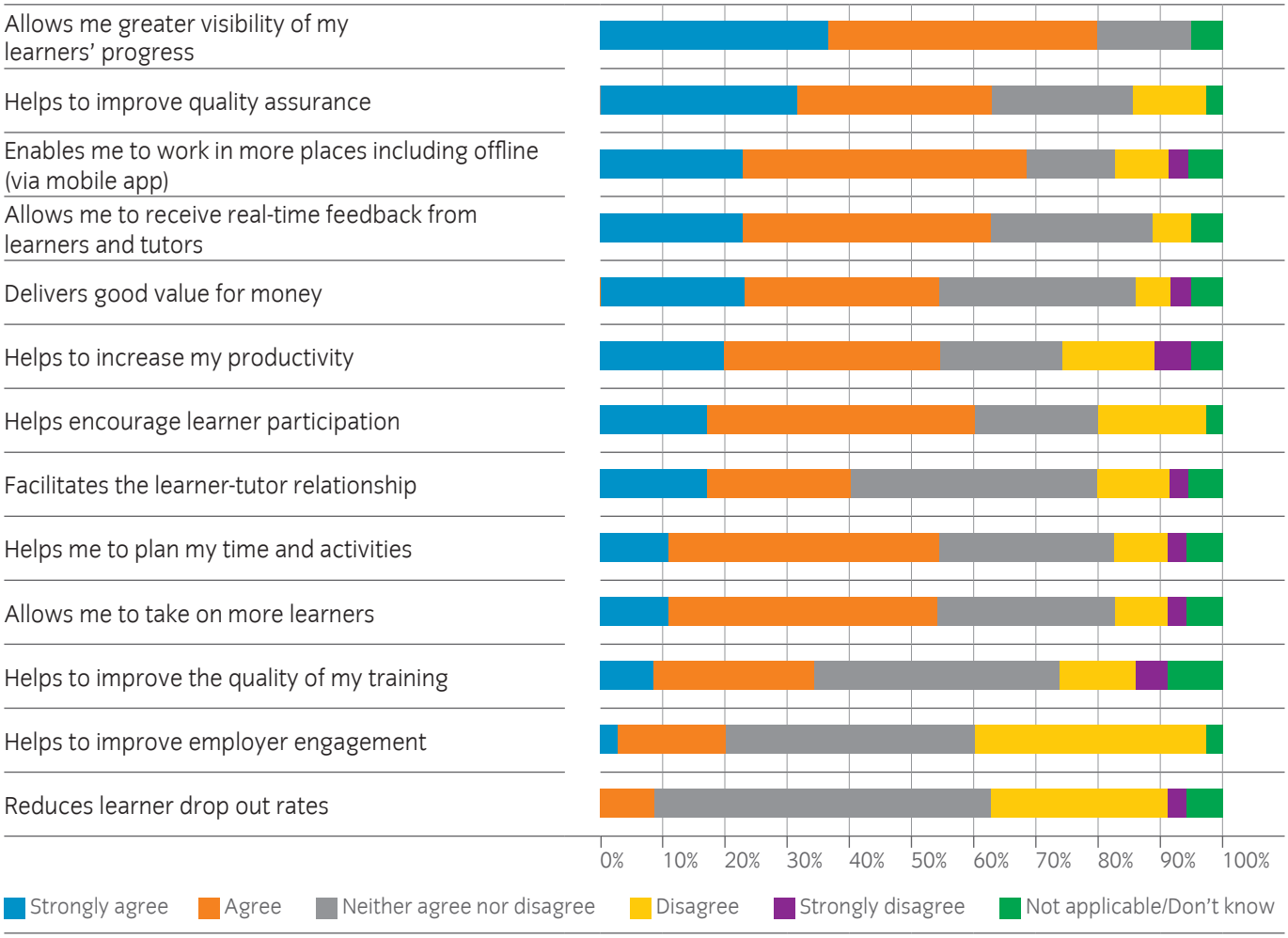
However, when we look at how those who were using an e-portfolio responded to other questions in the survey, we can see that access to digital resources remains an issue even for those who already have access to digital support: for those using an e-portfolio, the day-to-day issue that had the biggest impact was a lack of digital resources (37%),[7] and this cohort were almost twice as likely as the rest of the sample to request more digital support to help them plan lessons (16% vs 9%).[8] This suggests a greater appetite for digital support among those already making use of it, and fuels further the argument that providing a greater level of access to digital technology across the sector is key in order to address many of the existing challenges faced day-to-day.

