



JISC RSC case study

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eTracker enables personalised learning at Bromley College

Summary

Bromley College offers a diverse range of learning opportunities from A-levels, BTECs and NVQs through to Work Based Learning and Train to Gain programmes. This diversity presents a major challenge in how to monitor the performance of their learners to ensure they achieve their potential. eTracker is an electronic individual learning plan (eILP) solution that enables lecturers to take a highly personalised approach to the individual needs of their students. It enables them to identify issues early and intervene quickly - not just academic issues but also pastoral and behavioural. eTracker has been a motivating force for the students at Bromley College and it facilitates good communication across the college.

About Bromley College

Bromley College is a further education college with over 8,000 students and 600 staff. It offers a great variety of courses to help students achieve their ambitions by acquiring skills and qualifications that are highly regarded by employers. The college has several sites and its Rookery Lane campus is now in the second phase of a £20million re-development. Bromley College is proud of its partnerships with schools, universities, and local employers and the place it holds as a centre of educational excellence in the local community.

The Challenge

Bromley College had already successfully implemented a Moodle virtual learning environment. However, Moodle's tracking system for student grades was felt to be less than satisfactory and pastoral targets and monitoring was non-existent. For this, Bromley College had some clear ideas about what it required. It wanted the solution to:

- Be online so that students and lecturers can access it from anywhere.
- Have clear graphical feedback so that it would be easy to see at glance how well students are progressing towards their individual goals and motivate them to reach their potential.
- Bring together both grades and attendance records into one place.
- Support the student-lecturer interface by providing practical tools such as action plans and feedback sections and general pastoral monitoring.
- Have a section for 'cause for concern' notes

- Have good analysis tools so that lecturers can identify issues early and act on them immediately.
- Conform to RARPA principals (recognising and recording of progress and achievement).

Bromley College could not find a solution on the market that could *meet* all the above requirements, so it turned to VLE Support to help develop a new online management tool. The result was eTracker which has since been adopted by many other leading FE colleges in the UK, including John Ruskin, Southampton City College and NESCOL.

Roll-out

The College opted for a complete, cross-college roll out of eTracker to all staff in one go. However they quickly realised that to achieve the best results extensive training and support would be required throughout the first year. So Danny Hodder, Lecturer at Bromley College, was put in charge of providing an eTracker Helpdesk.

Danny said: “We found it effective to train one department at a time. It meant we could ensure that eTracker met their specific needs and requirements. We typically gave small groups of about 12 lecturers an overview of the system then let them go away and play with it for themselves. The basic system is intuitive to use, but sometimes as lecturers want to do more and then they come back to me with their queries. They are usually delighted to find that it can do exactly what they want - it has all the functionality they need. Occasionally there's something that eTracker can't do and then we decide whether it's worth developing or not.”

One such example is the traffic light system. eLights enables a student and his or her lecturer to quickly monitor their performance profile by means of a green, amber or red signal. Students are given a green light and 100 points at the beginning of each academic year. They can lose points if there is a drop-off in performance in any particular course or attendance or if a lecturer registers a cause for concern. As points are deducted, the light changes from green to amber to red. Equally, students can gain points through improved performance to get back to a green light or to see a 'Good', 'Excellent' or 'Outstanding' comment alongside their green light. Traffic lights can also be used to provide a comprehensive illustration of how a group is performing.

Danny continued: “There are some courses, such as the English as a Second Language, where there are no set assignments during the term, only one test at the end of term. This is where some creativity is required to make sure that eTracker can provide feedback on meaningful, formative assessments. The system is very flexible and can provide exactly what the lecturers and students need. Other courses, particularly the BTECS, simply love it from the word go! The students are introduced to eTracker in one of their tutorials early on in the year. Most students grasp the concept instantaneously and quickly become hooked on it.”

The outcomes

a) Early Intervention

It is important that we can spot when a student is at risk and take action as soon as possible. eTracker allows all the information the college has on the performance of students to be easily available to lecturers and personal tutors. Danny said: “Before eTracker we used paper based systems which made it hard to see what was going on, but now we can see performance immediately and take the necessary action right away.”

b) Results and motivation

Danny commented: “Unfortunately, we don’t have before and after eTracker measurements because the training was rolled out incrementally and also because there are so many factors influencing the results it would be difficult to isolate the effects of eTracker. However, we have seen good overall improvement in our course results last year and I feel that eTracker has played an important role in this success.

“The increase in motivation of the students is plain to see. It’s not uncommon to hear students complaining that their tutor hasn’t updated their marks yet – eTracker encourages them to want credit for their work and the students start driving us to use the system.”

c) Behaviour

Attendance is often closely related to retention. eTracker enables lecturers to keep track of attendance and punctuality and share this information with the students.

Danny said: “Reality and perception often differ, and having the hard facts in front of you makes it easier to address the issue with students. It also helps them to take responsibility as they can clearly see how often they are absent or late.

“eTracker has also helped curb some difficult behaviour. Previously students could hide behind the veil of anonymity because many members of staff wouldn’t know who they were. Now we have eTracker, it’s easy for member of staff to access information on a student and this helps to maintain an open and honest approach.”

d) Communication

Connexions, the government agency to provide advice and guidance to young people, has an office at the Bromley College campus. Connexions can monitor the full eTracker system, and can add notes to a student’s profile that can be seen by everyone including the student.

“This has helped enormously with communications across the college. Often students will try several routes to resolve an issue and knowing who else is involved can save time and help the process along,” commented Danny.

“Next year we will be looking at how to extend eTracker to support our work based learning courses, linking students’ work placements results with their college studies”.

Conclusion

eTracker has helped Bromley College lecturers to:

- Support students in their individual goals and create personalised learning programmes
- Monitor how well their students are progressing across most courses
- Capture pastoral as well as academic results, and curb behavioural issues
- Analyse the success of their courses as the term progresses, not just at the end of the course
- Facilitate good communication across the college.

eTracker has helped students at Bromley College to:

- Understand their learning objectives and goals
- Monitor how well they are progressing towards their goals and motivate them to achieve
- See how well they are performing in non-academic areas such as attendance and punctuality

- Receive feedback and raise issues or concerns that they may have.