

Make it FutureFit

Four ways to design
better adult learning

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Nesta runs two programmes in the Nordics and Benelux. These are Digital Frontrunners, an active network of over 300 future of work experts, policymakers and practitioners and FutureFit, a major training and research project involving unions, researchers and learning experts. In partnership with unions, FutureFit is focused on upskilling and reskilling workers and doing innovative, robust research about what works. The programmes are supported by Google and Google.org.

Introduction

Who is this guide for?

Anyone interested in designing and delivering better adult learning experiences that prepare people for the immediate needs of a rapidly changing world of work.

How can this guide help you?

The guide will introduce you to key strategies and innovative approaches used in the design of adult learning experiences that we think you should be considering. Each strategy comes with clear examples of how it could be implemented in practice.

The guide also provides you with valuable references for further reading and summaries of the initiatives employing these approaches, in case you want to find out more about them.

Adult learning practitioners strive to help those they work with to thrive and achieve their ambitions.

Understanding how best to do this is not always straightforward. We are often told that advancements in technology, climate change, increased migration and other significant cultural shifts will render the skills we are learning today redundant in a matter of years¹. This means that preparing adults for the future is perhaps more complex than ever.

Adults need to learn throughout their lives if they wish to adapt to the shifts we're experiencing². Our research shows that there are well known barriers that prevent this from happening: lack of time and cost; lack of access to high quality training; limited guidance on what type of training to do; and a lack of belief and motivation to get involved in training in the first place³.

Adult learning has its own specific challenges, requiring specific approaches suited to the unique time we are living in⁴. With fifty-four per cent of all employees requiring extensive upskilling or reskilling by 2022⁵, the need for high quality, effective adult learning experiences is increasingly pressing.

In this guide we hope to provide some guidance in two respects. Firstly, to outline key principles or ingredients that are known to be effective in the design of adult learning experiences. Secondly, and more crucially, to provide specific examples of these principles in practice from initiatives that are applying them today.

How this guide is organised

We have categorised the practical examples of these strategies into four sections. We've been informed by principles from adult learning theory (andragogy)⁶, behavioural science⁷, and **human-centred design***.

1

Strategies that promote learner identity

These are primarily concerned with ways in which people can better understand themselves as learners.

2

Strategies that drive motivation to learn

These are primarily concerned with unlocking both external and intrinsic motivational factors that encourage people to engage in learning.

3

Strategies that help learners master a new skill or topic

These are primarily concerned with ways to organise content and deliver a learning experience that maximises learning.

4

Strategies to develop a community of practice

These are primarily concerned with ways to deliver a shared learning experience effectively, focusing particularly on peer to peer learning.

* Human-centered design

A creative approach to problem solving developed by the design agency IDEO. Human-centred design starts with the perspective of the people you want to help, and then by developing solutions tailored to their needs⁵. For learning design, this means empathising with your learner, understanding their learning needs, and developing a solution based on these insights.

At the beginning of each chapter, you will find a short description explaining why these strategies are important. We then elaborate on how they are employed by the initiatives featured in the guide. Different learning experiences will naturally have different objectives, so these strategies should not be treated as a checklist for designing a training programme.

There is evidence that many of these practices complement each other well; effective adult learning experiences seek to combine multiple approaches to adult learning when possible⁹.

We've highlighted where approaches complement each other, or where there is natural overlap.

The initiatives

We have chosen initiatives that respond to the reality of a rapidly changing world of work. Whilst they don't all target the same profile of adult learners (see the case studies for these details), they aim to prepare them for the current demands of an increasingly digital labour market.

We have not chosen these initiatives on the basis of their target audiences. Instead, we've aimed to capture a wide range of strategies and approaches that are relevant for learning designers today.

We've been able to talk to them extensively, to better understand these strategies, so that others can gain inspiration from them.





1

Make it FutureFit

FutureFit

Strategies that promote learner identity

These are primarily concerned with ways in which people can better understand themselves as learners.

Work and learning are often perceived as completely separate activities. This is particularly true when the focus shifts from being in full time education at a younger age, to being a working adult who 'does things'. Life's priorities change; this has important implications for learning new skills¹⁰.

The tendency to silo education to specific stages of our life is not always compatible with life as adults, when other commitments take over. Engaging in learning might not seem like the obvious or necessary thing to be doing.

This is especially true for those that need training the most, for example low-skilled workers whose roles are highly likely to be automated. They usually have the lowest intentions of engaging in learning and may see it as an activity that is not for them¹¹. This might also be a result of having had negative learning experiences early in life, and not developing a sense of 'belonging' in learning environments¹².

Taken to the extreme, if a person does not believe that they can learn, they will not¹³.

This section focuses on how learning by doing (applied learning) can help people identify as learners, redefine what learning means for them, and see themselves in new ways. **Applied learning***, with its focus on immediate application, is known to be a highly effective learning method¹⁴.