7 QUESTION: And which of these impacts you the most? (Base = all affected by more than one issue; n=73)

8 QUESTION: Which of these activities would benefit most from external digital support such as online platforms, networks or programmes? (Base: all respondents; n=118).

We also asked e-portfolio users directly what they saw as the key benefits to using this kind of tool. Figure 3.1 below illustrates the results.

Figure 3.1: Benefits of E-portfolio



QUESTION: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? An e-portfolio… (Base = all who use an e-portfolio; n=35)

Overall, the biggest benefits to using an e-portfolio were seen to be having greater visibility of learners' progress (80% agreement) and enabling tutors to work in more places including offline (69% agreement). This is consistent with on-going internal research conducted by City & Guilds into the use of e-portfolios and it also suggests there are great advantages in making mobile app versions of e-portfolios available so that tutors do not need to rely so much on good network connections, which can be difficult to find at some places of work.[9] This could help with providing more widespread access.

9 At the time of reporting, 55% of City & Guilds Learning Assistant customers were using the mobile app version of this product users

Improving quality assurance (62%), receiving real-time feedback (63%) and encouraging learner participation (60%) were also key advantages, and significantly so given the importance of quality delivery for training providers' business model (see Part A).

Importantly, over half (54%) also agreed that an e-portfolio delivers good value for money. When we look at the results of our questions around which issues had the biggest impact (see Part A) we can see that none of the 32% who identified financial pressures as the biggest issue were e-portfolio users.[10] This could suggest that, although financial pressures do remain an ongoing challenge, using an e-portfolio might play some role in reducing its impact.

In a recent case study of Lakefield, a professional hospitality training provider, Kristen Frost commented on the longer-term potential for saving money on things such as printing, that may not be as immediately obvious as other savings, due to using e-portfolios. Perhaps this feeds this reduced sense of priority for making financial savings here.

'We should see a drop in costs this year in terms of printing etc. – and that will only show at the end of the coming academic year.'

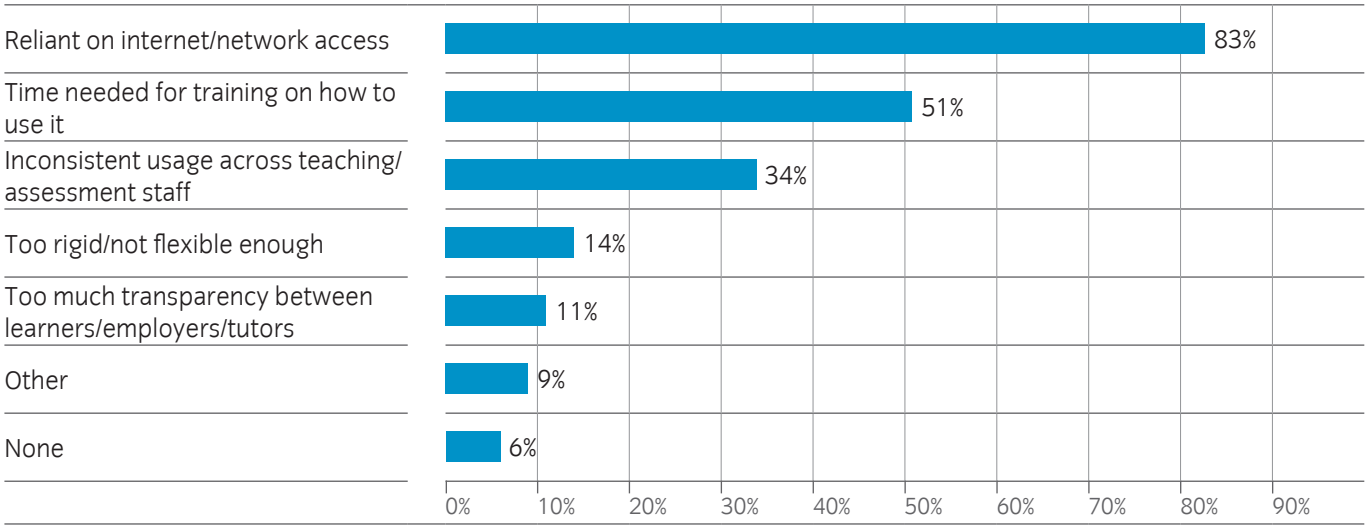
– Kristen Frost, Course Director & Training Manager, Lakefield

