

Case study

Technology and CPD

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How to fit a quart into a pint bottle

Offender learning practitioners often work in challenging and isolated conditions. Like teachers in many other parts of the lifelong learning sector, they have to meet a range of very diverse needs, but the prison and offender education context presents a number of further challenges and constraints, related to teaching in a secure environment. Nick Marshall, IT curriculum team leader at Dover Immigration Removal Centre, explains how 15 teaching staff with limited internet access are recording their continuing professional development (CPD).

I work in an education department at the Dover Immigration Removal Centre, which is run by the Prison Service. The department has only two computers that can connect to the internet, one of which is used almost continually to input data. That leaves only one computer to be shared by all 15 teaching staff.

Using the normal REFLECT program from the Institute for Learning (IfL) to input asset data was taking a long time, because the computers could really be used only during the lunch break, which is a busy time on the system, and REFLECT ran slowly. Many of the teachers became disillusioned with keeping their CPD data on REFLECT.

In November 2008, I went on an IfL course, and saw how quick and easy it was to enter CPD data using REFLECT Mobile.

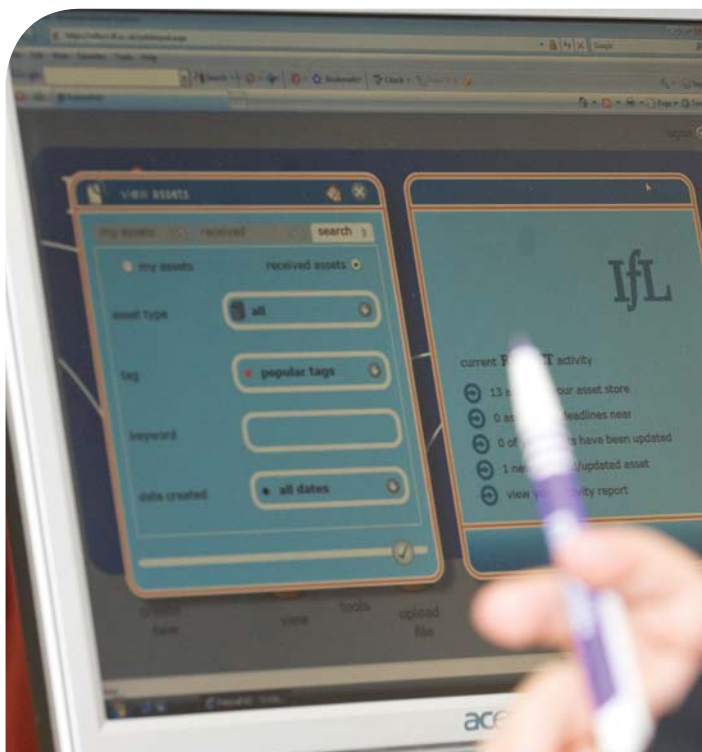
Having learned how to use the system myself, I was able to show our teachers how to use it for entering their own CPD.

It really sped up the data entry, because all the information required is presented in an on-screen form and displayed at once, whereas with the PC version, teachers were accustomed to waiting for REFLECT's graphical user interface to refresh.



“I am really pleased that my staff have a quick method of initially recording their CPD by using REFLECT Mobile. As we have very limited access to the internet at work, any method that encourages and enables them to record their CPD using work computers is appreciated.”

Janet Defrémont, Education Manager
Dover Immigration Removal Centre



The education centre at Dover Immigration Removal Centre.

The only drawback to this quick data entry method is that it is not possible to add a tag. When I was helping the teachers set up their second password and taking them through entering their own CPD, I always made a point of reminding them that they would need to revisit REFLECT via a computer to reflect upon their activity, and that they could tag the CPD then.

By showing them a quicker way of initially entering data, I hoped to encourage the teachers to use REFLECT to record their CPD. My challenge was to overcome inertia. The two computers with internet access are used heavily, and so there was a real need to find a quicker method of entering the initial data. Using REFLECT Mobile meant that the teacher could return at their leisure, either on their own computer or on one of ours, to reflect on their activity and set the tags.

The outcome of the exercise has proved to be more positive than I had hoped. I have succeeded in persuading teachers to use REFLECT, as it is much quicker to add activities and so on using this method.

The teachers appreciate the fact that more than one of them can add activities in the time available. They welcome the timesaving and that they no longer have any one teacher 'hogging' the computer for the whole of the lunchtime. The manager is happy that more teachers have more access to add to their CPD record during their lunchtime.

As the data is filled in on an on-screen form, rather than constantly being sent to and from the IfL server, we experienced no real problems. Once the teachers were used to the fact that the boxes were a fixed size, because they are designed for use on a mobile phone or PDA [personal digital assistant], they were quite happy. It was suggested to IfL that the three common tags – Establishment, Training and Subject – could be added here.

Of the seven teachers I showed how to use REFLECT Mobile, five of them are using it. They have been on a learning curve together, sharing their learning with each other and finding out how to save time recording their CPD.



The art room at Dover Immigration Removal Centre.

The others prefer to log their CPD at home in their own time. I would like to get all 15 teachers using REfLECT Mobile as a matter of course, which will depend on my getting them all access to the computers with internet connections; only a third or so of them currently do.

I also hope to be able to get the teachers to add their activity as soon as they have finished training on the Establishment. For example, if they do Fire training in the morning, they add the activity at lunchtime and reflect upon it when they get home.

Using REfLECT Mobile has made a real difference to me too. My internet connection at home is via a dial-up, and therefore too slow, so I had to go to my local library, where I am allowed only one hour at a time. This does not allow enough time for entering all the CPD details and reflecting.

These days, I use REfLECT Mobile to enter the CPD details as I go, and then use the PC and internet just to reflect on and tag the activities, all in one go. This takes about an hour.



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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