* Applied learning

An approach to learning that gives students the opportunity to learn by doing. By using an applied learning approach, learners can be encouraged to learn and apply new skills directly outside of the classroom, in a contextualised way¹⁵, especially in real-world settings.

All of these strategies are underpinned by a very strong understanding of who the learners are and their specific needs.

— Make it obvious that learning is integral to the world of work.

If someone wants to be a tech professional, they need to see that 'learning' is simply part of the job. BeCentral (see Case Study 1) designs all of their applied learning experiences in this way. The learning experience reflects the world of work they are preparing their participants for, including the physical space. One way they foster this mindset is by making applied learning almost indistinguishable from the activities a tech professional would carry out on a daily basis.

— Make patterns of study reflect patterns of work.

BeCode classes typically run from 9am to 5pm. Students will have objectives and assignments that resemble those they would experience in a tech company. The rhythm of their study week will mirror that of a work week. Some assignments will be specific to any workplace: organising meetings; chairing a meeting; updating calendars; and other tasks related to the world of work.

— Make the learning environment reflect the world you're preparing them for.

The initiative BeCode (part of BeCentral) in Brussels organises their coding classrooms to closely resemble web agencies or other businesses from the tech sector. The building itself has active tech startups based within it; indistinguishable from the classrooms, all part of the same environment. BeCentral's residents also reflect the diversity of the train station it's housed in; the idea is that most people will feel at home, or at least comfortable in such a setting.

— Make sure the course is right for the learner.

BeCode offers a two week period during which participants, with support from coaches, can decide whether or not the programme is the right fit for them. Some participants have difficult home lives, or simply find that they are not ready for the experience. If they leave the programme during this time - which is not considered a formal part of the course - it does not affect their entitlements to social benefits.

Case Study 1.

BeCentral



BeCentral is a digital training campus based in Brussels which provides activities and networking opportunities for people with low to high computer skills. The campus was founded in 2016 by several experts with a background in startups, academia, venture capital and government. They came together to bridge the digital skills gap in Belgium.

Located above the central railroad station in Brussels, the campus hosts a community of residents. This includes coding schools, NGOs and startups. Since its opening, BeCentral has created a co-working space dedicated to training sessions, seminars, hackathons, digital schools and workshops.

BeCentral is open to a variety of adults, ranging from job seekers to refugees. Residents of the training campus are brought together by an eagerness to learn about other initiatives and use it as an opportunity to share best-practice.

One of the resident initiatives is BeCode. It is a free coding school for adults that are currently unemployed. The seven months on-site training programme is followed by a 3-month internship at one of BeCentral's partnering companies. Like most of their training programmes, BeCode is accredited by Belgian government training agencies Bruxelles Formation, VDAB and Forem.

The campus hosts over 60 initiatives and 11 tech schools. Since 2017, BeCentral has trained almost 2,000 adults who now work as digital professionals in web development, digital marketing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and entrepreneurship.

Support learners to integrate in the unknown and unfamiliar.

Pursuit (Case Study 2) recognise that their Fellows may need support integrating into the workplace. With limited professional experience Fellows may feel out of place in the ‘tech world’ (a feeling that is often referred to as ‘impostor syndrome’). The curriculum includes half day workshops delivered by professionals specialising in workplace integration. Fellows are also assigned a career coach who supports them with situations that could be difficult or unfamiliar.

Prepare learners for workplace dynamics.

Before entering the tech industry, Pursuit Fellows participate in site visits at leading tech companies as part of their training. They meet engineers and attend information sessions, and get a feel for the rhythms and routines of workplaces. They can ask questions and become familiar with the industry for which they are preparing. Volunteers from the tech industry also run sessions, help prepare Fellows for technical and behavioural interviews, and offer mentorship during project work.

Include non-technical skills in your objectives.

In addition to teaching technical skills, Pursuit equips Fellows with the professional skills and industry fluency needed to be successful. Professional skills include building their personal brand, sharpening their technical and behavioral interview skills, crafting CVs and cover letters, and navigating their job search. Industry fluency comprises opportunities to expand their professional network and attend presentations by experts on relevant tech industry topics. Pursuit’s programmes, resources, and curricula are designed to address the systemic barriers fellows face to break into and build careers in the tech industry.

Case Study 2.

Pursuit



Pursuit is a social impact organisation. Through their rigorous, four-year Fellowship, they transform the lives of adults with the most need and potential by training them to become software developers, launch careers in tech, and become leaders in the industry. Pursuit believes this approach can create transformation where it's needed most, enable equality of opportunity, and create a more prosperous society for all.

Their two-part, four-year fellowship includes a year-long training program that equips their Fellows with the technical and professional skills to enter the tech industry; and a three-year career advancement program that empowers them to build their careers over the long term.

Their programme serves adults who demonstrate the highest need and potential. This includes low-income adults without professional experience and/or college degrees from diverse backgrounds who also demonstrate the passion for technology and perseverance to succeed.