However, tutors were less convinced of e-portfolios' ability to improve employer engagement (20% agreement) and even less so to reduce learner drop-out rates (9% agreement), although a large proportion for each either didn't know or didn't have an opinion on these features (43% for employer engagement, 60% for learner drop-out). City & Guilds know anecdotally that e-portfolios can help with these issues as they can facilitate communication between trainer and employer and allow staff to monitor learner progress in order to intervene if necessary before motivation or participation declines (indeed, monitoring learner progress received the highest level of agreement: 80%). What these survey results highlight is that there may well be an awareness issue here, or that perhaps some of these more granular functions are just not being used due to other reasons such as lack of regular access, employer education/awareness or perceptions of ease of use.

10 This suggests that, although financial pressures do remain an ongoing challenge, using an e-portfolio could go some significant way to reducing its impact

In order to gain some insight into this, we can look at what respondents perceived to be the drawbacks to using an e-portfolio. Figure 3.2 below illustrates this.

Figure 3.2: Drawbacks to E-portfolio



[10]QUESTION: And which of these impacts you the most? (Base = all affected by more than one issue; n=73)

For the overwhelming majority, despite the potential to use mobile apps to access certain platforms, the biggest drawback of using an e-portfolio comes from the fact it is reliant on the internet or network access (83%). This is a key theme throughout this and previous research, particularly for work-based learning where access on different sites is not always possible. Coupled with the fact that the main reason operational staff don't use their e-portfolio is lack of access within their department, the opportunity exists to help make resources such as this more accessible to tutors across all types of training provider organisations.

Half of respondents (51%) also recognised time for training to be another key drawback. This may provide some insight into the relative low awareness of particular features allowing greater employer engagement and reducing learner drop-out rates.

There is again an opportunity here to ensure that this can be delivered as efficiently as possible so that operational staff feel comfortable with using their e-portfolio quickly.

Overall, e-portfolios were viewed very positively in our survey as a resource that could help staff plan, track progress and engage students in a cost-efficient and timely manner, freeing up time and relieving some of the financial pressures experienced. It is clear, therefore, that e-portfolios have the potential to improve some of the issues identified within the day-to-day lives of operational and managerial staff at training provider organisations.

'I feel an e-portfolio is a great teaching tool and feel that all teaching organisations should be able to use this.'

– Assessor, e-portfolio user

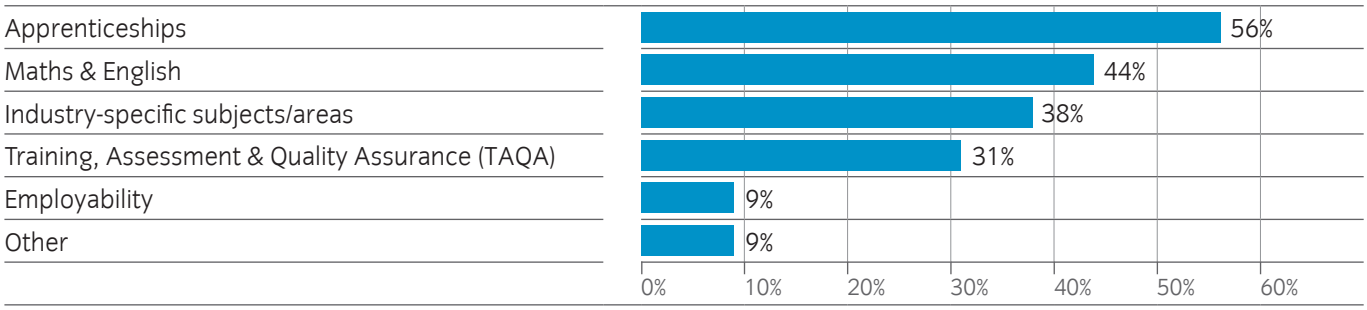
10 QUESTION: And which of these impacts you the most? (Base = all affected by more than one issue; n=73)

