

## Evaluating and co-creating with 'Student Learning Developers'

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Video available at: <https://youtu.be/JGaWqtEUWAI>

### Project and outcomes

The purpose of this project was to evaluate and enhance the online academic development resources developed by learning development staff at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU). The aim of the project, that having been achieved, was to enrich the student learning experience and ultimately enhance academic development. The user-friendliness of resources was evaluated using an adaptation of the 'Think Aloud Method' (Ericsson and Simon, 1984), where students were observed using the resources while articulating their thoughts and actions. An online survey instrument was simultaneously emailed to all students to assess the content of resources. Some navigational issues (e.g. cluttered menus, inconspicuous links) and content issues (e.g. need for interactivity and content on specific topics) were subsequently identified. 'Student Learning Developers' then worked with the project team to improve existing resources and co-create new ones, so as to obviate these issues. The project team's reflections highlight the value of the Think Aloud Method in providing authentic, real-time evaluation data and in offering the potential for student partnership work to enhance the contextualisation of and student engagement with learning materials.

### Context

GCU is a post-92 institution with a strong tradition of widening access to students from non-traditional backgrounds. One of the ways the University supports student success is through its three 'Learning Development Centres' (LDCs). The overall goal of the LDCs is to enhance the student experience and improve student success. They do this by providing flexible and contextualised learning development support in such ways as embedded-in modules, one-to-one support and online support.

The LDC in the School of Health & Life Sciences (SHLS), where this project took place, serves over 6000 students, over seventy per cent of whom spend time off campus in placement. Consequently, the usability and quality of the online support mechanisms offered are extremely important.

### Aims and objectives

The online LDC community was developed by the eight-member LDC Team almost three years ago. However, how students engage with the resources and the extent of the educational utility of those were not known. Given their potential value, particularly to off-campus learners, systematic evaluation is required. The overall aim of this project was to evaluate and develop the resources, thereby enhancing the student learning experience.

The objectives were as follows:

- To identify areas for enhancement and co-creation of resources through evaluation
- To develop and co-create resources based on evaluation data
- To promote the resources and increase staff and student awareness of their availability
- To increase student engagement with the resources

## Methods / strategies

Five 'Student Learning Developers' (SLDs) were recruited to work in partnership with the LDC Team throughout the project. These were current, full-time students coming from a range of programmes across the School.

To assess the interface usability of the online resources, the Think Aloud Method, as adapted to e-learning by Cotton and Gresty (2006), was used. The LDC Team was trained on the procedure, which involved observing and recording individual students both navigating their way through the community learning resources and simultaneously articulating their thoughts and actions. Each think-aloud procedure lasted approximately one hour and ended with a short exit interview. Data collected were subjected to qualitative analysis. Meanwhile, an online survey was emailed to all students to gain wider perspectives of the content of resources. 243 students responded and data were quantitatively and qualitatively analysed.

Based on these analyses, the Team constructed an inventory of tasks to develop the online community. These were undertaken in partnership with SLDs who met with the Team, not only to advise on specific changes to be made, but to co-create materials. For example, in developing resources on presentation skills, SLDs have worked with the Team (often taking the lead) to create exemplars of poor and effective presentations.

## Results and reflections

Appendix 1 highlights the key changes to navigation and content that have been made or are currently under development. These can be viewed at: <https://sites.google.com/site/ldcgculearn>. Given the timescale of the project, it has not been possible to address all the issues that emerged from the evaluation; however, the online community development will continue as a work in progress. A key finding from the survey was that fifty-seven per cent of respondents were not aware of the LDC community. SLDs are currently considering the best ways to promote it and suggestions offered so far include using social media and campus posters and organising a launch, during which marketing materials can be distributed. Such activities will be strategically planned for the start of the new academic session.

A key learning point for the Team, and of significance to the wider learning development community, is that, despite recruitment concerns (especially given the overlap of the project with the exam diet), students were very willing to participate in the project. Moreover, their contributions, in suggesting changes and subsequently co-creating materials, were of a very high quality. This partnership working has been successful in producing resources which are contextualised, formulated from students' perspectives and therefore more meaningful to them.

## Recommendations and next steps

The LDC Team will endeavour to build on its collaborative activity, with the ultimate aim of embedding a culture of student partnership work within the LDC. For example, as the online community continues to evolve, students will be invited to contribute to further evaluation and development activities.

## Reference list

Cotton, D. and Gresty, K. (2006) '*Reflecting on the think-aloud method for evaluating E-learning.*' *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 37(1), 45-54.

Ericsson, K. A. and Simon, H.A. (1984) *Protocol analysis: Verbal reports as data.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

## Appendix

See below.

## Case Studies

### Appendix 1. Summary of key changes to online resources based on evaluation data

Navigational issues	Progress
Link to the LDC community on the university VLE was not visible enough	Now moved to a more prominent position
Main navigation menu was too detailed and cluttered, with important information 'buried' in sub-menus.	Menu reorganised and streamlined based on reported support priorities
Access to support on related topics was not sufficiently co-ordinated	Cross-links now added for greater fluency and comprehensiveness
Some links were broken	Links now removed
Paths to access desired content area were too long	Now addressed in menu reorganisation

Content issues	Progress
Resources were lacking personalisation and a sense of identity	Team photographs have been added and the marketing department is currently designing an image to be embedded in all materials
The use of the phrase 'academic skills' did not align well with the LDC's enhancement-led philosophy	Now replaced with 'academic knowhow'
Referencing resources were not sufficiently engaging	Xerte has been used to develop an interactive activity which provides instant feedback
Lack of support on different referencing systems	Harvard and APA guidance is currently under development
Insufficient materials on presentation skills	Vidcasts of poor and effective solo and group presenting have been developed and are currently being edited
Insufficient dissertation support materials	Subject-specific vidcasts and dissertation-support vidcasts are currently under development
Feedback information was very text-heavy	Video from a student talking about the value of feedback was created and will be uploaded shortly
Some PowerPoint presentations could be properly viewed only when downloaded, but not previewed online	All presentations were reviewed and now can be viewed online and as a download file

**Link to short video explaining think aloud procedure to students**

<https://youtu.be/uK-2IZ3Dzbw>