There are no upfront costs to Fellows for their training. Instead, they contribute a percentage of their future earnings for three years once they get a high-paying job in technology. If they don't get a job, they pay nothing.

The programme is financed through Pursuit's innovative Pursuit Bond income sharing agreement. With the Bond, social impact investors cover the upfront costs of training which is later repaid by Fellows if they get a high-paying job in technology.

To date, Pursuit has trained almost 500 developers who on average experienced an increase in their annual salaries from \$18,000 to over \$85,000. By 2022 they plan to have served 1,000 Fellows and created more than \$1 billion in lifetime wage gains from inception. Thanks to its efforts, Pursuit is also one of the RSA's Future Work award winners of 2019.

— **Design training for immediate, real life needs.**

WhiteHat's (Case Study 3) apprenticeships include monthly 1:1 coaching sessions which prepare apprentices for the everyday demands of the workplace. For example, with the support of coaches, apprentices learn how to prepare and run a 1:1 meeting with their line manager. They also learn strategies, models and prompts for difficult workplace conversations.

— **Promote a growth mindset.**

WhiteHat encourages apprentices to see that they can do anything if they put their minds to it. Through graft, coaching and reflection apprentices can see the small gains build up into larger progress, helping to reinforce their identity as learners and professionals. This type of mindset is built into all aspects of the programme and embodied by all staff.

— **Record learning and progress.**

All of WhiteHat's learning activities are supplemented with monthly reflective journals to identify concrete next steps, and consolidate and build on the learning. Participants learn to methodically take responsibility for their progress, acting on their own reflections, coach and employer feedback, and assessments (see strategies to master a new skill on page 26).

— **Promote a values driven approach.**

'Putting others first', 'being results driven', and 'we are all owners' are examples of some of the values that WhiteHat introduces apprentices to from the start of the programme. Embedding values in this way throughout the apprenticeships, and getting apprentices to actively reflect on them regularly, helps to engage them in the process of becoming lifelong learners (see mastery section on page 18).

Case Study 3.

WhiteHat



WhiteHat is a tech startup that matches non-graduate talent with apprenticeship opportunities across the UK. It seeks to provide young adults with an outstanding alternative to university. The organisation believes applied learning delivered through apprenticeships should be prioritised as a way of empowering young people to build and have access to great careers, without first having to pursue 3 years of university education and absorb increasing levels of debt.

Founded in 2016, the company has a core target audience that ranges from 16 to 24 years old, though will also work with older adults. Applicants create a Digital Profile which helps match them to the right opportunity based on skills and personality leveraging individual strengths beyond academics and work experience. The 12 to 18-month, certified apprenticeships are designed to form fully skilled professionals ranging from Accountants, Managers, Digital Marketers and Software Engineers.

Whilst training is mostly delivered at work, WhiteHat has built partnerships with leading content providers such as General Assembly, Mind Gym and Grant Thornton to support the learning experience. This is complemented by 1:1 coaching and tech based support mechanisms. For example, apprentices can use the tech platform Spill for free counselling. All apprentices join an on and offline community which supplements their training with social events, meet ups, societies and sports teams. This ensures WhiteHat apprentices have a support network of people going through similar experiences.

WhiteHat has reached almost 65,000 applicants and has worked with over 120 companies across the UK. This includes tech firms, broadcasting companies, fashion brands and global NGOs. WhiteHat has a 97% pass rate of its apprenticeships.

Strategies that drive motivation to learn

These are primarily concerned with unlocking both external and intrinsic motivational factors that encourage people to engage in learning.

Many people take part in learning to better themselves, to pursue longer term aspirations and ambitions. This speaks to people's internal drive to progress in life, and should be carefully considered when deploying strategies that aim to make learning rewarding or attractive.

Learners can be **motivated*** by external rewards, such as financial incentives, improved job opportunities or accreditation. Learning also needs to speak to people's internal motivation; it has to be personally rewarding, enjoyable, challenging, and interesting¹⁶.

Without both these internal and external motivators, people are unlikely to take up or complete training. One key pitfall with rewards for learning is if the reward itself becomes the focus, rather than the learning itself¹⁸.

That said, if used carefully and in a meaningful way, rewards and a user experience that is pleasant (and even fun!) should not be overlooked.

* Motivation to learn

Learners' drive to engage, learn, work effectively, and achieve potential¹⁷. The factors influencing people's motivation to learn can vary. These range from individual characteristics, the environment in which learning takes place, or the activities through which learning is presented. Motivation to learn can be intrinsic, if learning personally rewards you. It can also be extrinsic, if it involves earning a reward or avoiding punishment.

Here are a few strategies that can help drive motivation to learn shared by the initiatives we spoke to:

— Set objectives that encourage reflection and planning.

In addition to making learners more digitally savvy, Hyper Island (see Case Study 6 on page 29) designs curriculums that get learners to reflect on how these technological developments affect their roles or lives; on what skills they can build on or may need to develop as a result; and identify personal opportunities in a digitally transformed world. There is evidence that including ‘purpose of learning’ exercises like these at the beginning of programmes can drive motivation to complete courses¹⁹.