3.B: E-LEARNING

E-learning was perceived as another highly useful way to increase learner engagement in a cost-effective manner.

41% of the operational staff we surveyed said their organisation used e-learning tools, while 46% said it did not. Of those who had access to such tools, 67% of them used them. Figure 4.1 below illustrates what areas they used e-learning for.

Figure 4.1: Areas for E-learning



QUESTION: Which of the following areas do you use e-learning in? (Base = all who use e-learning; n=32)[11]

Looking at the subject areas tutors were using e-learning for, we can see that, perhaps unsurprisingly, Apprenticeships (56%) and then Maths & English (44%) were the most popular areas but there was a relatively good spread of usage overall. This highlights the versatility of the platforms that exist.

Despite this, the most common reason for not using the e-learning tools available was that they were perceived as not relevant to what respondents teach. Whether this is due to an actual or perceived lack of relevance is not clear from our research and may be worth further exploration.

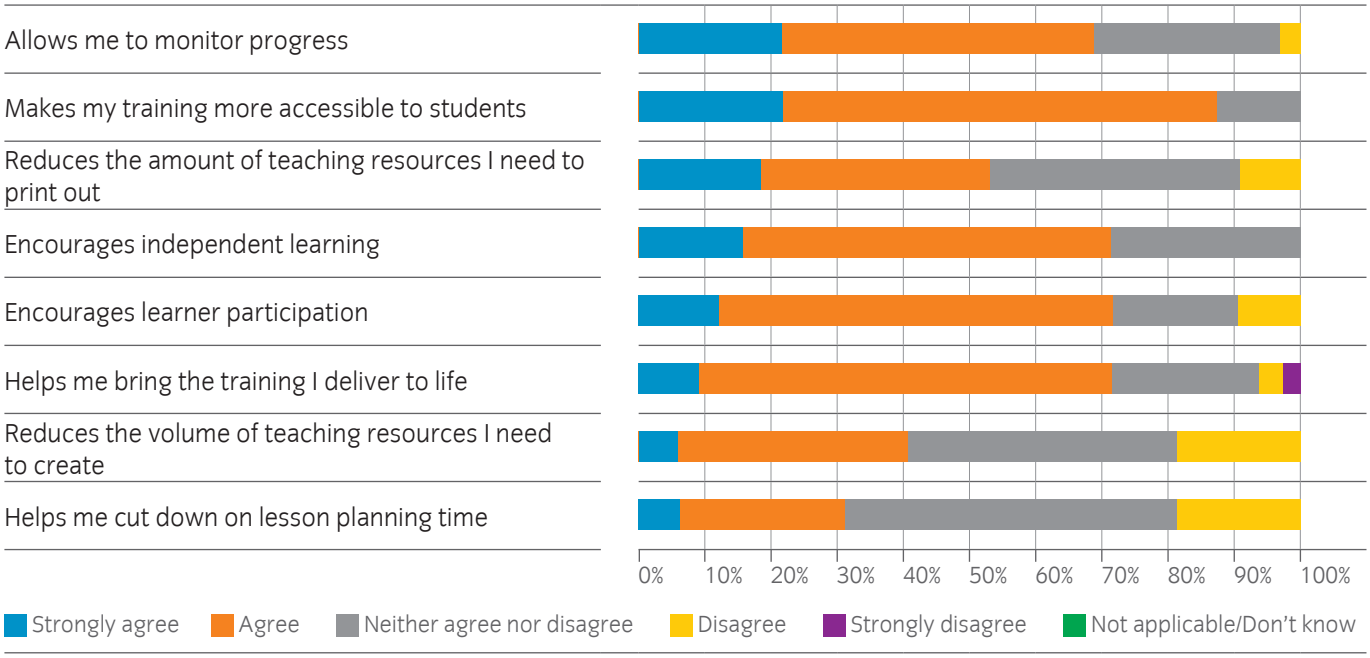
11 NB: Teaching, Learning and Quality Assurance is used by City & Guilds here to refer to Teaching and Learning Qualifications

