

Case Study: Walsall College, UK | Students: 4,000 FT, 7,000 PT | Age: 14-19 & 19+ | Class size: 18 | Vocational Education

Strategic approach to ongoing change leads to teachers becoming more effective, efficient and innovative in their teaching and learning.

Personalising learning is a challenging process of finding new ways to support students, of professional development and often, developing new uses of digital technologies. This process of change can challenge teachers' effectiveness as they move from traditional practices to new ways of working. At Walsall College they've addressed this by viewing these changes as part of the same journey, recognising that teachers need personalised support if they are to be really effective in their interactions with learners.

"We consider teaching and learning as a complete journey" remarks Jayne Holt, Director of Learning Technologies and Innovation at Walsall College. This includes developing efficient ways to support staff's own development. In 2009 as the College was moving to a new site, there was shared agreement that it provided an opportunity to reconsider the processes of teaching and learning as well as a recognition that the process of changing site and approach could be a challenge to teachers' effectiveness.

"Walsall College is uniquely and proudly vocational. Our greatest passion is unleashing the potential of individuals, communities and businesses; our greatest legacy is the talent of our learners; skilled, professional and enterprising."

Amarjit Basi, Principal and Chief Executive

The Challenge

One of the early challenges identified by the College was of teachers' confidence, attitudes and skills in developing new approaches to teaching and learning – and that these issues needed to be addressed on an institutional level. But recognising the best way of supporting staff through this change meant that a whole range of professional development activities were created: "bite-sized" sessions, drop-in surgeries, lunchtime and early morning opportunities were all offered. Although some "invaluable" sessions were held with Promethean experts and external advisors, Jayne believes that it was the variety of CPD opportunities that made the support really appropriate. "We



increased the number and type of sessions, but we also decreased the barriers to attending them". This included using an e-booking system where staff could easily sign-up for courses and browse what was on offer.

The Long Game

"We started this approach over 12 months before we accessed the new building". The approach was strategically planned to change the teaching and learning but within that process was a recognition of the varying paces of personal development. To manage this, some technologies were introduced as mandatory, particularly the reporting and management tools that would help the whole staff be more efficient in their communications and planning. Other technologies and teaching practices were also introduced when teachers were ready for them. "We wanted to build their confidence and skills," Jayne explains, "we're all on the same journey, it's just we're all at different stages". Mixing teachers at different stages of this journey meant that staff could take inspiration from all areas of the College and develop at their own pace. This led to a growing confidence amongst all staff.



“Promethean believes that education is the fuel that drives economic growth and social progress. Effective teaching is the key to successful, collaborative and personalised learning-which in turn creates better prepared students, more prosperous nations, more secure societies, and more engaged global citizens.”

The Culture of Participation and Innovation

Teachers with expertise in particular technologies are encouraged to share their approaches with other staff. This has become formalised through the core eLearning and Professional Development teams, but all staff have a responsibility to share good uses of technology and leading practices. It's even in their job descriptions to do so. Peer teaching is particularly valued throughout Walsall College with staff able to easily book the Professional Development Suite to join or lead sessions “Everyone has responsibility for sharing and improving – we just facilitate it”. With a supportive and inspirational Senior Leadership Team who lead by example, a culture of sharing and innovation has developed amongst the whole staff.

One powerful example is of Walsall College's internal “Innovation Fund” that rewards staff for creating imaginative resources that help others to develop their teaching practices. One such package was developed by a member of staff to support teaching of functional skills in Maths 1 and English 2. Flash based resources, ActivExpression activities and teaching materials were integrated into Promethean Charts which were then shared with other teachers to use or adapt. This supported other teacher's confidence in developing new approaches to subject teaching, but also in effective uses of digital technologies.

The Impact

“The main difference now is the way we handle the information that teachers use”. Electronic communications, planning and record keeping ensure that the flow of information between teachers and with students is clear and transparent. This “collaboration in the interests of the learner” has seen an increase in attendance and retention, along with “exceptional successes” for 16-18 students. Overall though, it is the confidence to develop the most appropriate practices to best support the students that is most evident. This strategic approach to ongoing change has supported the teachers to become more effective, efficient and innovative in their teaching and learning.

“When moving into a new state-of-the art, world class building, the College did not want to migrate into a new campus with old and traditional ways of working; their focus was to change people's lives.”

“I'm happy with the place that everyone is on with their journey – but I'm not happy with them staying there!” With Walsall College's supportive culture of improvement and sharing, it seems more than likely that this shared journey will continue to progress.

Lessons from Walsall College

- Create a shared vision with teachers, students and other stakeholders.
- Communicate the vision well with all people.
- Involve staff fully in the decision making process (including which technologies to adapt).
- Are clear about the time commitment that is required to change teaching and learning practices.
- Find ways to increase the opportunities for sharing and professional development, but also to decrease the barriers to teachers getting involved.

There is still much to do in this project but the impact on how we do things has been enormous, changing the culture to a greater level of e-innovation.

Both staff and learners were involved in defining what was important for e-personalisation, including what information and services do learners need and what reports staff need. This ensures the best possible interventions are in place to encourage learner success.