— Make objectives personalised.

WhiteHat (see page 19) places a strong emphasis on the personalised development of objectives. Those who join a WhiteHat apprenticeship are motivated by the prospect of kick-starting their career, and in most cases getting a full-time role at the end. It’s essential to personalise this journey and for it not to be a ‘blind’ match; this is where coaches from relevant industries, skills matching, and a highly participatory approach ensure that apprentices are working towards something they feel passionate about.

— Find a way to prompt learners.

Hyper Island uses a chatbot integrated into the workspace on Slack. It reminds learners about assignments, prompts them to reflect within the chat window, and collects their answers. Encouraging prompts from friends, family, or colleagues in the form of texts has been shown to be a relatively simple and scalable way to boost attendance and performance in training by *The Behavioural Insights Team*²⁰. They’ve developed a tool called *Promptable*²¹ for college students; they nominate a ‘study supporter’ who sends regular encouragement, key reminders, and questions relating to their studies.

— Make learning meaningful, fun, and rewarding.

The **gamification*** agency Luducrafts (see Case Study 4) has worked closely with companies to spread good working practice and values within organisations. Employees carry out a learning ‘treasure hunt’ carefully crafted with an approach that speaks to employees’ interests. Teams record their experience (e.g. with photos, videos) and unlock ‘achievements’. The company rewards teams that complete the missions by sponsoring or donating to a cause that the employees really care about.

Case Study 4.

Luducrafts



Founded in 2014, Luducrafts is a gamification agency based in Slovakia. They offer learning experiences informed by game design, behavioural science and design thinking. Their experiences aim to boost participation and motivation to learn in the workplace.

Luducrafts mainly works with HR departments of big companies, startups and NGOs. Understanding a company's culture is a key step in their game design process. It helps them build a narrative tailored to workers' needs and profiles.

The idea is to offer an alternative to corporate training. Games are delivered both online and offline and are characterised by strong narratives, challenges or missions. Participants taking part in their training programmes are assessed through trivia questions, follow-up questions, and performance data specific to an employee's role.

To date, Luducrafts has trained around 10,000 and 15,000 employees and worked in a range of sectors. These include tech giants such as Microsoft and Accenture and the largest commercial bank of Slovakia, Slovenská Sporiteľňa. For the bank, they developed a game to help employees develop a better understanding of themes like fraud, compliance and intellectual property.

* Gamification (of learning)

A design process using game-design elements to increase engagement and enjoyment in learning²². This can be done by providing learners with interactive narratives, challenges and rewards.

— Find out what drives learners.

Luducrafts researches the internal drivers of their users before designing any learning experience²³. Are they competitive? Are they driven by social interaction? Or by social impact? Do they like public recognition? This research on their 'player types' will determine whether they implement competitive elements (such as a leaderboard) for an activity or whether to be more collaborative through group work. They might create situations where success is shared and celebrated, or award prizes in the form of charity donations close to employees' hearts.

— Use small rewards as nudges of encouragement.

The Elements of AI course allows users to rate each other's work with a simple 'smiley face' rating system. They recognise this is not detailed, meaningful feedback (see mastery section on page 30) but it is a popular feature nevertheless. It allows users to give a nudge of encouragement to each other to keep progressing on the course. It also helps the course organisers to identify any flagged responses (e.g. those that have been plagiarised, see developing communities of practice on page 32).

— Make the learning experience appealing, positive and pleasant.

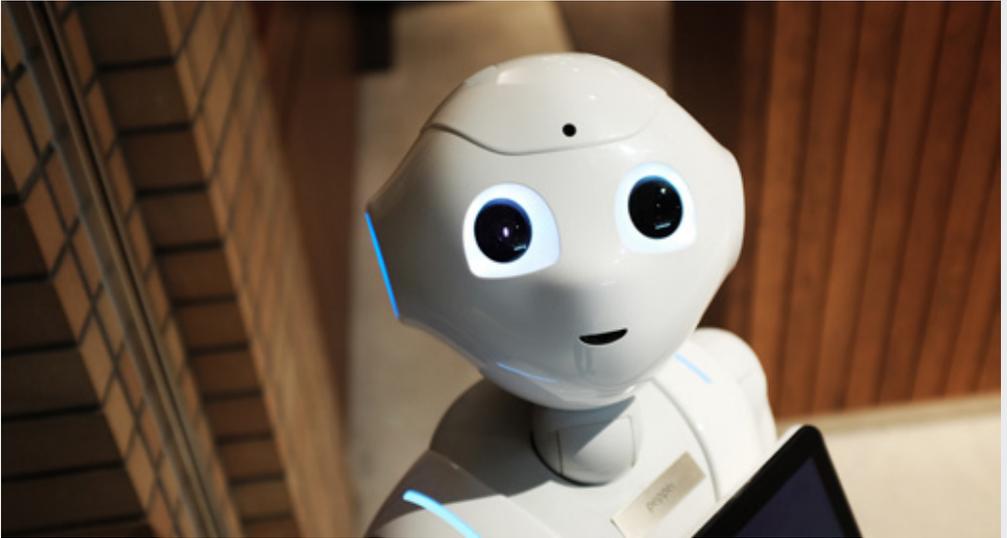
The Elements of AI (Case Study 5) course was designed in a multidisciplinary way: AI academics worked closely with user experience designers and copywriters from digital agency Reaktor. They ensured the content of the course was accessible yet challenging in the right ways; that the tone was not elitist or threatening; and that the course design didn't alienate specific groups. If people enjoy navigating your content, they are more likely to return and engage in the learning experience²⁴.