However, the second most cited reason was lack of access within the department, echoing the responses relating to e-portfolios and which again highlights the same inconsistency in access to digital support across and within institutions. Not only that, but when we look at other results from our survey we can see that those who didn't use e-learning tools despite their organisations having access to them were the most likely to highlight lack of access to technology within their department as their biggest challenge – 20% compared to just 7% overall.[12] This suggests that using e-learning can highlight real discrepancies between departments that have access to it and those that don't.

To consolidate the suggestion that using e-learning tools can greatly help operational staff in their day-to-day roles, those who used e-learning were also less likely than the rest of the sample to identify 'lack of access to the latest resources' as a key issue, with just 22% saying this was a current challenge for them compared to 36% overall.[13] The same proportion (22%) also said that financial pressure was the biggest challenge they faced, compared to 32% overall.[14] E-learning, therefore, appears to have the potential to not only help staff access resources, but also alleviate to some extent the all-important financial burden experienced.

To explore the benefits further, respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with certain statements relating to e-learning. Figure 4.2 below shows the results.

Figure 4.2: Benefits of E-learning



QUESTION: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about using e-learning? E-learning.... (Base = all who use e-learning; n=32

12 QUESTION: Which of the following challenges, if any, are you facing in your day to day role? (Base: all respondents; n=118

13 QUESTION: Which of the following challenges, if any, are you facing in your day to day role? (Base: all respondents; n=118)

14 QUESTION: And which of these impacts you the most? (Base = all affected by more than one issue; n=73)

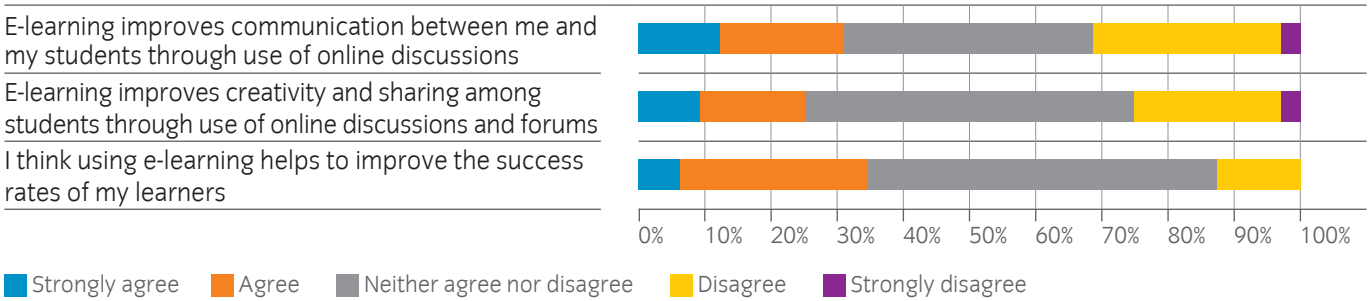
The biggest advantage associated with e-learning was that it makes training more accessible to students (88% agreement). In addition, 72% also agreed that it encourages independent learning, encourages learner participation and helps bring the training to life. All of these, it could be argued, are also likely to improve the quality of delivery also.

Another notable benefit evidenced through our survey is the degree to which using an e-learning platform can help reduce the amount of material that needs to be printed out; over half (53%) of respondents recognised this as a benefit. The implications of this for relieving financial pressures are clear given the cost of printing across the year.

