Gloucestershire College: Intuitive learner management system helping students into work

Summary

Angela De Gandy, Employability and Skills Manager has significantly increased the attendance of students involved in their work programme by deploying an intuitive learning management system (LMS). Since the LMS has been in place student attendance at their sector-based work academies has risen from 50% to 80%.

Communication between staff and students has improved greatly and this has led to a rise in the number of students actively seeking and gaining employment through the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) and Jobcentre work programme.

Screen shot showing the initial user creation page within the Workpepper LMS software
About Gloucestershire College

Gloucestershire College is a Further Education college, which has over 21,000 students spread across several campuses in Cheltenham, Gloucester, Forest of Dean and several smaller sites in Kingsditch and Tewkesbury.

The main college campus at Gloucester was formally located at Gloucester Docks.

It offers Higher Education up to and including HNC, HND and Foundation Degree levels. In 2008 the college won the Civic Trust Award for the Best Climate Friendly Scheme.

The challenge

Keeping track of students from enrolment to employment is a big challenge for Gloucestershire College.

Prior to the deployment of their LMS system the college was struggling to:

- Track students throughout their journey
- Record and plan students’ activities and placements in an accurate way
- Manage the non-attendance
- Communication across the team on individual learners

The activity

Angela was looking for a solution that could offer a way of delivering a personalised learning programme and to be able track students.

Equally important was the ability to provide quality data, which would help improve the learner experience and highlight the value of their service to students.

Angela organised a meeting with the internal stakeholders, administrative team, teaching team and the senior managers to determine what the requirements were for the whole process, right through from infrastructure to deployment. This identified the requirement for a management system that could be considered for use to deploy campus-wide.

Workpepper was identified as the software system that the team felt could provide the college with what they needed. The MIS team looked at how the system could fit into the Skills Funding Agency funding audit, so that data captured could match the SFA requirements.

“It was very much a whole college approach matching the learner journey and mapping a system that could help improve journey measure and monitor results and
help in preparing for SFA monthly returns.” – Angela De Gandy, Employability and Skills Manager

When the college had identified a workflow and audit requirement the Workpepper LMS was tweaked and developed to meet the needs of the college. The system was trialled for 8 weeks to test the functionality in practice.

“Once we were happy that the system worked, we just flew with it and we’ve never looked back.” – Angela De Gandy, Employability and Skills Manager

In terms of the features involved with the Workpepper system, there are three main areas involved, which are: Administration, the Teachers and Managers.

For administration, the team can:

- Accurately work with the job centre to create event and calendar entries
- Communication tools for letter generation and text tools
- Accurately log and communicate updates, track student development and progress
- Track where they are and where they are supposed to be

For the Teachers, they can:

- Create student individual action plan
- Access the students’ individual action plan
- See the full programme on offer for clients
- Access their own timetables
- Communicate with learners via text tool
- Communicate with the whole team about learners via communication log
- Record information about learners in one place such as barriers to work – what they’ve done in the past and support for where they go in the future
- Personalise their learner journey Track the learning aims
- Use registers and mark books for any qualifications or unit the student has passed
- See reports and attendance

For the managers, they can:

- Manage all the learning aims effectively
- Meet the requirements of any changes to SFA funding units
- Plan more effectively and on-the-fly room allocation planning
- Regulate different departments and track students’ progress
Screen shot showing the past attendance of learners area within the LMS

The outcomes

Deploying an LMS system has undoubtedly enabled Angela and her team to be able to more accurately log and track students’ progress. Both staff and students are able to clearly see when they have training events and it provides a much better way of planning and organising the curriculum.

The system has enhanced the entire process from induction right through to helping students into jobs.

The Workpepper system has provided the college with relevant, important and accurate data, which they can use to improve the service to both students and referral agents.

“It’s enabled me to very much streamline and effective in how we meet the project aims, and the learning aims, which is to get people into work and not just qualifications.” Angela De Gandy, Employability and Skills Manager

The system is scalable, with 2000 students in 2013/14, in comparison to 300 when the project first started in 2011. The management of this many students would have been very difficult without the LMS system. The increase has been in learner numbers and the delivery team, not in the administration of the programme.
“Having the information electronically web enabled it means tutors can access it from home – they can access it with the learner, wherever they like so it can be in the classroom, or having a cup of coffee with their learning, using an iPad,” – Angela De Gandy, Employability and Skills Manager

Capturing the right information has been key and providing staff with the ability to book students onto any course straightaway, without reams of paper and letters sent in the post. Staff can show the student all the courses that fit into their calendar and action plan and all the appropriate courses can be booked at the click of a button, and provide the learner with their timetable.

Another advantage to the system is that the students will get a text message to alert them of any appointments and training days at least one day before course.

The Workpepper system is cloud-based and students and staff can use their smart device to connect at any time, so it’s a very useful communication tool.

The impact

Since the system has been in place the college has seen a 30% rise in attendance at their sector based work academies. This reinforces that the LMS system is not just an excellent data management system, but one that has improved communication, retention, administration, management and attendance.

Staff and students are more empowered by having a system that is enabling the college to deliver a streamlined and flexible learning management system.
Through the rise in attendance for the students at the college’s sector-based work academies this has led to a rise in the number of students actively seeking and gaining employment, which is a fantastic achievement for the college.

“As a management tool it does functionally what I ask for, but in terms of the reality, it’s giving me so much information about what’s been successful and which courses are used by the job centre and DWP, and which courses result in more job outcomes.” – Angela De Gandy, Employability and Skills Manager

The lessons learned

“The only thing I would have done differently is really thought about future-proofing because things do change, so think about how your provision might change in the future.” – Angela De Gandy, Employability and Skills Manager

Useful links

- Gloucestershire College
- Macleod Associates Workpepper
- Jisc RSC South West

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