

JISC

Effective Practice with e-Learning

An abstract digital illustration featuring a stack of playing cards, including the Ace of Hearts and Ace of Spades, overlaid with various geometric shapes like circles and lines. The color palette is dominated by blues, purples, and oranges, creating a modern, tech-oriented aesthetic.

Case Studies

Visualise and present concepts

Abingdon and Witney College

Visualise and present concepts

What is the intended outcome?

Learners present information effectively and can visualise the relationships between concepts.

What is established practice?

- Learners are asked to present their conceptual understanding in written and oral assignments
- Practitioners give feedback on learners' conceptual understanding and on their presentation of information
- Learners improve their skills by practice

What advantages can e-learning bring?

- Use of mind-mapping software can help learners to visualise the relationships between concepts and to structure lines of argument
- Use of assistive software can assist learners with planning and presenting assignments effectively
- Functions within this software can deliver individualised learning support

Presenting your learning

Abingdon and Witney College

Background

Abingdon and Witney College serves learners from across South and West Oxfordshire. The College offers a range of academic and vocational courses to learners whose ages range from 16 to adult returners.

The challenge

Learning difficulties can prevent learners from achieving their potential, affecting retention and achievement. These range from poor language skills, note-taking or comprehension skills, to dyslexia. Some learning difficulties may not have been previously diagnosed, or are deliberately hidden by learners to avoid being stigmatised. It is vital to identify such problems at the outset of a course and to provide appropriate support.

The e-learning advantage

The approach followed at Abingdon and Witney College is that 'e-learning starts with the tools to learn how to learn'. Ellen Lessner, ILT Development Co-ordinator at the College, has ensured that assistive software is as widely available as possible on both student and staff desktops. All learners are introduced to its role and purpose during induction to make its use a standard part of college experience. In this way, assistive software becomes a mainstream application for all learners, whatever their age or level of ability. Two examples of assistive software used at Abingdon and Witney are textHELP Read & Write and Inspiration®.

textHELP Read & Write combats learning or literacy difficulties with facilities such as text read-back, phonetic spell-checking and word prediction. The ability to select text read-back in a variety of voice types, speed and pitch

“Embedding the assistive software as a common learning aid for all has been the key to its success in improving learning.”

Ellen Lessner, ILT Development Co-ordinator, Abingdon and Witney College.

allows each learner to set their own preferences. Using headphones, they can select a document such as a web page, see words highlighted and hear them read back. When applied to their own writing, this can help to correct errors and improve expression.

Inspiration® is an example of mind-mapping software which presents information and ideas graphically. Mapping diagrams are used to visually highlight relationships and dependencies. This assists learners in building up relationships and associations to support an understanding of written structures and mental concepts. The learner can control elements such as colour, font and graphics for themselves, building up a map of what they want to say.

Key points for effective practice

- A key element of the approach at Abingdon and Witney College is to make assistive software available across the College as a common learning aid for all, using the whole site licence available for textHELP Read & Write and purchasing licences for Inspiration® for student desktops.
- This approach is justified by the rapid identification of learning difficulties, which enables learners to be more effectively supported.
- Ensuring the software is embedded and ready for use at the start of the academic year makes assistive software a natural learning aid for all.

Final word

While many institutions have similar software, it is often used as a specialist solution to specific learning problems. At Abingdon and Witney College, imaginative use of the software has demonstrated the potential for a wider application, particularly in identifying individual learning style preferences which can maximise learning potential, whatever the level of ability.