However, agreement was lowest when it came to saving time. Only 40% agreed e-learning reduces the number of teaching resources tutors need to make, and 31% agreed that it helps them cut down on lesson planning time. Interestingly, the survey also showed that those using e-learning on average deliver more hours of lessons a week (63% deliver more than 6 hours compared to 48% overall)[15] and so it perhaps stands to reason that they need more time to prepare for these lessons. When we consider that for both these measures the largest proportion of respondents did not have an opinion on whether or not e-learning helps (reducing volume of teaching resources, 41%; cutting down on planning time, 50%), we can see that it may indeed be due to the relative additional planning and preparation that is required due to additional teaching time, rather than the e-learning platform requiring more preparation to use.

We also showed respondents a second set of statements relating to the benefits we felt e-learning can bring based on results seen after usage. Figure 4.3 below illustrates how much they agreed with each of these.

Figure 4.3: E-learning Results



QUESTION: Here are some statements people have said about the results of e-learning. How much do you agree or disagree with each one from your own experience? (Base = all who use e-learning; n=32)

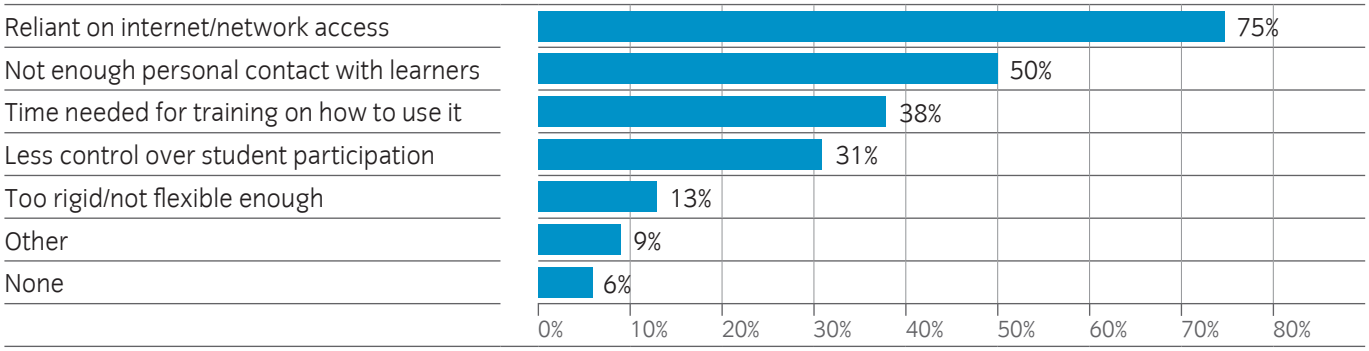
15 QUESTION: How much time per week do you spend on average on the following activities? (Base = all respondents; n=118

As we can see, communication through online discussions is polarising. While almost a third (32%) agree that e-learning improves communication with students (and 13% strongly agree with this, the strongest level of agreement across all potential benefits), the same proportion (31%) disagree with this statement. We see the same with improving creativity and sharing through online discussions: 25% agree with this, while 25% disagree. This may be down to the subjects they are used for, the tools themselves or just tutor preference. However, previous research conducted by City & Guilds has indicated the necessity for digital resources such as e-learning to complement and thus enhance face-to-face learning, rather than replace it altogether.[16]

What we may be seeing in these results, therefore, is just this – that depending on how it is used, e-learning can enhance communication and sharing, but that it may not always be appropriate. Finally, rather surprisingly, given the relatively positive responses to the previous statements around encouraging independent learning and learner participation, and bringing training to life, respondents weren't so enthusiastic about the success e-learning could bring, with only 33% agreeing that it can improve the success rates of learners. Perhaps, again this is showing that whilst e-learning can enhance the learning experience, it won't necessarily improve learner success on it's own.

So what are the recognised drawbacks to e-learning? Figure 4.4 below illustrates these according to our respondents.