— Promote grit.

Longer (e.g. over several years) and more intensive programmes like Pursuit and WhiteHat tend to recruit for a number of qualities, including 'grit', intent, passion and willingness to make long-term commitments. Both organisations promote 'deliberative practice', a way of working commonly associated with 'gritty' people. This means setting ambitious goals with learners (e.g. 'stretch objectives'); regular reflection and feedback; deliberately acting on the feedback and reflection; and building a learning environment which enables learners to focus without distractions²⁵.

Case Study 5.

Elements of AI



Launched in spring 2018, Elements of AI is an online course created by Finnish tech consultancy Reaktor and the University of Helsinki. On a mission to make the basics of artificial intelligence accessible to everyone - regardless of background, age or gender - the courses are offered in 5 different EU languages. By 2021, the course will be offered in all official EU languages.

Delivered entirely online, the course is structured in bite-sized lessons, which helps learners master the topics at their own pace. It was developed by designers, copywriters and AI professionals. This means the content is accessible and designed to cater to a vast range of adult learners.

The Elements of AI course aims to demystify artificial intelligence. It seeks to help learners overcome emotional barriers that are often linked with the subject; like the fear of losing your job to a machine.

By becoming better versed in the subject, learners will also develop their critical thinking in relation to AI; for example by being able to question headlines involving AI or not believing everything they read about the subject on social media.

Learners can earn a LinkedIn certificate if they complete at least 90 percent of the final test with a minimum 50 percent of correct answers. Finnish Students can also earn 2 ECTS credits through the Open University.

Since launching, Elements of AI has already trained over 350,000 students from across 170 countries. The course creators see AI as one of the key forces driving the modern economy, which is why they aim to train at least 1% of European citizens by 2021.

Strategies that help learners master a new skill or topic

These are primarily concerned with ways to organise content and deliver a learning experience that maximises learning.

People learn at different paces, and may prefer to learn in different ways²⁶. Adapting the design or approach of a learning experience based on what we know about learners is thus crucial.

Many industries now offer personalised products and experiences, employing human-centred design principles. Similarly, when designing a learning programme it is essential to focus on the learners needs, their experience, and what works for them. It can be tempting to focus on the teaching methods, rather than on the learners themselves. This ultimately leads to detrimental effects²⁷.

This section offers strategies to help you organise and design content into an experience that will help learners master new skills. They all share a fundamental principle: the needs of the learner comes first.

Let learners pace themselves.

In the Elements of AI online course (see page 25), you can decide whether to work against deadlines, or to work in a self-paced manner. This functionality is coupled with a style of questions that encourage you to revisit material and to spread out the learning (see bite-sized, spread-out learning). Giving learners the freedom to navigate and explore content how they see fit can encourage mastery²⁸. Freedom is good, but setting clear objectives that matter to the learner helps keep momentum and set direction.

Continuously assess your learners.

Monitoring progress, and providing ongoing feedback to learners is essential³¹. This type of formative assessment helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses, and address problems immediately. WhiteHat places a strong emphasis on regular, verbal feedback from coaches. This helps to relieve the pressure on apprentices, who may be accustomed to high-stakes exams in school. Their coaches are often ex-teachers who are able to talk through feedback and identify clear next steps to ensure objectives are being met.

Offer bite-sized, spread-out learning.

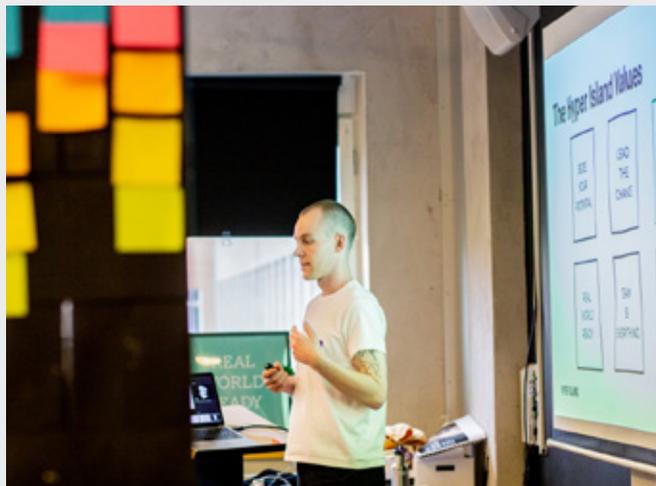
Splitting the content into small, manageable sections is likely to help participants master new knowledge. The Elements of AI course uses the principle of **micro-learning***, which allows learners to navigate content step-by step. Distributing the learning effort like this is known to promote better progress²⁹.

