

Case study

Technology and CPD

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New tools of the mind for learning and skills instructors

Carillion plc is one of the UK's leading support services and construction companies, employing around 50,000 people. Its training arm, Carillion Training Services, has a portfolio that includes 18 centres around the country, serving more than 2,000 learners. Bill Saunders has been with Carillion for 16 years and is one of three learning and development managers responsible for helping 100 or so instructors with their professional development. He invested two years doing his Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS), and completed the Professional Formation process with the Institute for Learning (IfL) in December 2009. He is also a qualified Subject Learning Coach and an IfL Volunteer Connection.

Many of our instructors are in their 50s or 60s, expert tradesmen and craftsmen who worked in their particular trade for 30 or 40 years or more before becoming full-time trainers. This is typically their second or even third career. Their learners, in the main, are apprentices related to various trade disciplines, such as bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, who are doing level 1, 2 or 3 qualifications.

Ensuring that our instructors are comfortable and effective in their use of information and communications technologies (ICT) and reflective practice has been a stimulating challenge for us all. Like other teachers and trainers throughout the learning and skills sector, they need to be members of IfL and undertake continuing professional development (CPD).



In this respect, we are showing them how to get the best out of REfLECT – the online personal learning space provided by IfL for its members – as an e-portfolio for recording and sharing their CPD.

For the past two-and-a-half years, I have been running four half-day good practice workshops a year for the instructors at each of the centres I support. The topics are agreed with the instructors, by consensus, to ensure that we address the subjects they perceive at the time to be most relevant for their professional practice and CPD, as well as a range of important initial teacher training (ITT) issues.

To help boost their confidence in using ICT, we do sessions covering products like Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and REfLECT. Our instructors tend to be active-kinetic learners, so all the sessions are interactive, to reinforce learning and to ensure understanding of the information.

I was trained as an IfL Volunteer Connection at the start, when the scheme was first introduced, so I can show our instructors how to use REfLECT to record their CPD, as well as a range of other IfL materials and resources.

We have access to a spectrum of ICT equipment and online tools, including laptops, personal computers, data projectors, visualiser units and interactive whiteboards. We also have modular resources from IfL and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), such as the Motivational Dialogue package, which we have trained on.

My approach is to identify good and engaged instructor learners within my centres and to encourage them further, give them one-to-one coaching sessions and enhanced access to resources. I then ask them to provide inputs for the workshops, support me in some of the sessions, and make themselves available to help instructor colleagues at their centre. I am also seeking enhanced status and resources for the good practice role models in each of my centres.

This train-the-trainer approach has resulted in very proactive workshop sessions. Those who were somewhat slower at grasping the ICT side of things found that by talking to their colleagues they were able to understand how ICT could be used in their day-to-day work. Singling out and encouraging capable individuals meant that I could create a community of practice where there were more people capable of answering the frequently asked questions.

In carrying out these workshops and running the training, I am sharing the fruits of my own professional development with the instructors. Over the years, a clear body of evidence has been gathered from doing 86 or so observations of teaching and learning (OTLs) – at least two a year for each instructor – of a greater and more effective deployment of a range of ICT resources and material sourced from IfL and LSIS, amongst others.

Parallel to this is a notable trend improvement in the overall OTL results, matched by feedback from learners that they appreciate their instructors' improved deployment of ICT, which further encourages the instructors. I am careful to point out regularly that the use of ICT does not guarantee them improved OTL results: it is one important tool in their instructors' toolbox. It is vital that we maintain through regular practice a wide range of teaching strategies and pedagogic means; this includes the good usage of such things as overhead projectors and flipcharts.

A significant number of instructors, especially the older ones, continue to be ICT-averse, in varying degrees. My advice is not to browbeat them. Be patient, try to understand their difficulties and encourage small, incremental steps to inspire personal progress and achievements. Highlight the distance travelled and value added by each person – strengthen the weak and encourage the timid wherever possible. It is also important to recognise the fear that gnaws away at many instructor-learners. Given sustained support, resources and time, I have seen this fear subsiding when people realise humbly that one of the greatest assets they bring to their role as an instructor is to be teachable and a good learner in their own right.

