Weston College: Award-winning LibraryPlus service creating a vibrant learning environment

Summary

Weston College have transformed their library service into an award-winning vibrant and creative environment thanks to a complete redevelopment.

Their LibraryPlus service is providing students with an innovative social learning space, with which they are able to utilise and benefit from a range of support from the Learning Technologist’s team. Learning mentors have been introduced to provide further support and this interlinks with several successful existing projects, such as eVolution and Tech Genius.

Students have a collaborative and engaging place to work and Graduate Interns working towards their level 5 teaching qualifications have benefitted from a cross-cultivation of sharing key practice.

Screen shot showing one of the vibrant flyers used for the eVolution project at Weston College
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

The main challenge for the college was to transform their traditional library, which was a quiet study environment into one that was bright and vibrant. In order to do this the college had to fully renovate the library learning space and make fundamental changes to the design and layout of the book shelves and physical areas of the library.

Making changes to the library was difficult both in terms of the transformation of the space, but also as a new concept because the expectation for any library is that it is a quiet study space to help people to concentrate on their work.

It was also a challenge for library staff to embrace the concept of the new learning space and help facilitate the changes in terms of the more open nature of the service.

Teaching staff additionally face the challenge of improving their skills and knowledge, whilst trying to engage in the curriculum. So they found it a challenge to manage their time effectively in order to learn about new technology and systems to introduce into their classrooms.

The activity

In terms of the learning space, several changes were made to the arrangement of the space, such as:

- Book shelving height dropped to make a much more open space
- More technology and computers installed in the library
- Interactive walls, that students can write on to brainstorm
- The look was made more student-friendly and colourful
- Drop in blocks and soft seats that can be used as a social space
- HE specialist library support provided

As part of the redevelopment of the library into LibraryPlus, Jon Hofgartner, Technology and Library Services Team Leader, is responsible for tying additional services for staff and students into the library, so that they can benefit from a much more coordinated library service.

Tech Genius, the ICT helpdesk run by students for students is one such project that is housed within the library and enables students and also staff to benefit from additional ICT support.

“The concept was to make a vibrant and creative, bright environment where students could come in, so a social learning space with computers and access to technology, which was key. So as soon as students step through the door they are having that outstanding learning experience.”
- Jon Hofgartner, Technology and Library Services Team Leader

Another development in terms of extending the reach of services to students has been the implementation of a graduate internship programme, which enables graduates on a Level 5 teaching qualification to work directly with the Learning Technologists, Library Administrators and Learning Mentors. Graduates on the internship can alternate between the different roles to gain more experience.

“The idea is that at the end of this year they’ll have that teaching qualification, plus experience of classroom technologies, doing the one to one and mentor support and also the library administrative tasks, so they could take their learners into a library and know exactly where to find the resources and some of the transformations they’ve had have been really notable.” – Jon Hofgartner, Technology and Library Services Team Leader

The college have additionally extended the reach and appeal of their Moodle VLE through the evolution of the Moodle Medals concept into Moodle Must Have’s, Moodle Marvellous and Moodle Mind Blowing. Staff that have achieved excellence are awarded a badge for ‘mind-blowing staff’, this is put into all staff email and photographs of the occasion to recognise the hard work of those staff working on the VLE to provide quality content. As part of capturing the impact of their Moodle developments, Jon keeps an audit to directly assess the quality of their Moodle courses.
The outcomes

One of the great outcomes this year of the LibraryPlus project has been the success of the Graduate Intern programme, which has enabled the graduates to develop new skills whilst studying to become teachers. LibraryPlus is giving them the opportunity to work with library staff and therefore learn first-hand about the kind of support and services that the library have. They have additionally been able to learn about the interactive classroom through the Learning Technologists and the type of classroom technologies that are used. Graduates are also creating their own content and able to use the knowledge they have gained to integrate within their own studies.

“We’re having the graduates producing this content as well, so we’re seeing them producing online interactive content, which is an excellent skill to have on a teacher’s CV, so the outcomes are to produce excellent teachers that have all these skills.” - Jon Hofgartner, Technology and Library Services Team Leader

The service is also branded very vibrantly with colourful logos and strong messages to reinforce the aims and objectives of the project.

Staff are more enriched in terms of their knowledge of web 2.0 tools and the kind of support that they can offer because of the way in which LibraryPlus is coordinated with other support services in the college.

“It’s about allowing creativity, creativity is behind a lot of the stuff we do, we’ll come up with new concepts – have room to come up with new projects – it’s allowing that stability to try things.” - Jon Hofgartner, Technology and Library Services Team Leader
Ofsted have cited that the Moodle course quality audit that has been provided to them through the LibraryPlus Learning Technology team has been something that they have really valued in terms of evidencing the success of the new Moodle standards at Weston College.

**The impact**

The re-structure and development of the LibraryPlus service has undoubtedly improved the library service for students, who now have access to a range of services within a more social and collaborative environment.

“I can find the support and resources that I need.” – Weston College student

Additional services such as Tech Genius have proved to be so valuable that in recognition of their efforts the LibraryPlus service have been awarded a prestigious national Best Practice Award from The Council for Learning Services in College (CoIRiC). This service has given students support for technical and ICT issues and has also proved to be invaluable for staff. For example one member of staff was able to rescue 5 years of work from a faulty USB stick, when otherwise that work would have been lost.

Graduates who are job shadowing staff in LibraryPlus as part of their Level 5 Teaching Qualification are able to see first-hand how the different areas of LibraryPlus operate as well as gain valuable work experience across the service.
Staff have a real connection with their students because they actively engage with them by attending student forums and student council meetings. This is reflected in some of the positive feedback from the student’s themselves.

“The staff are very helpful.” - Weston College student

“The LibraryPlus is a welcoming and comfortable place to be.” - Weston College student

Jon cites that one of the primary aspects for the success that underpins the whole service is their focus on learner voice.

“That’s the real driving force behind what we’re doing, we’ll respond to learner voice.” – Jon Hofgartner, Technology and Library Services Team Leader

The Moodle course quality audit has additionally provided Ofsted with a complete breakdown of the Moodle course standards within LibraryPlus, as well as the quality data that is fed back by students and staff.

“The learner experience is really everything, everything we do ties into that – it’s quality improvement for the technology initiatives that we’ve got in, making that learning experience better whether it’s online or in the facilities themselves and really part of that is growing links with curriculum.” - Jon Hofgartner, Technology and Library Services Team Leader

Useful links

Weston College

Jisc RSC South West

Tech Genius wins major national award

Disclaimer

Disclaimer: Jisc Regional Support Centres work with more than 2,000 UK learning providers helping them to improve performance and efficiency through the use of technology. Case studies may refer to specific products, processes or services. Such references are examples and are not endorsements or recommendations and should not be used for product endorsement purposes.