Use assessment to evaluate progress and take action.

Pursuit reviews the performance of Fellows against the standards set out in the curriculum. The reviews include clear steps towards advancement; if fellows are putting the work in but falling behind, they are placed in a trailing cohort and can continue learning the content with which they are struggling. WhiteHat uses online mock assessments at key milestones of their courses; apprentices are tested on the knowledge, skills and behaviours of their apprenticeship standard. Apprentices are also supported to identify strengths and gaps in their knowledge.

Case Study 6.

Hyper Island



Hyper Island is a global learning experience provider for individuals and organisations.

Founded in 1996 Hyper Island aims to create new approaches to learning, encourage people to question the status quo, and provide them with the tools to become lifelong learners.

Courses are delivered both online and on-campus. These range from short, part-time courses to full-time master's degrees. They explore a variety of subjects such as design, business and digital skills and respond to current market needs and possible future challenges.

Hyper Island has over 5000 former students. Their online course completion rates are between 70-80%, compared to the 5.5% reported by other providers³². They currently collaborate with over 250 organisations, and have worked with more than 1200 companies to date. Since 2019, they have worked in partnership with Nesta's FutureFit programme in Sweden to provide innovative online training to over 400 Swedish workers from three of the country's largest trade unions.

* Micro-learning

A learning approach used to break a complex subject into smaller units or short activities. Micro-learning can help a learner achieve a specific, actionable objective. This approach also gives learners the flexibility to return to specific topics and can boost knowledge retention³⁰.

Match the curriculum to industry standards.

Pursuit has found that their fellows are more likely to get hired if the standards of the curriculum match the hiring requirements of employers. Therefore, it is a key priority for Pursuit to keep its curriculum relevant to match what employers need.

Encourage learners to have an opinion.

Someone who masters a topic is able to reflect, contextualise, challenge and even teach it to other people. The exercises provided by Elements of AI are purposefully open ended, encouraging participants to elaborate and provide a critical opinion. Beyond offering AI skills, the course equips learners with the confidence to produce informed opinions³³. Similarly, the assignments during Hyper Island courses (see page 29) are mostly short reflections essays. Through reflection, learners are given the time to digest information and enrich it with their considerations, values and ambitions.

Make students comfortable with feedback.

Encouraging learners to provide feedback to each other in a playful way can be an effective approach to initiate this type of exchange. The games designed by Luducrafts provide learners with a safe space and a playful opportunity to get used to receiving feedback. If provided in the context of a game, learners can feel more

Make sure learners engage with the feedback.

All of the initiatives we spoke to encourage learners to do something with the feedback they receive. In the Elements of AI course, participants are encouraged to revisit specific parts of the course depending on their results in quizzes; on Hyper Island courses participants write an action plan taking feedback into account. It is known that people are more likely to achieve a future goal if they make a plan, and break it down into concrete actions and intentions³⁴: they should do this in response to feedback.



4

Strategies to develop a community of practice

These are primarily concerned with ways to deliver a shared learning experience effectively, focusing particularly on peer to peer learning.

Communities of practice* are an integral part of our life. At work, in school or at home we naturally tend to form groups of peers. Yet, learning can often be considered an individual endeavour. It's easy to forget that, outside of academic institutions, we mainly learn from those around us³⁵.

For example, the workplace is a typical setting in which communities of practice are formed. Over half of employees first turn to their peers - not their managers or an instructor - when they seek to learn a new skill³⁶.

Communities of practice can play a fundamental role in our personal and professional development. It is worth noting that these are different to communities of interest, where peers only share passions. In a community of practice, peers actively support each other to acquire new skills³⁸.

The sense of belonging that arises from such groups or communities is key in fostering motivation and perseverance to learn (see Strategies that drive motivation to learn on page 20).

Incorporating **peer learning*** can help training initiatives boost engagement and completion rates of courses³⁹. This can take a variety of forms such as peer support groups, supplemental instruction, peer tutoring, peer teaching, and peer-assisted learning⁴⁰.

* Community of practice

Groups of people who wish to learn something by collaborating and supporting each other³⁷. It can be viewed as a social learning system where people share a challenge, goal or interest and learn from each other by sharing information and experiences.

* Peer learning

A learning process where peers support each other to make progress. Peer learning often happens in a self-organised way, and without hierarchies between individuals. Peers are usually not professional teachers; by helping others to learn, peers also learn themselves⁴¹.

Here are some strategies to help you develop a community of practice:

Think carefully about group composition.

