Warrington Collegiate: LRC pop-up training area to enhance staff training and development

Summary

Warrington Collegiate wanted to locate an area of the Learning Resource Centre (LRC) and equip it with a smart board and ten laptops primarily for staff development. Since the pop-up seminar area has been created it has been used for Vado, Moodle, Quizdom and e-book training plus much more. From an empty corner in the LRC the addition of this technology has created a welcoming comfortable learning space. It has encouraged staff across all the curriculum areas to come into the LRC and extended their role in a place for high quality staff development.

About Warrington Collegiate

Warrington Collegiate, based in the north of Cheshire, is the largest learning provider in Warrington, offering a wide variety of courses to a diverse range of learners.

The challenge

The staff within the college’s LRC went to various courses and had discussions where they were being asked to prove what impact the LRC had on the college and to define ‘what was the need for having libraries in this day and age?’. As a result of this they were on the lookout for new ways to diversify the use of the LRC.

Additionally they are very mindful of the importance of digital literacy and they ensure that their college staff and students are up to date with new technologies and are able to access and use e-resources and technology confidently and efficiently.

They set up an e-brary group with the LRC and ILT and through this realised the College lacked a dedicated area for staff training in digital literacy and e-resources. This began the idea to develop a bespoke area in the LRC primarily for staff training. The LRC seemed fitting as it is a centre of knowledge and information retrieval and was also a comfortable and welcoming environment without a curriculum bias.

The activity
The e-brary team put forward a proposal to the Director of Learning and Learner Services for funds to cover the cost of ten laptops, a laptop trolley, divider boards and an interactive smart board. Technical expertise was provided by the e-brary and IT team.

The pop-up was established at Easter 2011. The setup was straightforward as the space lent itself to being divided off with flexible boards that could be removed (so the space could revert back to LRC study area). The IT department arranged the installation of the smart board, consulting with the e-brary team and provided laptops and a trolley. The process was done within two months as the LRC staff were keen to get staff training going and establish the area with its own identity.

Since the pop-up area has been created it has been used for Vado, Moodle, Quizdom and e-book training.

The biggest challenge was promotion. To tackle this they gave the area a name and an identity using an eye catching type face and logo. The area was identified as a staff development area and was promoted across the college as such. To launch it a coff(e) morning was organised with a schedule of short punchy staff training events led by Sylvia Haggett from Information and Learning Technologies and hosted by Bethan Bligh and Patrick Veale from the LRC.

It is still primarily used as a training area now, but has developed into a popular area for University visitors, staff meetings, school liaison visits, and it can be booked as a classroom at the discretion of LRC staff. Tutors can use it to show DVDs. A wireless keyboard and mouse have been provided and improvements are being made to recording of its use to help with impact statements.

Many sessions have developed organically depending on the need at the time. Plans for the future include, equipping the pop-up with more flexible furniture to suit its flexible remit.

Fionnula Byrne, the Careers and HE Advisor gave feedback about some of the school taster days: “Salford, Chester, The University of Manchester and Liverpool Hope have found the resources excellent and the space workable.”

Bethan Bligh from the LRC explains: “The great thing about the pop-up is that it goes across college curricular, academic and support staff and inside and outside agencies and fulfils a need that I don't think any of us realised was so great.”

Kate Halsall, one of the college’s dyslexia specialists said about the area: “It is a versatile, welcoming area in which to deliver informal workshop style sessions.”

**The outcomes**
There have been major benefits since the pop-up area has been introduced for staff and for students.

Bethan Bligh told us: “Staff appreciate having a purpose made area for staff training and it raises the profile of the training. They like that the area is flexible and meetings can be set out in an informal/formal style. They like that the training area is not in a particular curriculum area and that everyone is working in a neutral space.”

The staff like the fact that they now have right on hand:

- priority booking whenever they need the area
- a comfortable attractive area to bring outside visitors
- the skills of the LRC information advisors and the IT support advisor
- study skills; and
- an area which can also host events where catering can provide refreshments.

Students like having:

- access to the books without having to take them out and carry them around
- the LRC / IT staff to help; and
- the change of environment and some have said it is more ‘grown up’.

The LRC staff are required to take bookings, record all bookings electronically, give out the keys/smart board equipment and keep an eye on the area.

So while the pop-up area has created extra work for the LRC staff, the positives far outweigh this as the LRC staff have found that many more staff from all areas of the college interacting with the LRC. For example, the Principal delivers his welcome presentation on open days in the pop-up and the profile of the LRC has definitely been raised within and out of the college.

There has been really positive feedback from staff and students alike.

Linda Williamson, Teaching, Learning and Development Manager explains: “Currently the pop-up centre is used on a regular basis for group staff development. It is an ideal area in the library for staff to gather and learn from their peers in relation to ILT, Moodle and ICT.

At the same time we use the area for staff development for all types of subjects at lunch time, designated timeslots and when required by staff or individuals.

Having the availability of the pop-up centre allows staff to learn individually or as a group. This has been a real benefit to staff, as we do not then have to take up a classroom for staff development. This is an area we need to keep!”

Neil Colquhoun, Student Involvement Manager explains: “I have found that the pop-up area in the LRC is a really valuable space for the delivery of training to both staff and student groups. It’s flexibility and availability at short notice has been very useful in the delivery of safeguarding and learner voice training to staff teams and also to learner tutorial groups. Since the development of the pop-up area it has allowed me
to respond quickly to requests from staff teams for the delivery of training which I feel has allowed me to support both our staff and learners more effectively.”

The impact

Information and learning technologies training sessions were all additional to the training that was already offered to staff at the Collegiate. The pop-up was created from a vision of the LRC and ILT staff in a response to a lack of dedicated training space for staff – which they felt with the ever changing use of technologies in teaching needed addressing. The other sections happened organically as the pop-up was exploited creatively across the Collegiate.

Pop Up Use

Jenni Wood, Communications Officer, explains the impact of the pop-up for their school liaison. "The pop–up seminar room has enabled me to bring schools in on taster days and motivational events when otherwise there wouldn’t have been any space available. The young people respond well to the LRC environment which has an ethos and air of study around it.

The big advantage is that it is so flexible. It can be used for presentations, activities and informal talks and tours that I do with small groups. In my opinion it’s far better to be in the LRC than in a classroom. It makes the event seem more important and the young people put more of a value on being in a designated space rather than just
another classroom – they see enough of those at school! It definitely adds to the success of the event.”

The lessons learned

Bethan Bligh from the LRC tells us: “The main lessons we have learned throughout this whole process are be bold, work in tandem with other departments, be clear on the ‘need’ you are meeting, create a strong brand and take ownership.”

Useful links

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Warrington Collegiate

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