Weston College: Developing a marvellous Moodle

Summary

Weston College have redeveloped their Moodle standards from the traditional model of Gold, Silver and Bronze into a vibrant and dynamic model called Moodle Must Haves, Moodle Marvellous and Moodle Mind Blowing. This has significantly improved the quality of courses within their VLE (virtual learning environment) and inspired staff engagement.

Most courses have been upgraded to the minimum standard and beyond, which has encouraged cross-department competition to achieve the highest standards and helped to embed more immersive and interactive technology for students to gain access to.

About Weston College

Weston College is a further education college, located in Weston-Super-Mare. It has an A-Level pass rate of 97% and a 99% pass rate for degree courses, which is well above the national average. Vocational programmes are just as successful, with 99% pass rates across levels 1, 2 and 3.

90% of all their apprentices on work-based learning programmes are offered permanent jobs at the end of their program.

There are approximately over 7,500 students at the college, studying a range of courses; including BTEC, ECDL, A-Levels and degree programmes.
The college also has a pupil referral until for students excluded from mainstream secondary schools for ages 15 to 16.

The challenge

Moodle standards have been embraced by many colleges and providers to help improve courses and the content embedded within them. Whilst a Gold, Silver and Bronze standards-based system is an effective solution, it was one that Weston College were finding had become too ridged and staff lacked the enthusiasm to engage in it.

So the main challenge for the project and developing a new set of standards was how the college would be able facilitate a complete redesign of standards to encourage staff to make improvements to their courses within Moodle as well as ensure that students used the VLE more effectively.

Due to the fact that uptake in their previous model had low enthusiasm from staff, the learning technologist team had a difficult task to come up with something that would turn the tide.

The activity

After initial discussions about how the team would redevelop their Moodle standards, the initial concept was created for the new set of standards.

The team decided that they wanted to create standards that staff could relate to and would spark more enthusiasm, rather than simply have lists of performance criteria to fulfil. This involved the team spending considerable time to consult with staff through one-to-one training to find out the kind of technology and content that staff would find most beneficial.

Once the team had developed the content, they worked closely with marketing to come up with catchy and inventive slogans to make the standards more exciting. The new standards were named as Moodle Must Haves, Moodle Marvellous and Moodle Mind Blowing, which replaced the old model of Gold, Silver and Bronze.

Screenshot showing the three new Moodle standards designed by the marketing department at Weston College
“We used alliteration as a form of persuasive writing and we also used really strong marketing and branding to make it more professional.” - Amy Palmer, Lead Learning Technologist, Weston College

The college then held a re-launch event, which staff attended and it was here that the new standards were introduced.

The team additionally held further on-to-one training, workshops and audits to reinforce the changes with staff and how they could get the best out of their Moodle courses.

In terms of the achievable criteria required for each standard, each award has a different set of requirements. All courses need to achieve the Moodle Must Haves standard before being able to go for the Moodle Marvellous standard and then in order to achieve Moodle Mind Blowing all courses need to achieve Moodle Must Haves and Moodle Marvellous.

In order to achieve Moodle Must Haves, some of the type of key criteria required, includes:

- Course handbooks
- Syllabus information
- Assessment schedules

Some of the type of key criteria required for Moodle Marvellous courses, includes:

- Forums
- Images
- Embedded videos
- Turnitin assignments

Some of the type of key criteria required for Mind blowing courses, includes:

- Glossaries
- Quizzes
- Scrom content
- Moodle lessons

Mind Blowing courses are the highest achievable standard and they are designed to include more interactive and immersive content.

Staff can additionally select the criteria that suits their course, rather than have to achieve every single criteria on a prescribed list.
The outcomes

The new standards have completely changed the dynamics of how courses are setup and run in Moodle at Weston College. Staff are able to approach their courses in a more versatile way and include all the elements that are going to be beneficial to their students as opposed to those that need to be checked off from a list.

The new model has created a positive teaching environment and healthy competition between staff, who are trying to achieve the best results for their courses. It has also encouraged staff to immerse in new technology and extend their own teaching practice. In turn this has helped to extend the support provided for students, including:

- Greater access to technology
- Greater depth of interactive technology available
- Better course structure
- Better support
- More flexibility

The new model has helped to redefine Moodle for staff and has opened up the potential of the VLE to staff that were not very engaged before the changes. This has given staff the knowledge and support they need to help their students further and make Moodle interactive as opposed to a static storage space for resources and files.

“Before the new standards we were constantly having to go to the staff to get them to improve their courses and talk to them about their courses, now they are coming to us and asking for training and making suggestions.” – Louise Hutson, Learning Technologist, Weston College
The impact

The biggest impact of the new standards has been the engagement of staff and the improvements made to courses within Moodle.

Staff are more proactively involved than they were before with the previous model and students have a VLE that is constantly evolving and providing them with the tools and support that they need.

“The engagement the staff have with Moodle as well as the buy in from the senior management team is beyond anything we could have even hoped it would be.” – Amy Palmer, Lead Learning Technologist, Weston College

By having a more flexible and rewarding set of standards Weston College have not just raised the standard of courses within Moodle, but given the staff something that they want to engage in. The knock-on effect is that the students have a much wider depth of technology available to them and are better supported.

“The students are loving it because it’s a lot more interactive and that is the strength of Moodle, it’s the communication aspect of it, this has opened up so many of our staff to the potential of Moodle that they weren’t quite so aware of before.” – Louise Hutson, Learning Technologist, Weston College

“Having just completed the final audit you can see how well tutors have engaged with it and they are all very proud of their badges, it’s a way for tutors to share best practice and anyone that looks at it can see that it’s a mind blowing course.” - Alice Bingham, Learning Technologist, Weston College
The lessons learned

The only issue with the project has been that the learning technology team ran out of Moodle Mind Blowing badges and had to order more because so many staff had achieved the highest Moodle standard.

“It’s worked brilliantly, even better than we would have hoped.” – Louise Hutson, Learning Technologist, Weston College

Useful links

Weston College

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Moodle

Moodle news

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