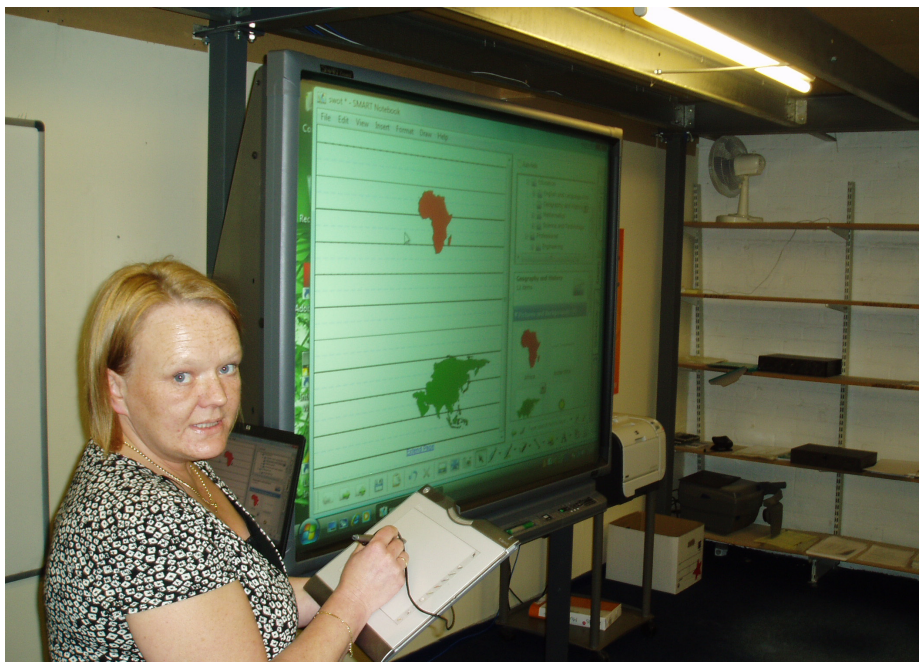# The Vocational College

## Measuring the success of student engagement

Time and time again, research and experience has shown that we have to take advantage of the way children entertain themselves today, to employ dynamic technologies for the betterment of learning outcomes. As so much of today's students' experience is shaped and surrounded by highly visual interactive activities, this has become the new currency of learning.

Faced with the challenge of being in an area with high unemployment, advanced by low post mandatory school retention and a low spread of vocational skills, The Vocational College, Liverpool set about addressing these challenges through an investment in dynamic and highly interactive technologies.

Due to its location, The Vocational College is ideally placed to offer students the Government's 'Entry 2 Employment' (E2E) programme, an initiative set up to support the success of young people in the North of England. Those living in the North of England who find it difficult to get a job are encouraged to take an apprenticeship or college place rather than being unemployed. They are treated as a 'Work Based Learner' and are therefore paid a small amount of money per week including travel expenses and a childcare allowance.

The E2E initiative helps students to achieve basic maths, English and ICT skills, work at their own pace and take assessments in manageable stages. However at the heart of the E2E programme is vocationally based training. Currently the college offers bespoke facilities for Diplomas in construction and the built environment, engineering, sport and leisure and hospitality, two of the initial five 14-19 Diplomas."The youngsters that the college recruits are from across Merseyside, Sefton, Holton, the Wirral and Liverpool," explains John McCollah, operations director, at the Vocational College. He continues: "We recruit from the top one per cent of the hardest to reach boroughs so these youngsters are particularly hard to help."

### Challenge

Faced with challenge of disengaged students, The Vocational College set about addressing these challenges through an investment in dynamic and highly interactive technologies.

### SMART solution

- SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard
- SMART Board™ 2000i rear projection interactive whiteboard
- SMART AirLiner™ wireless slate
- Senteo™ interactive response system

### Result

- 89% of students stated that they would like to see the interactive learning resources used in more sessions and more topics.
- 95% preferred the new interactive teaching style over the old non interactive whiteboards
- 86% said it improved their understanding of the subjects.

"We understood that using the latest technologies was the route to connecting these youngsters to our teaching. We recognised that we needed technologies that encouraged collaboration, interaction and involvement from the students."

