



The Low Down on Individual Learning Plans

Tim Lyth is an independent education consultant, previously the Vice Principal of Carshalton College, and has worked in further education for more than 30 years. Here we talk to him about electronic individual learning plans (ILPs)...

How do ILPs benefit students?

ILPs help students to set their own goals and measure their progress towards clear improvement targets. This is a motivational force in itself and it helps ensure they achieve their potential. In order to set these goals and targets, teachers need to get to know the learners and help them to recognise their strengths and areas for improvement through initial assessments and good induction processes. All too often, teachers feel pressure to start delivering the course and they rush through this essential stage. When setting goals, it is important to take into account broader areas such as self presentation, oral and social skills, as well as academic disciplines. The tutor and student need to review these regularly to ensure it becomes an integral part of the learning process.

Don't students have a good idea about how they are performing anyway?

On good courses, they do! An effective course team will give regular feedback to learners. The benefit of a tracking system is that the performance and progress of each learner is shared across the whole teaching team so everyone gets a complete picture of the learner and it's much easier to spot students who might need additional support.

Most good colleges are now using systems like eTracker to improve the performance and success rates of their learners. The beauty of this solution is that it makes the process of drafting and revising the ILP simple and it's transparent to the learner and all the teachers and tutors involved.

Is there a growing shift towards the development of broader skills?

Thankfully, the increasing influence of employers on further education is emphasising the importance of developing broader skills. Good vocational courses, for example apprenticeships, are fully integrated with working life and employers are also engaged in assessing the wider skills of the students. But without a solution like eTracker which can be accessed remotely, it would be difficult to capture and use this information.

What is an ePortfolio? Is it just another gimmick?

An ePortfolio is simply a way of collecting and presenting evidence about the capabilities and experience of a person. It's especially relevant when reviewing someone's educational progress and attainment. It's an absolute godsend when students come to apply for a job – so I'd say it anything but a gimmick!

Is it necessary for more technology to be pushed into colleges?

Perhaps the problem here is with the phrase “pushed”. It seems to me that the truly successful colleges are the ones that have a clear vision of what is needed and why and have set their own strategy to embed the technology into the educational process. It takes great leadership to really change teaching and learning so that new technologies, such as online ILPs, can make a positive difference to everyone at the college.

Tell me a little about the ILP seminar you are involved in.

I’m looking forward to speaking at VLE Support’s seminar on ILPs in January. The seminar will draw on the experiences of colleges of using ILPs and VLE Support’s Managing Director will be demonstrating its highly successful ILP software, eTracker.

On: Wednesday 7 January 2009

At: Dominion Theatre, Tottenham Court Road, London, W1T 5AQ

From:

For more information or to register, please visit: www.vlesupport.com/seminar

VLE Support
Tel: 0845 638 4328
Email: info@vlesupport.co.uk