

HOLEX Learning Technologies Support Pilot Programme – Sep 15

Executive Summary

The HOLEX Learning Technologies Support pilot programme (March - August 2015) aimed to provide members with support in line with the FELTAG recommendations, with a particular focus on horizon-scanning; workforce capacity development, and empowering learners. This multifaceted project was founded on the establishment of a network of Learning Technology Leads, providing a direct route into organisations to deliver information and continual professional development. The Learning Technology Leads were supported through an e-group, Twitter feed, Blog, series of Webinars and Exchange Events.

Other existing HOLEX e-groups were used to disseminate technology-related information, highlight CPD opportunities and respond to queries. The Blog and Twitter feed was public and accessible to anyone and, although Learning Technology Leads were the primary target for four of the webinars, webinars were recorded so that Leads could signpost colleagues within their organisation to them. Exchange Events were also held, and a series of case studies and supporting papers generated.

The **objectives** of the project, with associated throughout/output targets, were to:

- develop a network of Learning Technology Leads (LTL) across the HOLEX network;
- develop mechanisms for sharing best practice, support, ideas and resources;
- provide support to leaders/senior managers to enable them to gain a genuine understanding of how technology and on-line/blended learning can work for learners in their organisations; and
- work on behalf of Community Learning and Skills providers, in an advocacy role, to ensure their voice is heard.

All objectives were met and targets fulfilled, albeit to a lesser extent in two cases.

1.1 Background

HOLEX, the national network of Adult Community Learning and Skills providers, has not historically sought to support members in their development of learning technologies, believing this space to have been adequately filled by other national initiatives. The FELTAG report, government response to it and various ETF-funded initiatives however elevated the importance of developing HOLEX members' capacity both to offer learning fully on-line, and to enhance existing programmes by increasing the incidence of "blended learning" approaches.

Over the summer 2014 HOLEX commissioned Coralesce Ltd to assess HOLEX members' readiness to address the FELTAG agenda. Their report identified a sector that "recognises the importance of learning technology but rates its performance as needing to improve". Informed by this research, HOLEX secured funding from Jisc to pilot on-the-ground support for members, and the Ideas4Learning consultancy were commissioned to develop and implement a six-month work plan to deliver a range of support activities and generate a series of outputs. As a result of this work, the following **project outputs** have been achieved:

- a network of Learning Technology Leads has been established with 64 members from 50 provider organisations, and is supported through a HOLEX e-group;
- numerous contributions have been made to other HOLEX e-groups to disseminate technology related information, highlight CPD opportunities or respond to queries;
- a HOLEX Twitter account has been created and is being used;
- 20+ posts have been written on a learning technologies blog established for this purpose;

- 4 case studies have been written that share good practice;
- 3 exchange events (skills, resources and practice) have been held, in various regions, attracting some 49 participants, from 30 organisations, in total;
- 5 webinars have been held (one for managers, four for learning technology leads), and were heavily over-subscribed but recordings are available;
- 15 instances of direct, tailored support (face-to-face meetings, via telephone, or virtually) have been delivered to provider organisations, selected against agreed criteria;
- learning technologies leads have been signposted to Coralesce self-assessment tools and other self-assessment practices.

Additionally, the I4L team have made inputs at HOLEX Network events, have participated in national policy meetings on behalf of HOLEX, and have liaised with national organisations.

1.2 Evaluation findings

Learning Technology Leads:

The network of Learning Technology Leads was established through the creation of a Yahoo e-Group. This continues to grow in membership every month, and the incidence of inter-provider messaging to share information is increasing. In total there have been 145 messages posted, with 46% of the posts from provider organisations. The posts show that the e-group is relevant to its purpose; contributing providers are sharing practice, information, asking for and giving support.

