



JISC RSC Scotland South & West Case Study @South Lanarkshire College

A cross college approach to provide free enabling technologies to all staff and students

Podcast Transcripts - Managers and Support for Learning at South Lanarkshire College

Margaret McKay: Hello my name is Margaret McKay and I am the inclusion advisor at the JISC RSC Scotland South & West. This morning I am at South Lanarkshire College with Anne Hefferman, Head of Faculty; Elaine Rodgers Curriculum Manager Support for Learning and Lorraine Cochrane who is a lecturer at the college. This discussion looks at MyStudyBar and its developments in SLC.

How did the college start looking at MyStudyBar at the College.

Anne Hefferman: Lorraine has been instrumental in this. She had been at a training session delivered by Margaret McKay at JISC JISC RSC Scotland South & West and came back enthused by it. She felt that this could be a great benefit to all students in the college. In order to make it accessible for students we had to sell it to members of staff, if staff became enthusiastic about it and realize the benefits of it then the students would very quickly be able to access and make use of it.

We agreed amongst us and took the idea to the management team and it was agreed that MyStudyBar could be put on the college network in that way it would be accessible to all the staff and the students in the college

Margaret McKay: So it was very much a strategic decision?

Anne Hefferman: Well it was brought in initially by Lorraine lecturers and then went upstairs to get agreement so it was strategic at that point.

Elaine Rodgers: We did pilot it for a while in the support for learning department to check that it was compatible with the college network before it was spread out across the college and by that point we had SMT support.

Margaret McKay: I guess the idea was the tutors being the conduit was important?

Anne Hefferman: Yes unless the lecturers were enthusiastic we would have struggled a bit more. MyStudyBar would have probably have been seen as only a software for the learning support area and we were anxious that it was not seen that way but instead for all learners. Initial enthusiasm was for the mind maps as a lot of staff had previously used mind-mapping software which started the interest and it progressed from there since a lot of staff have used mind maps extensively.

Margaret McKay: What is the South Lanarkshire College policy in using technology to enhance learning and teaching?

Anne Hefferman: It is one of the main aims of the college, we don't have any chalkboards or OHPs in the new college building and this was a conscious decision. We use smart boards and interactive whiteboards in all areas whether it is a salon or a workshop or a classroom and we are always looking at technology to keep up to date to pass on absolutely the best available software for our students.

Lorraine Cochrane: Finding a piece of software within the suite of software was an important factor that would appeal particularly to staff. A lot of staff were used to mind mapping but perhaps not specifically mind mapping software because there were limited licenses, however by putting a piece of software that staff were familiar with on the network and making it available for them sold the package and made the other pieces in the suite available.

Margaret McKay: So the mind mapping software was the hook?

Lorraine Cochrane: Absolutely! There were other mind mapping software packages available (mind manager, mind genius, inspiration) but the policy to make it universally available, and the fact that it was available on every desktop via the network and not just cascading through pen drives was important. Every time anyone logs on it is there on the desktop

And students are curious and if they see the software sitting on their desktop they will dip into it. If someone did not have their pen drive with them the software is always there on the desktop.

Margaret McKay: How effective has MyStudyBar been in assisting students who receive support for learning on their course at the college?

Elaine Rodgers: It has been excellent, particularly for student applying for Disabled Students Allowance, this year we have been recommending that they use MyStudyBar instead of Texthelp read and Write Gold software and other technologies they would have used and we have discussed this with students.

For example with a dyslexic student, often the educational psychologist would have recommend Text Help Read and Write Gold and we have also shown them MyStudyBar and virtually every student we have assessed have indicated that they are happy with MyStudyBar and found it easier to use and that it met all their requirements. It means therefore that we did not need to go ahead and put forward a proposal to access commercial software when there was a free alternative which is also a good money saving strategy too.

Margaret McKay: How do you feel that the applications compare with the commercial alternatives?

Elaine Rodgers: I think that MyStudyBar applications much easier to use, and students often pick it up in shorter periods of time. With a couple of hours of training and the online tutorials are great and students can revisit. Commercial alternatives are excellent but are often more complicated and need longer training and often there are components that students do not use. MyStudyBar has extracted the bits that are useful and that has made it easier to use and students don't need to be bogged down with the additional bits of the commercial packages.

Lorraine Cochrane: I think also the development of this initiative in the colleges was significant. When Margaret first introduced free software to SLC two or three years ago when it was first Access Apps which was a very valuable suite of software but quite daunting and with MyStudyBar had picking the most useful software which the majority of students might use and also with the hook of mind mapping software and the fact that xMind mind mapping software on MyStudyBar was a better tool than the Freemind software which was on the original AccessApps. xMind was easier to use and looked a lot like some of the commercial software.

South Lanarkshire College is constantly upgrading its software and now with V3 of MyStudyBar where you can hook in to the voice recognition software in Windows 7 some of the students will use the built in voice recognition instead of Dragon Naturally Speaking.

Some students will require the extra functions provided on the commercially available alternatives but as Elaine said, many of our students are quite happy with the programmes in MyStudyBar.

Margaret McKay: One of the lecturers in the earlier podcast talked about the gap between students disclosing or identifying a support need and making the decision to receive support for learning. It was at that point that this lecturer would raise awareness of the MyStudyBar resource indicating that this member of staff in South Lanarkshire College demonstrated the ability to help find solutions for students was empowered in being inclusive in the delivery of their teaching and learning.

Margaret McKay: What about students who don't have barriers to learning or identified barriers to learning?

Lorraine Cochrane: This is the most important thing, anytime you have a resource that is identified with a group of people is a negative thing. With a new class I show them the software and tell them that this is software where everyone can at least use one of the programmes and some people will use other programmes.

Even using something like Orato for proof reading because students don't proof read effectively, so to use Orato proof read before you hand something in. I sometimes use it to proof read emails just to check that the tone is right and also for different learning styles with Balabolka and if students prefer to hear things, or who spend time on buses or don't have ready access to a computer they can download and listen on their MP3s or listen on their phones. We really have to push that this is a resource for all students.

This means that staff who are supporting students with additional support needs can support those students. WE still have a long way to go and are just at the beginning of really trying to encourage most students at some time to use it.

I guess also lecturers using the tools to enhance the way they teach and deliver their learning and teaching with the magnifier or VU Bar.

Margaret McKay: Any advice for institutions embarking on using MyStudyBar?

Elaine Rodgers: Get the support from the top to begin with, and we used the hook of the mind map because we knew that our deputy principal was very much in to mind mapping, that got our SMT involved and then it comes down through the system. It you get it onto the network rather than just individual pen drives definitely makes a difference.

You need to make the staff aware, we did sessions at faculty meetings and after that our learning support staff did short demonstrations with to class groups.

If you get staff on board then they will get students on board. It is a bit of an uphill struggle because until people find a use that they have for it they may not get on board and as soon as they find a use to them they then disseminate, and word of mouth is a powerful tool.

Lorraine Cochran: We also incorporate awareness raising into staff development and CPD and provide staff with the opportunity to learn about it. Staff are also very busy and are bombarded with lots of initiatives and resource and particularly with technology, it can seem quite daunting to learn something new and staff need time to play with the software at staff developments opportunities.

South Lanarkshire College will try to give staff the opportunities to investigate and become familiar and cascade to students particularly at induction where students can be introduced to MyStudyBar.

Anne Hefferman: It will also be included in staff development days to learn more about MyStudyBar and hear how other staff colleagues have used this resource.