Lambeth College

Area	e-testing and e-portfolios
Programmes supported	Basic and key skills levels 1 and 2
Awarding body	NCFE
Number of learners covered by this case study	40 completed tests by end May 2007 1,100 learners completed tests by end of July 2007
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Background

Lambeth College is a large, urban further education college based at a number of sites in south London. The college has a significant programme of basic and key skills (BKS) delivery, both to full- and part-time learners. To date, Lambeth has been using traditional paper-based tests at levels 1 and 2. However, last year the college embarked on a college-wide strategy to improve its BKS performance and outcomes. One element of this strategy was to move towards using online tests for learners at levels 1 and 2.

The college took the opportunity to review the overall offer from each of the BKS awarding bodies and decided to use NCFE as its online provider. The aim was to have the system installation and training completed in time to use

e-testing for the majority of learners at the end of the 2006/7 academic year.

Progress to date

The system was set up and the training completed during the early part of 2007. The first 40 learners successfully took their tests in mid-May. Between late May and July the college planned to use the system to test a further 1,100 learners.

Issues

Overall, the feedback from Lambeth was that the first set of tests had 'gone better than expected'. The college information learning technology (ILT) manager made extensive use of the guide to train staff, and the college also received awarding body training in the use of the system and access to support from its local manager, all of which helped with the smooth introduction of the system. While some staff had been concerned about the changes, most welcomed the opportunity to improve BKS outcomes and offer more flexible testing and faster results, and were reassured by the level of preparation.

While it is too early to judge changes in learner performance, results from the initial batch of learners were broadly as expected. NCFE provided practice tests and the college used other, widely available BKS practice material. Using the technology did not prove to be an issue for younger learners, but the staff still have some concerns about adult learners and their IT skills. The college will monitor issues and address them as necessary.

Lambeth has used existing IT facilities to accommodate the testing and has not, therefore, needed to undertake any significant investment specifically for this development. However, this may become an issue if volumes increase significantly and use of the system and IT facilities spreads more widely across the year.

The college will continue to use the guide as a benchmark for good practice and it is likely to be used to benchmark other e-assessment developments.

Next steps

Following this development, Lambeth is thinking about introducing e-portfolios, and other parts of the college are looking at the BKS development to see if further online testing should be introduced.