The e-group is showing that it is developing into a sustainable community of practice, although it still has some way to go. Not all HOLEX providers have managed to access the e-group, and many of those who have joined do not actively contribute to the discussions. Research shows that this takes time to develop, and that people need to feel comfortable within a group before participating. This implies that HOLEX will need to draw on its Joint Learning Technology Theme Leads to act as “stimulators” of e-group messaging for some time to come.

Blog Posts:

Between March and mid-August there were 24 Blog posts. These generated 845 views from 340 visitors. The blog posts covered a wide range of topics, and have provided an excellent way to share practice, inform, signpost and offer new ideas, especially when combined with access to the e-group for private discussions related to the topics raised.

“Please keep up the blog with ideas on new tools and examples of how people are using the ones you have already highlighted.”

The interest in the blogs has shown a rapid growth in the latter part of the project, where regular sharing practice posts have been published. The blog posts have all been written by Ideas4Learning, with half of them sharing provider practice: providers were invited to submit posts, but none were forthcoming. A commitment to blog writing is required in order to ensure it continues; again, the Learning Technology Theme Leads could be encouraged to play a role here.

Case Studies:

Four case studies have been written that share good practice:

- Google Apps for Education (GAPE)
- Blended and Online Learning
- The OFSTED Experience
- From Good to Outstanding.

These have stimulated local development work. For example, the Google Apps for Education case study spurred inter-provider connections, and three HOLEX member organisations have

subsequently been bought together to form a GAFE Support Group, the two with experience offering support to the third through the GAFE application process and its implementation as a VLE. As a result of this mutual support, the provider is going to move from Moodle to Google during 2015/16.

“Our next step is to improve our Intranet and stimulate tutors to use GAFE more in conjunction with what we already have, and to make more use of newer technologies in the areas of Maths and English that were identified as in need of improvement.”

Bespoke Support:

Fifteen enquiries for bespoke support were received from HOLEX providers, and 14 received help. Types of support varied, and included VLE support, engaging reluctant staff, Digital Learning Strategies, eILPs, preparing for OFSTED, staff development and use of learning technologies for specific curriculum areas.

“It was very useful to be able to use the HOLEX Technology Support programme to enhance the changes to our Quality System that we had already started. It was also useful to link this with the development of skills for our tutors (especially those who have not been confident about using new technology).”

The fourteen providers who received customised support represent just 13% of HOLEX member organisations. Many of the organisations had more than one area where they wished to be supported, but time limits meant providers were encouraged to focus on their main priority area. These factors combine to suggest there may well be further need for customised support amongst HOLEX member organisations.

Webinars:

Five webinars were held (one to Managers, four to Learning Technology Leads) between May and June, each with a different focus:

- Developing your Digital Learning Strategy
- Assistive Technology
- FELTAG 4 Ways
- Learning – there’s an App for that
- Staff Development.

Rapid registration onto these events demonstrated this as being an appropriate support method, while views of recorded webinars add to the evidence that this is a popular and effective medium. During webinars providers were willing to share practice, ask questions and give answers. The manager-focused session ‘Digital Learning Strategy’ generated a follow-on discussion on the e-group and a sharing of ideas, with four providers sharing their strategy documents. Evaluation feedback indicates the webinars were highly appreciated, and of direct use.

“This was one of the best webinars I’ve attend in a long while. To the point and well presented, without too many speakers” .

Exchange Events:

Three free-to-attend Exchange Events (skills, resources and practice) were held in London, Wolverhampton and Newcastle. The project did not achieve its target numbers for these events: potential reasons cited for this include as travel costs, time availability of staff members, and budget constraints relating to training pay and/or teacher cover costs.