The college's aim was two-fold. Firstly to increase student retention and achievement and secondly to improve their achievement of higher teaching and learning grades against the inspection framework, by at least one grade.

The college's local government Initiative Grant, set up to fund equipment for training providers, enabled the management team to invest in the latest range of collaborative learning resources from the market leader, SMART Technologies. In the first phase of investment, the college installed SMART Board interactive whiteboards, Senteo interactive response systems and an AirLiner wireless slate.

John then set up a research teaching programme to determine the effectiveness of these technologies in achieving their objectives. As a part of the programme teaching activities were delivered both with and without the technologies.

"We collated feedback from the learners and graded each session in terms of the technology used," explains John. He continues: "The whole point of the investment in the interactive technologies was to connect with the learners, especially those who did not normally willingly engage."

The second part of their investment in innovation was used to take e-learning into the working environment by installing a rear projection SMART Board so they could move the whiteboard around the college's workshops and allow interaction with the e-learning resources. In the woodwork classes the tutor can display various designs and open up discussion. The students come out and draw over the images with their own thoughts on the design, angles and alignment. 80% of students said that using the technology improved their understanding of the topic.

"The technologies have been designed to encourage the students' interaction in learning and certainly the difference in the students' perception and engagement in their learning has been astonishing," enthuses John. "The SMART Board gets the students out of their seats to directly engage with the learning, while the interactive response system is ideal for learners who don't want to openly engage in the learning but will get involved through the anonymous voting system. 86% of the students thought that using this resource helped and sustained their interest," he explains.

Fulfilling the college's other aim, students' grades have improved significantly. Most participants' grades have improved by one if not two grades. Further to this, feedback from the learners has been outstanding. 95% preferred the new interactive teaching style over the old non interactive whiteboards and 86% said it improved their understanding of the subjects.

John summarises: "The research we undertook backed up a very obvious change in the students' engagement in their learning. 89% of students stated that they would like to see the resources used in more sessions and more topics. Looking forward we want to build on what we've got; ideally we would like to put SMART equipment in every teaching space to enthuse all our students to transform their career potential."

"The research we undertook backed up a very obvious change in the students' engagement in their learning. Looking forward we want to build on what we've got; ideally we would like to put SMART equipment in every teaching space to enthuse all our students to transform their career potential."

**John McCollah,**
**Operations Director**
**The Vocational College**

## About SMART

SMART Technologies Inc. is both the industry pioneer and global education market segment leader in easy-to-use interactive whiteboards and other group collaboration tools. The award-winning SMART Board interactive whiteboard is the most widely installed interactive whiteboard in the world.

Many school jurisdictions have standardised on the product, which is used to provide interactive learning opportunities and enhance student achievement in more than 450,000 classrooms spanning every U.S. state, every Canadian province, every Local Authority in the UK and in more than 100 countries worldwide. SMART products also include interactive pen displays, interactive digital signage, wireless slates and software. Using SMART products, groups can access and share the information they need to meet, teach, train and present. SMART's education customers include New York City Board of Education (U.S.), Oxford University (UK), Kobe City Board of Education (Japan), Barnier Public School (Australia), University of Ottawa (Canada), United World College (Singapore), Stephen-Hawking-Schule Neckargemuend (Germany), Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind (U.S.) and Harvard University (U.S.).

SMART is a private company founded in 1987. Employing more than 900 people, SMART is headquartered in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, with assembly facilities in Ottawa, and offices in Bonn, Tokyo, China, New York City and Washington, DC. SMART has been issued and maintains a broad portfolio of patents with numerous U.S., Canadian and other patents pending. In 1992 SMART formed a strategic alliance with Intel® Corporation that resulted in joint product development and marketing efforts, and Intel's equity ownership in the company. SMART products are sold through dealers across North America and distributors worldwide. For more information, visit www.smarttech.com.

## About Steljes

Steljes creates opportunity for partners, customers and end users by pioneering innovative technologies that enable people to interact and communicate more effectively while working and learning.

**steljes**

**www.mysmartspaces.co.uk**

**SMART**