Somerset College made the decision to purchase Planet eStream in October 2012 and since installation, the learning resources team has been busy setting up and trialling the system prior to roll out to tutors. We have been invited by Somerset College to co-present with them at the JISC RSC e-Resources Fair to be hosted by the college on April 24th and as preparation for that, we caught up with Andrew Hobbs, Head of Learning Technology & Learning Resources to see how they have been getting on so far….

Can you provide a brief background on your organisation?

Somerset College is a well-established higher and further education college based in Taunton, Somerset. We offer a wide variety of courses, both locally and nationally, that range from entry level right through to graduate degrees. We are in the top 10% of colleges nationally for achievement with 95% pass rates for further education and, in partnership with Plymouth University and the Open University, a 97% pass rate for higher education.

What is your/your department's role within your organisation?

The Learning Resources team is responsible for the day-to-day running of our two college learning centres but we also maintain the college's virtual learning environment and manage all the digital resources that the college utilises. We deliver one to one or group support to students and staff in how to find, use and manage resources relevant to their subject areas.

How did you manage your media prior to purchasing Planet eStream and can you provide a brief background on how and when the original concept for the need for a digital media streaming, archiving and off-air recording solution arose?

Prior to purchasing Planet eStream, Freeview programmes were recorded using a PVR and then edited and burnt onto DVDs which were then catalogued and placed in the library. Other media had to be stored by members of staff on an individual basis and there was no overall system for recording, storing or finding them.

Our original concept for a digital archive arose some time ago with the introduction of Box of Broadcasts into the educational sector as it was felt that we needed to shift from a time-consuming physical recording process to a much more streamlined and efficient digital one and that BOB might provide the means to do that. As it happened in the end, after trialling and testing, BOB didn't have the range of facilities that we were looking for whereas Planet provided a much more comprehensive system.

What features of Planet eStream have you found most useful for your applications?

The facility to embed videos, and now categories, directly into our VLE has probably been the most useful aspect of the software during implementation, as while password protected access is being ironed out by our IT people, it's given us a safe way of sharing media resources in the meantime. We also expect to use the mobile upload on a regular basis so staff out on field trips or sporting events etc. can upload the videos directly onto the system from their mobile devices.

Please explain how our most recently implemented features will assist you? i.e. subtitles, streaming to mobile devices and digital signage functionality. Please also include detail on what further ongoing development you would like to see at some stage.

At the moment, we're hoping that the digital signage functionality may provide a simpler alternative to the one we're using currently so although it's yet to be tested, it's a very useful option to have and could well be a valuable tool for us.

In the future, we would like to look forward to seeing further development of the Freeview search capability, with the possibility of users subscribing to saved keyword searches so that they will be automatically alerted to any programmes coming up with matching keywords (rather than needing to search manually)

Finally, please comment on your experience overall of both the product and your dealings with Planet PC?

Overall, our experience with Planet PC so far has been very positive. The support staff are very quick to respond to any issues and very open to suggestions of new features – a few of which were implemented within a month or two of the suggestion being raised. The product itself has been excellent during setup. It's clear and simple to use but offers a wide range of potential uses.