The Events each provided an opportunity for delegates to share skills, resources and practice; to invigorate local networks; and to provide CPD, including assistive technologies. Summary feedback on Exchange Events from the 47 delegates who returned forms is highly positive:

	outstanding	good
Programme structure/activities	24 (51.06%)	23 (48.94%)
Relevance of topics covered	25 (53.19%)	22 (46.81%)

All participants at each event stated they had gained from the sessions, including the ability to network with colleagues, and being able to have hands-on time with a range of technology. Several pieces of software – notably Plickers, Tellegarmi and Xerte – were rated as “favourites”; there was also strong interest in the use of Apps and how they could be used in teaching, learning and assessment. As a result of the events, several delegates developed specific action points relating to the local use of tools and/or applications, sometimes on a pilot basis in specific curriculum areas/with particular clients.

“Great ideas, practical applications and discussions.”

“Good mix of introducing different levels of tech/web apps and ‘pearls’ from people doing the show and tell”.

Other HOLEX e-groups and Twitter feed:

Contributions were made to existing HOLEX e-groups: Yahoo data show that 18 messages were posted by Holey@ideas4learning onto the main HOLEX Policy, MIS and Staff Development e-groups, disseminating a range of information. A Twitter account was set up, and used 49 times to tweet. The Twitter feed has 18 followers, 8 of whom (44%) can be identified as practitioners within HOLEX organisations. The Twitter feed has been used to quickly inform followers of blog posts, learning technology opportunities and to retweet useful posts by others. The Learning Technology Theme Leads, LTLs and HOLEX staff could continue to make use of the HOLEXTechLearn Twitter feed.

1.3 Conclusions

This pilot programme, delivered in a very tight timescale, has been highly successful. It has engaged providers with support and delivered events/webinars to enhance HOLEX members’ use of digital technology. There is clear evidence of a change in local practice as a result of engagement with the programme offered via Ideas4Learning.

It is also clear from the discussions during webinars and events, from e-group messaging and from the response to published case studies that HOLEX members – and, we suspect, ACL providers more generally – continue to need to be given access to opportunities which enable them to communicate with each other in order to provide mutual support in finding solutions to the challenges they face. This pilot programme has provided the impetus for that to take place, and has laid a solid foundation. Ways need to be found to sustain and further develop the range of support offered through this pilot.

1.4 Recommendations

Taking account of the evidence available from this pilot programme, and informed by Ideas4Learning's assessment of their experience in managing a multi-dimensional programme of support in a concentrated timescale, the HOLEX National Office now recommends that:

1. Jisc should be encouraged to take note of the positive reception of this pilot programme and its evident effectiveness, and as part of their ongoing support of the FE and Skills sector give early consideration to the possibility of **commissioning a follow-on phase of support for HOLEX members**.
2. The AAETO Board should **stand ready to commission and oversee a follow-on support programme** and should seek to use the evidence generated by this pilot programme to **pursue external funding support for such a programme**, should that not be forthcoming via Jisc. We envisage any future support programme being multi-dimensional, with greater emphasis on enabling and overseeing a "buddying" approach between providers. Any follow-on programme should be **led by a suitably expert consultancy** familiar with the ACL operating context.
3. Notwithstanding the availability of a full follow-on support programme, we recommend that the AAETO Board should **consider certain small-scale but key actions which might be delivered from available internal resources**:
 - a. maintenance of the **TechLearn e-group** and the **Blog posts**
 - b. continued use of the **Twitter feed**
 - c. establishing a "**document library**" **facility within the new HOLEX website**
 - d. convening a single **face-to-face workshop event for Learning Technology Leads**, based on the Exchange Event model, to be held by March 2016.
4. We additionally recommend that the AAETO Board **consider exploring the technical requirements and costs associated with mounting HOLEX webinars**, which may cover a range of topics. Additional considerations might also be explored as an adjunct to this, including:
 - a. the potential purchase of a license for webinar software for shared use by Learning Technology Leads in HOLEX member organisations, and
 - b. the potential design and delivery of a CPD programme that equips a wider number of HOLEX member personnel to feel confident in using webinars as a vehicle.

September 2015

Executive Summary drafted by Ideas4Learning Ltd

Edited and issued by the HOLEX National Office

Report supported by JISC