Think about who's in your group, the support they need, and what they can offer others. For instance, a mixed group with a diversity of perspectives can secure a rich exchange of experience and skills. However, if people feel too unfamiliar with each other, then this can undermine a sense of safety⁴². For example, BeCentral seeks to strike this balance by looking at the collective profile of their classes, which informs their recruitment process.

Avoid having groups that are too large.

Enrol Yourself Learning Marathons are delivered in small groups of 10-12 peers. Small groups can result in higher quality interactions, whilst larger groups can increase perspectives, knowledge, and exchange of skills. This is not an exact science, but do consider how you can maintain meaningful interactions between peers if you increase group size. Groups that are too large (anything above 40 people) no longer respond effectively to different adult learning strategies.⁴³

Establish roles.

Even groups without hierarchy can still benefit from having informal roles. These can be based on participants' qualities rather than skills alone. Examples from Enrol Yourself include a 'rock' (a figure of support) and an 'antagonist' (someone willing to challenge the status quo).

Make group members accountable for each other's learning.

We are more likely to carry something out (e.g. completing an assignment) if we've committed publically to doing so⁴⁴. Enrol Yourself strongly encourages participants to take responsibility for co-designing the curriculum of their Learning Marathon. Each participant commits to delivering a workshop to share their knowledge with their peers. This approach maintains a high level of engagement, by making each participant ultimately accountable not only for their own learning, but also for that of others.

Case Study 7.

Enrol Yourself



Founded in 2016 by a pair of social designers, Enrol Yourself is an award-winning social enterprise delivering flexible lifelong learning programmes across the UK.

The platform helps adults develop new skills through peer-to-peer learning.

The programme trains local hosts who initiate peer groups. These groups take part in a six-month learning acceleration programme: the Learning Marathon. Designed to meet a professional, personal or societal challenge that matters to the participants, the marathons involve co-design and are led by the peer group itself.

Enrol Yourself mainly targets adults in periods of transitions: career changers, freelancers or self-employed workers. The peer groups include people from different backgrounds, at different professional stages and with diverse skill sets.

Enrol Yourself is making the case for peer learning as a tool to improve wellbeing. This is a key measure throughout the Learning Marathons; at the end of the programme, participants are asked to provide feedback to each other and self-assess whether the experience has improved their sense of wellbeing.

Results show that peer group average scores for wellbeing increase after the Learning Marathon, particularly across indicators such as professional efficiency, happiness and entrepreneurship.

Enrol Yourself is supported by a wide range of organisations such as the RSA, Royal College of Art and UnLtd. The peer learning programme has trained almost 200 people across the UK and Bulgaria. In 2017, Enrol Yourself won the Our Place in the World award which brought support from InnovationRCA and UnLtd to expand to new regions in London and Birmingham in 2018.





Use peer review to promote quality participation.

Elements of AI uses a peer review approach in a scalable way. The courses are taken individually and most assessments are marked automatically. However, some questions are open-ended and peer-reviewed (the system assigns these automatically). Participants can flag plagiarised content or answers that they think should be checked by course facilitators. It's one of the most popular features of the course: participants encourage each other to produce high quality answers, and facilitators can intervene if needed⁴⁵.

Give communities of practice a sense of autonomy.

WhiteHat (see page 19) recently launched an online community hub for their apprentices. This hub will be led by and for apprentices. Only a small number of moderation staff from WhiteHat will be able to access the portal. The idea is to build a space which apprentices feel is theirs (see developing learner identity on page 12). They'll be able to hold discussions, message, promote events and so on. This builds on the fact that all social events for the WhiteHat apprentice community are organised by apprentices.

Find a way to make learning groups replicable.

Enrol Yourself trains 'hosts' to support peer groups in the early stages of the Learning Marathon. Hosts support the group to form and take on shared responsibility for the experience. This helps participants set their own goals and shape the approach they want to take for their Learning Marathons (see goal setting in the motivation section on page 23).



Conclusion: Building a programme

This guide has presented a range of strategies to help promote learner identity; drive motivation to learn; help learners master a new skill or topic; and to develop a community of practice.

In each of these sections we have shared specific examples to support you in different aspects of learning design. These examples raise important questions concerning programme design, whether for new or existing learning experiences. Use the following section to reflect on these important considerations.

Analyse the context in which you want your learning experience to take place:

Is your learning environment geared up for real life application?

Do learners feel safe and at home in your learning environment?

Have you thought about who's in your group and how this will affect dynamics?

Are there ways in which you can encourage learners to navigate your learning experience in a way that suits them?

Think about the aims of the course:

Are the objectives of your learning experience clear to everyone?

Does the learning journey naturally fit into the long-term ambitions defined by learners themselves?

Do you promote and develop qualities such as perseverance and passion e.g. by getting learners to set and 'own' stretch objectives?

Are the values you promote present throughout your learning experience?

Are the values you promote embedded in the learning and are learners actively engaging with them?

