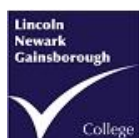# iTS:MyPC

Lincoln College
(Learning Resource Unit)

Lincoln College is a large general further education college with sites in Lincoln, Gainsborough and Newark. The College operates across all areas of learning and offers a diverse portfolio of activity in line with local and regional priorities. Currently, there are approximately 3,411 16-18 year olds, 702 16-18 apprentices, 4,508 adults, 261 adult apprentices, 1,241 Train to Gain students, 1,000 community based and 250 HE students on a variety of vocational and professional qualification courses. The LRU is responsible for Learning Centres in all 3 sites, the main base at Lincoln named the Friary Learning Centre (FLC), which is replicated at the other Centres (GLC and NLC), appropriate to size and function. We are committed to 'empowering the independent learner, providing high quality learning resources, building on success'.

The three-storey FLC building was opened in October 2003 to be the vibrant heart of the College's study and research facilities, serving its students, staff, managers and governors, as well as providing a resource base for the local catchment area and business community. Its bright and flexible design was created from and continues to reflect the feedback we receive from focus groups and stakeholder surveys, which originally pointed up the introduction of small-scale, ergonomic and less noisy workspaces and the need for easy access to coordinated study areas. It is divided throughout into subject zones and specialist resource bases containing mixed media resources and comfortable seating, adjacent to open-access computer workstations and standing height terminals. There are separate Quiet Study and Conference Suites.

What we want for our students

We wanted a student interface which was clear and concise, easy to understand and quick to use. It needed to be attractive and colourful, on a 'what you see is what you get' principle. We wanted students to have the facility to book a computer in advance from any PC location – home, work, on campus – and at any time, so it needed to be web-based. A major priority was ensuring that students across a range of abilities from Entry Level 1 onwards would cope with the system as part of the learning process, thus contributing to their independence and confidence-building. Recently, a small group of business students who were working on block-booked computers in the Friary Learning Centre made the following spontaneous comments when asked what they liked best about the system: "MyPC is simple and easy to use" and "It is good to be able to book a PC from home".

What College Managers Want

The IT Services Manager had to be assured that the software was compatible with the College network following installation and subsequent upgrades. Of huge importance was inevitably 'value for money' and subscription costs set at ongoing rates that were realistic and acceptable to the College Finance Manager. Purchasing additional licences in packages meant that we would have the flexibility to designate different computer clusters around our Centres, whilst benefiting from a better price structure. The training received at both the initial installation and the subsequent upgrade one year later was excellent. We were able to work at our own pace and everything was clearly explained. The MyPC Technician worked closely with our IT Services Unit to ensure a smooth introduction. Although the user guides are very comprehensive, we used them to create our own simplified guide for students and staff. On the rare occasions that we have needed to call the Help Desk, their response has always been first class, with problems either being resolved quickly or with a constant communication maintained if they have not been able to resolve problems immediately.

What LR Staff Want

The LR staff wanted all these attributes too with no margin for doubt or uncertainty in the screen configurations. Not surprisingly, flexibility and reliability were also high on the agenda. Staff training had to be tailored to our needs and of high quality. When any problems did occur we needed to be assured that the software support was responsive and reassuring, efficient and effective. We looked for freedom to customise the screens and benefit from generous administrator rights to set restrictions and parameters of usage for accommodating our own service requirements, as well as to generate stats easily. When we required more flexibility in changing/adding features, we looked to having our requests for improvements taken to the software developers for inclusion in the next upgrade release.

What Flexibility Students Want

Whilst we wanted our Learning Centres to remain drop-in facilities with free open access to all computer workstations, we also looked to offer students the flexibility of booking designated computers to suit their busy study schedules.

The log-jam times when PCs are at a premium are over busy lunchtime periods, lead-up days to assignment deadlines and when accommodating groups which need to work together. Part-time students, work-based learners and Foundation Degree students with work commitments often have limited study opportunities when they are at College and need to maximise these with the assurance that they can access a PC whenever they have free periods. One other important factor is that, as Lincolnshire is a large county often with poor transport infrastructures, any 'on campus' study time at our students' disposal can often be reduced to short windows. This points up the urgent need to ensure PC availability on demand.

The Decision

In the final analysis the LR Senior Team were convinced that MyPC Computer Booking and Access Management met all these criteria, particularly in ease of use and easy to administer.

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Promoting MyPC

MyPC Computer Booking and Access Management facility - via direct links on the student and staff Intranets - is high profile in our Learning Centres and gets regular boosting from our 'in your face' publicity, internally within the Unit and cross-campus, and externally in the locale and beyond: in College Prospectuses, in the College Student Handbook on a memory stick and in our LR Student Guides; at student and staff

inductions; on both our Virtual Tour and friPOD Audio Tour, accessible from the College website and Intranet pages, and also as a download; through specialist information booklets at each Centre incorporating floor plan map guides and booking instructions; in our Rolodex 'How do I?' flipover guides within the computer clusters; via plasma screen slides at our main Help Desks; at intervals on our dropcord and moving message-maker displays in the FLC; and in regular newsletter features for students, College staff and governors.

"This case study was written by Laraine Cooper, Head of Learning Resources."

Developing with MyPC

Originally in 2006, we purchased 25 licences for use in the FLC only. This start-up was so successful that we purchased a further 50 licences last year and introduced the booking service at both the GLC and NLC. Our Centres are still open access but students and staff have the added choice and flexibility of booking their workstations where they want and when they want to suit their own needs. Our Learning Centres are committed to constant improvement and to making significant contributions to student success. As such, we are now considering expanding the booking facility to run our Conference Suite and investing in a Screen Totem at the entrance to the FLC, so that students can see for themselves where there is a free PC as soon as they arrive. This has been a major success story for us and our associations with ITS Ltd., ensuring that MyPC will continue to figure strongly in our Vision and Values for the future.

The Benefits

MyPC definitely ensures that all our students are empowered to manage their time and plan their workload more effectively and without the frustration and panic which comes from searching for that elusive 'free' computer at crucial times, and we all know that students always leave their work for submission to the very last minute!

This also reduces the headaches for our staff in calming them down and reducing the associated flak!! LR staff on the Help Desks, when discussing these benefits, also added that as a norm MyPC is "Very useful for assisting students to check where there are free PCs in the Centre" and it gives them more supervisory control.

Tutors have benefited from making group/block bookings for students completing their UCAS applications themselves and when sending cohorts to undertake independent topic research on-line or use an electronic resource. Having bookable computer clusters in the Careers Zones ensures that students can always access careers software on designated PCs, which is important when they are tasked with looking up specific occupations and job opportunities. Likewise, PCs in the Specialist Technology area in the FLC are available to book by students who need to access CAD software or by students – with or without a specialist Co-Worker – using hardware and software for the visually impaired, thus giving each of them peace of mind. Delivering Information Skills sessions via our Information and Learning Co-ordinator and our Learning Advisers is greatly facilitated by reserving - well in advance - a bespoke area in our Study Suite or adjacent to our Conference Suite in the FLC for timed and successional slots. They have also identified that an added boon in their user support work is "When doing one-to-one College staff inductions it's great to know you can book a PC to show them the e-resources and computer catalogue".

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