These qualities are a sure mark of a developing personality at any age.

The requirement for teachers and trainers new to the sector from 2007 to be qualified and gain professional status will ultimately raise the standard, and everyone will be expected to be at that level, whether or not they fall within the scope of the new regulations. It is natural that some instructors should feel apprehensive about that. Having good working relationships with our instructors does help drive out their anxieties, inspiring them to have a go themselves at learning new things. It is a joy to see trust and confidence growing in individuals as they mine truths for themselves with these new ICT tools-of-the-mind like REfLECT. As the saying goes, “He who never makes a mistake, never made anything”.

The good practice workshops are proving increasingly effective because they are active learning events, rather than classroom teaching ones. The instructors value these creative learning spaces carved out of their large and diverse workload time and a high number of contact hours with their learners.

Reflective practice and using REfLECT helps the instructors to understand what they have done and how they achieved it, as well as capture all their data. In the next few years, work will increasingly be held electronically in webfolios, and the ability to use them from the outset will be essential.

Over time, it is expected that the roll-out of professional status for teachers in the learning and skills sector will bring down the average age of our instructor workforce. It is important for their mutual benefit that training should be effective and useful for both current and future instructors, and that it should play its part in ensuring that the sector’s instructors are fit for purpose and comfortable in the increasingly ICT-orientated Web 2.0 world in which many of their students flourish.

In the next few years, it will probably become mandatory for learners and instructors alike to use more ICT – e-portfolios, e-learning journals, and so forth. I am currently working with an in-house focus group and providers of e-portfolios to adopt a system that works best for the company, learners and instructor-assessors. REfLECT is already being used and for this reason is being considered within the context of this wider company project.

This whole instructor learning journey is a real adventure of not only seeking to make new discoveries and skills really count in our teaching practice; but also of seeing old discoveries through new “ICT eyes”. We in the learning and skills sector really are being challenged and supported to enhance our instructor competencies with teachers’ vocational skills. This is proving to those who go with the flow to be a really fruitful ‘migration of the mindset’ – I say, “Long may it continue”.

IfL and Becta working together

One of IfL’s strategies for continuing professional development (CPD) is to promote the use of technology to support professional development.

We encourage members to develop their knowledge and skills as reflective practitioners through planning, recording and assessing the impact of learning using REfLECT.

We are working in partnership with Becta on a research project to help boost our members’ skills in using REfLECT and new technologies to support their professional development. This case study is one of six produced as part of the project.

See www.ifl.ac.uk/cpd/ifl-and-becta-supporting-the-workforce-project for more information.

REFLECT

IfL members are given a free and flexible online tool, developed by teachers for teachers, to help them manage their CPD.

REFLECT provides a personalised learning space where members can reflect on their professional practice and record the many and varied CPD activities undertaken to enhance their teaching. Members can choose to keep all records private if they wish, or can selectively share them with peers, mentors and managers. CPD activity records can be linked quickly and easily to an annual CPD record for submission to IfL if desired.

When records or assets are shared, the user may give others permission to view, comment, copy or collaborate. Permission to share may be time-limited, or rescinded at any time. Comments may be added to shared assets in the form of a professional conversation.

REFLECT can be set up so that entries automatically populate the CPD record. As more entries are added throughout the year, the system will automatically recalculate the number of hours' CPD completed.

REFLECT also gives IfL members a number of easy-to-use utilities that can be used to support teaching and learning, such as a simple blogging tool, web page builder and the facility to create multiple e-portfolios. It complements a provider's virtual learning environment (VLE), and individual members may use REFLECT however they choose, at any time and from any computer with internet access.

REFLECT Mobile gives members access to a very simple version of REFLECT via the browser on any mobile device, allowing them to manage their professional development on the move.



This is one of six case studies produced by the Institute for Learning (IfL) and Becta in March 2010 to help identify the barriers and challenges that members face in capturing CPD.

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