Consider the content of the course:

Have you built in an opportunity for learners to check if it's the right fit for them?

Have you got the skills in your team to ensure that your learning experience is high quality in terms of content, and also in terms of user experience?

Are there opportunities to introduce narratives or playful experiences that speak to learners' interests or internal drivers?

Can you 'nudge' learners with prompting or small and playful rewards?

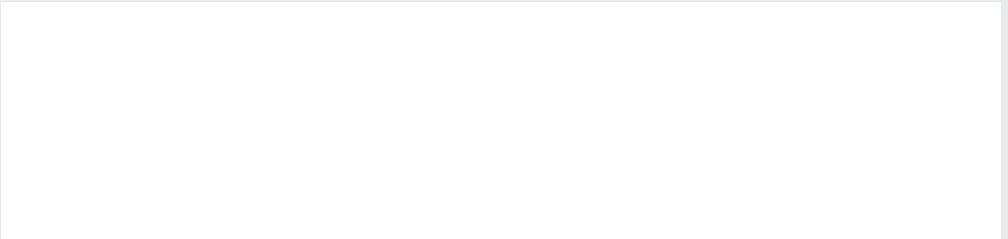
Have you spread the learning out? Are there activities at regular intervals with opportunities for feedback?

Provide learners with skills that can fulfil industry expectations:

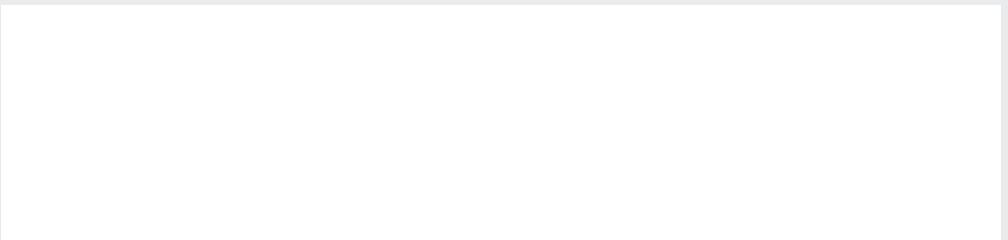
Are you preparing learners for workplace integration?



Have you built in patterns, rhythms, routines that reflect the real world of work?



What skills, beyond technical ones, are essential for workplace integration in your learning experience?



What kind of workplace situations can you help learners prepare for?



Encourage learners to work with each other:

Is group size having an impact on the effectiveness of any of your other adult learning strategies?

Are there opportunities for people to have informal roles in your peer to peer learning activities?

Are you creating opportunities for learners to be accountable for each other's learning?

Are you encouraging peer to peer learning to be led by the learners themselves?

Is your approach to peer to peer learning replicable and something that might sustain itself with minimal intervention?

Check how the learners are progressing and identify those who might need extra support:

Are you getting learners to record their learning journey and reflect on it?

Are there regular opportunities to reflect on the progress of learning?

Are the reflection activities purposeful and based on the skills, attitudes, behaviours you are instilling?

How can you ease learners into giving and receiving feedback if it's not something they are used to?

How will you support those that fall behind? What about those that race ahead?

Are learners getting plenty of feedback, and more importantly doing something with this feedback?



Find out more

FutureFit is a major training and research project led by Nesta and supported by Google.org. FutureFit is focused on creating an effective adult learning system to help tackle inequality and social exclusion. In partnership with some of Europe's largest unions, leading researchers, employers and adult learning experts, FutureFit is reskilling workers at risk of job displacement and conducting a large evaluation about what works, so that solutions can be scaled.

Since 2019, we have published two reports investigating what drives and prevents participation in lifelong learning in Europe and the UK. These are:

Becoming FutureFit: what we know about adult learning across Europe, which looks at who takes part in adult learning across Europe, what are the barriers that prevent participation and how this varies across countries.

Education for All: making the case for a fairer adult learning system in the UK, which uses data from the European Statistical System to provide a deeper understanding of adult learning and identify opportunities to improve the UK adult learning system.

To find out more, visit: www.nesta.org.uk/project/futurefit

Please get in touch if you would like to:

- Get involved
- Tell us about your work
- Sign up to receive our newsletter

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Our FutureFit Partners

We are privileged to work with the following partners from Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and The Netherlands:

- ACLVB Liberale Vakbond
- ABVV-Metaal
- Auto-ja Kuljetusalan Työntekijäliitto (AKT)
- ACV-CSC Metea
- Det Antropologiske Foretagende
- Demos Helsinki
- Finansförbundet
- Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV)
- HIVA
- HK Privat
- Hyper Island
- INOM-Arbeiders
- Ivaekst
- Palvelualojen ammattiliitto (PAM)
- SBI Formaats
- Suomen ammattiliittojen keskusjärjestö (SAK)
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- Unionen
- Universiteti Utrecht
- The Think Tank DEA
- The University of Gothenburg
- TOFAM West-Vlaanderen
- Vision

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