Figure 4.4: Drawbacks to E-learning



QUESTION: What drawbacks, if any, are there to using e-learning programmes? (Base = all who use e-learning; n=32)

16 Culture, Coaching and Collaboration report, City & Guilds, February 2014 http://www.cityandguilds.com/news/February-2014/unlocking-potential-of-digital-for-learning#.VDvUCfldU9Y

As with e-portfolios, the main drawback to e-learning was perceived to be the reliance on the internet to deliver it (75%), highlighting the degree of opportunity for making platforms that are available offline or via mobile devices. However, for half of users, the lack of personal contact with learners was also seen as a key drawback, again highlighting the fact e-learning is most beneficial when it's used in a blended environment.

Time for training in how to use e-learning tools was also recognised as a potential drawback by 38% of staff. When we look at results from other areas of the survey, we can see that those who were using e-learning tools were more likely to say that lack of time for CPD was a key challenge in their day (56%) and this was in fact identified as the biggest challenge overall for this cohort.[17] This reflects what we already know about the recognised need for more training relating to using digital resources; as these respondents are using more digital resources, they recognise an increased need for CPD, and, given their busy teaching schedule, they find allowing time for this an even bigger challenge. However, through allowing more time for CPD around these kinds of things, it may be possible to address other perceived issues such as the lack of personal contact, by teaching staff how to get the best from e-learning as a complement to face-to-face delivery.

What all these results indicate is that, while e-learning can be highly beneficial when it comes to accessibility, student engagement and encouraging independent learning, it is key to introduce it alongside effective CPD that allows teachers and trainers to understand how they can use it to its best advantage. As with e-portfolio usage, it has the potential to significantly reduce the financial burden on training provider organisations, and can also help address some of the other day-to-day issues such as resource access.

'From the quality point of view I would like to implement more e-learning to enhance our provision and give the learners more choice in a cost effective way.'

– Quality Manager, e-learning user

17 QUESTION: Which of the following challenges, if any, are you facing in your day to day role? (Base: all respondents; n=118)

4 CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that training provider organisations are facing a wide range of issues day-to-day that make their jobs a challenge, and this is particularly the case for independent providers where funding streams have been lessened or cut and competition from larger FE colleges is strong. The financial burden is significant, and this has a wider impact on the level of access operational staff can get to all kinds of resources that could help ease some of the burden, freeing up more time for tutors to keep up to date, source the best learning materials and attend training themselves.

Resources such as e-portfolios and e-learning tools can offer relative support to staff in training providers and work-based learning units. It can be argued that they are a cost-saving and time-efficient solution to dealing with a number of the issues faced on a daily basis. Furthermore, many believe they have a positive impact on student engagement, feedback and independent learning, which have huge potential implications in relation to maintaining quality standards for Ofsted requirements, particularly in light of recent changes to the amount of delivery that needs to be digital. As previous research has highlighted they are not intended to replace the face-to-face contact that tutors have with learners, but rather to complement this by offering more options for learning and greater possibilities for accessing necessary resources and information.

However, the challenge still remains of ensuring consistent access to these resources across departments within organisations. Developments such as mobile apps from which to access platforms can help to address that issue to a degree, as can training to address any lack in understanding or knowledge of how they can be used across all subject areas. But the opportunity exists to encourage wider usage of tools such as this for the benefit of the FE sector as a whole, not just individual providers, and the potential is there for both these kinds of platforms to work together to provide a better support overall.

> 'I feel with the use of e-portfolios and e-learning this will enable my learners to access support resources easier.'
>
> – Trainer/ Assessor

> 'An e-learning package with training included would be good. [And] it would cut out the time needed to research and update information if the learners could access the information they needed all through the e-portfolio.'
>
> – Trainer/ Assessor/ Internal Verifier

Despite all this, City & Guilds recognise that the digital technologies referenced in this report can contribute to helping training provider organisations maintain quality whilst still saving money but are far from being the whole solution. There are a great number of interventions available, including consultancy services that City & Guilds offer, such as **Advance**, that can and should be considered alongside the services explored in this report.

As stated at the beginning of this report, City & Guilds will be using the findings to inform the development of its Grow Your Business offer.

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