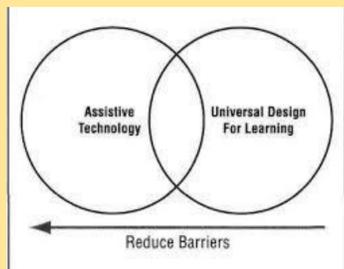# MyStudyBar

Context and rationale

The focus for this case study arose after attending a working group recently formed by The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) partnership to look at improving the accessibility and inclusivity of provision for the wider student population in terms of assistive technology (The Education Endowment Foundation, 2019). Hall et al. (2012) explore the relationship between assistive technology and universal design for learning (UDL) (see diagram below).


The rationale for this case study was to consider how the use of MyStudyBar to support Further Education (FE) students within Lews Castle College (LCC), UHI can be developed. This includes FE students who have a Personal Learning Support Plan (PLSP) and those students identified through the Dyslexia Adult Screening Test (DAST) who may require study skills and/or assistive technology support to ensure that their course is accessible to them (The Scottish Government, 2018). MyStudyBar is a tool which is freely available for all students to download and use and thereby inclusive to the student population to reduce barriers to learning (Johnson et al., 2011).

Methodology

A qualitative approach was taken to gather the data for the case study using Method Triangulation as recommended by Carter et al. (2014) to explore a particular phenomenon in more depth. The following methods were employed:

- Semi-structured interviews were carried out with selected FE students and LCC staff

- Questionnaires were sent out to members of the UHI Disability Practitioners Group (DPG) to find out how MyStudyBar is being used within individual UHI Academic Partner Colleges (APs).

- An internet-based search was used to look at other colleges and universities and information being provided to students about MyStudyBar.
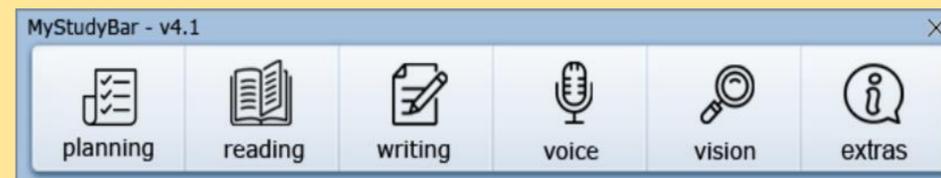
Research question:

How can the use of MyStudyBar in Lews Castle College, UHI be developed for the benefit of the FE student experience?

Key findings

- Positive feedback from staff and FE students regarding potential benefits of using MyStudyBar
- Lack of information about MyStudyBar for staff and students
- Use of MyStudyBar variable across UHI APs
- Examples of good practice from other colleges and universities on promoting the use of MyStudyBar

"It would be good for people who need help but might not ask for it". LCC FE student"

"I feel that if I had more experience and information on how to use this then I could have encouraged students more". LCC Lecturer

"I can't speak more highly of this amalgamation of freeware….I found it easily accessible and intuitive". Disability Practitioner, UHI AP

"The MyStudyBar applications would be very useful for students studying through the medium of Gaelic or English….staff need to be aware of its existence". LCC lecturer

Implications for practice

- Provide information about MyStudyBar for FE students at induction, in the student handbook and on the LCC website.
- Include training sessions for LCC staff during August 2019 in-service programme to highlight benefits for all FE students.
- Ensure that students with PLSPs and those identified through the DAST are aware of how MyStudyBar can be used to support them in their studies.
- Promote the use of Ceitidh, the Scottish Gaelic voice with staff and students within the LCC Gaelic department (Education Scotland, 2018)

Limitations of the study

This was a small-scale case study with a very specific focus within a set time frame. A limited number of LCC students and staff were included in the data collection due to time and researcher capacity. In addition, only three members of the DPG returned the questionnaires. The case study could be extended through carrying out focus groups with students and LCC staff to give a broader perspective of views.

Literature

Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., Blythe, J. and Neville, A. (2014) The use of triangulation in Qualitative research' , *Oncology Nursing Forum.* 41, (5), pp545-547.

Education Scotland (2018) *Improving practice in Gaelic education.* Briefing Paper. Education Scotland.

Hall, T. E., Meyer, A. and Rose, D. H. (2012) *Universal design for learning in the classroom: practical applications.* New York: Guilford Press.

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