King George V Sixth form College: VLE course enables students to revitalise their college magazine and run it themselves entirely online

Summary

King George V Sixth Form has transformed the way its magazine is created and empowered students to run it online through the use of their VLE. All decisions about articles and designs are submitted through the VLE and the editing and collating is done online. This has saved money and is less time consuming than the paper version which was first established in 1921. The new magazine is more accessible to staff and students and is hosted on the VLE home page.

About King George V Sixth Form College

KGV has an excellent national reputation and continues to be one of the few Colleges awarded the accolade of Beacon College status in the country. Achievement is always impressive with more than 40 subjects regularly achieving a pass rate of 100%, over 50% of these passes at A or B level, fantastic results on any measure. These results are achieved through the dedication, drive and devotion of the staff. The relationship between staff and students is tremendously warm and positive and students are always saying how much they enjoy their learning.

The challenge

Magazine editor Jaime Bolzern says the decision to go online was made in a team meeting because the paper version was very expensive to produce and the readership wasn’t very high. “It was hard going trying to get students to buy it for £1.25, I think one issue we only sold 15 copies and the other option was getting sponsorship for ads from local businesses.”
Once the new format was changed Jaime says an initial hurdle was establishing the working practice of the editorial team. "We tried working through email originally and it didn’t really work so now we use Facebook to communicate. It works much better as everyone is on it so they see it straight away."

The 20 member editorial team also initially found it tricky working to deadlines but now work collaboratively to ensure the writers give the designers enough time for particular design requests to be done.

**The activity**

eLearning Lead Rob Clarke says the roles and permissions on the VLE were changed to allow for students to work as ‘Teachers’ on the VLE course. By setting the course-level permissions on Moodle, students can upload articles and the ‘editors’ have permission to edit as and when necessary. This cuts down meetings and avoids all articles being emailed. Because of student access to the VLE course the whole project can run with little to no teacher input. In fact, the editors are even able to change the roles themselves, when new people join the editorial team.

Rob says senior management were also happy for the magazine to be hosted online, particularly as it saved money. "Everyone’s keen that there is eProgression at the college and there has been a realisation that using these online tools can promote more student work and make it more accessible."

The editorial team have meetings every week and meet online to make decisions about the magazine content or themes for each issue. Once the magazine is
produced they let students and staff to know about it by email and through Facebook.

**The outcomes**

One of the main advantages of the online format is that it has allowed students to have complete editorial and production control.

Hannah Greenway, the writer and editor for the magazine explains: “We feel more independent and there is a sense of achievement doing it ourselves.”

A cover of the college magazine, formerly The Voice, which was printed out for a student art exhibition.

Other outcomes include:

- Readership has increased because it is free and it’s easier for people to access online.
- It encourages students to use the VLE and the magazine is also visible to the public if they visit the college website.
- Design students Molly Roberts and Warren Davies work on the magazine design and have found the experience has complimented their course work and are using examples in their portfolios.
• Magazine writer Olivia Stone says that having the online magazine gives a more professional look and it has made it easier to share what they’ve done with family and friends.

• The online medium has allowed editors to set up polls so that contributors and writers can vote on decisions such as the magazine cover they like best.

The impact

e-Learning Lead Rob Clarke says utilising the VLE has led to the smoother running of the College magazine. "It has given the students more editing power, but also the idea of going entirely digital has meant that the magazine itself is more widely available. In this way, the VLE can now be used to showcase the work of the students as well as being a place where students go to work.”

The magazine also looks significantly different online than on paper. It was more formal before but now it has a contemporary look which Head of Art, Suzanne Knowles says has been the influence of innovative American graphic designer, David Carson, on students.

Without the expense of getting the magazine printed the students are not bound by the advertising they had to incorporate before and being digital allows for a much freer layout.

Suzanne Knowles tells us: “It’s really grungy and students like the online version. Everyone working on it has been so organised and professional and it’s very impressive that it’s completely student run.”

Hosting the college magazine on the home page of the VLE encourages students to use it.
The lessons learned

The editorial team have already looked at ways to improve the magazine including:

- They have changed its name from ‘The Voice’ to ‘The Georgian’ which is what the original college magazine was called.
- Plans are in motion to make previous issues viewable to the public online.
- Currently the readership counter on the VLE is not being used to its full potential as the magazine is also sent by email so they would like to change this to get a better picture of readership.
- They hope to recruit new students for the magazine through the Fresher Fair.

Rob Clarke explains: “Other people could learn how easy it is, with a few simple changes, to make your VLE more democratic. It also, with a few clicks, streamlines the work and reduces the teacher's workload.”

Useful links

- Jisc RSC Northwest
- King George V Sixth Form College website
- King George V VLE website

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