Tech North Talent & Skills Case study
Hull College Digital Strategy & Manifesto

Setting the Scene

In March 2014 Hull College Group launched its Digital Manifesto, committing it to a whole college, cross-curriculum approach to developing its students' digital skills with the objective of creating an employable workforce that could benefit from and accelerate The Humber's growing digital economy. Working in partnership with the Humber LEP and local and international partners, such as Strawberry, Label Worx, Trident, Microsoft, Platform Expo and the Centre for Digital Innovation (C4DI) Hull College Group pledged to deliver a learner experience that built up its students' digital understanding, knowledge and expertise to address skills gaps as defined and described by local employers.

What Worked?

Hull College Group's Digital Manifesto lays out a clear and concise action plan for achieving its vision. This includes designing and delivering new courses and course components in-line with the needs of local industry. For example, in response to the Humber LEP's prioritisation of renewable technologies, in particular offshore wind, Hull College added a Mechatronics unit to its Next Gen Level 3 Computing Course. Hull College's Digital Manifesto also commits it to raising the prominence and status of digital through a programme of events that invite Hull's digital community into the college. This is aimed not only at fostering links between the college and local digital businesses but also at raising the profile of the region as a centre of digital innovation. In addition to developing its curriculum and raising the status of digital, the Digital Manifesto also commits the College to dedicating part of its estate to a Centre of Excellence for Digital Skills to act as a hub for digital skills and talent including an incubation facility for digital start-ups founded by Hull College students.

Innovation

In addition to creating a physical hub on Hull College's Queens Gardens campus the Digital Manifesto also established funded hot desks at Hull's C4DI meaning that Foundation Degree Computing students have the opportunity to work alongside some of Hull's brightest digital talents. This innovative approach to employer engagement allows students to benefit from the knowledge, insight and expertise of industry professionals whilst still completing their course, without the need for a more formalised, and potentially more limiting arrangement, such as a work placement. It gives learners the opportunity to organically develop potentially beneficial connections that could lead to further opportunities such as an apprenticeship or even full-time employment.

Lessons To Share

Effectively and successfully implementing an ambitious Digital Manifesto like Hull College's demands a high level of coordination, participation and commitment from a number of different stakeholders including the College, local employers, industry experts and the LEP. It is therefore essential to ascertain that all those involved are committed to the same aims and have an understanding and appreciation of the mutual benefits of a digitally literate and technology-savvy generation of young people. Good communication, understanding and accommodation are essential ingredients in the process and eventual fruition of a sustainable plan for digital skills development and provision. Because of the fast moving nature of digital skills demand it is also imperative that there are robust review mechanisms in place that allow the provider to quickly tweak their Digital Strategy in response to the local labour market.

Success and Progress

In March 2015 Hull College opened its Centre for Digital and Green Energy through which it delivers its programme of renewable and digital related courses. This centre also acts as a physical focal point for Hull College's Digital Strategy giving local businesses and start-up's a clear point of contact with the College. Since releasing its Digital Manifesto the College has seen a dramatic increase in the uptake of digital courses – in 2015 the number of students taking digital courses increased by over 60 per cent.

Where Next

In the future Hull College is eager to be seen as the primary place in Hull for young people who are thinking about starting their own digital business by extending access to mentorship, funding and expertise. However, Hull College is also looking at ways to support and engage older people who own or work for mature businesses, especially SMEs that could benefit from gaining digital skills and qualifications. They see empowering these businesses to change their working practices using digital tools that encourage collaboration, such as cloud storage and cloud computing, as essential to creating a more productive, more economically vibrant Humber.

Key Quotes

"What we created with the Digital Manifesto was an epicentre for all the activity to focus on. It's not just a piece of paper – it was intent. And that meant that people really gravitated to us to look at what we could do to bring economic wellbeing for young people. That document allowed us to do that. "

–   Ian Bough, Curriculum Leader for Computing, Hull College

"It's about making that connect. Saying our business is education and skills and it's about working in partnership to ensure that the products that we are delivering are contemporary with what employers need. Our outputs are students that are employable and can hit the ground running. It's not just about the education and skills they develop – it's also about giving them the opportunity to step out of education and into employment and jobs with prospects"

–   Julia Davidson, Dean of the Faculty of Business and Science

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URL's

Hull College's Digital Manifesto – http://www.hull-college.ac.uk/uploads/files/digital_manifesto_DE.pdf

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