Burnley College: Engaging staff with an ‘Olympic Feast’ themed CPD

Summary

As part of its award winning staff development programme Burnley College has introduced an end of year ‘Feast’ of staff development activities. The Feast includes two weeks of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) workshops for all staff designed to promote e-Learning techniques, develop innovative teaching and learning methods as well as encourage staff to develop sharing hobbies and interests while always looking to expand the learning element.

About Burnley College

Burnley College is a high performing Sixth Form Centre which currently has around 7,500 students. These students are on a variety of courses ranging from pre-Advanced and Apprenticeship programmes to A Level, Advanced and University qualifications.

The challenge

Over the last few years Jo Crumbleholme, Learning Technology Tutor and Colin McAllister-Gibson, ALZ and Innovation Manager have been part of the cross College, Skills for Excellence Group which encourages the use of technology in lessons to ensure students benefit from active and engaging classroom sessions. Jo and Colin’s role began with training every member of staff on the College’s Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle) together with the use of Smartboards and this has grown extensively since those humble beginnings.

The Skills for Excellence Group suggested a different approach to CPD. They identified many topics to be developed across the College and realised these couldn’t be shared in one day. In order to offer this variety an innovative two week programme of events with 30 and 60 minute sessions was designed. The programme would promote an array of skills at the very edge of e-learning development. Having a mixture of short 30 minutes sessions and longer 60 minute sessions opened opportunities for more staff to take part. This is how the ‘Feast’ idea was born with such a broad range of activities on the ‘menu’.
The activity

Over the last two years the College has had themed CPD events at the end of the summer term. In the first year the theme was food (hence the Feast). Every session had food themed title such as keyboard kebabs and QR code quiche. Staff could book onto as many sessions as they wished via Moodle to take their fill. The activities were designed to improve teaching and learning and to share best practice. This enhanced professional skills. Some activities designed to have fun, focussed on building relationships with other staff across the whole College staff base including teams often forgotten such as security and refectory staff. It was so successful the College decided to repeat it again last year with an ‘Olympic Feast’ theme.

The overall concept for the feast is to develop all staff thus improving the student experience. Key aspects include:

- innovative use of technology
- exciting activities to ensure students are active and engaged in independent learning
- inspiring team activities to further build the organisational identity
- shared responsibility about engaging students
- collaboration to share best practice using existing expertise.

Over the two years staff confidence has grown with staff becoming more proactive in offering and extending their own sessions in last year’s Olympic Feast. Lots of ideas and the method of sharing has taken off beyond their expectations including linking in many part time staff.

In the Olympic Feast last year there were 87 facilitators involved with a variety of 55 different activities over 167 sessions during the nine days.

This year is the third year for the Feast and due to demand it has been extended to three weeks. The activities have been spread out over an extended period following requests from staff to provide much more choice and opportunity to take part.

Examples of sessions include:

- Appletics – showcasing a range of free Apps.
- Facebook and Twitter in Teaching and Learning – to discover how to use social media to engage students.
- Hidden Gems on the Internet - raised awareness of useful websites including the Regional Support Centre (RSC) service.
iPads in Education - showcased a range of educational apps including an iPad enhancement.

…and fun sessions such as:

- Crazy Golf - the Construction students designed and created a course. This was led by brickwork students and included work from carpentry, joinery and plumbing.

- Grow your own vegetables workshop - the horticulture department arranged a class to build 1 foot square gardens of vegetables and herbs.

- Burnley College Bake In – bakers of the College came together to share and sample their favourite recipes. Money raised from the sale of the baked goods went to charity.

Staff who attended the Olympic Feast said:

"It was great, keep doing it! It’s great to try something different and access sessions which directly link to your job. I just love visiting other departments, something I have never been encouraged to do at other colleges I have worked in."

"The short 30 minutes sessions were perfect and the tricks/tips on how to enhance what you do in the classroom were really useful. I will incorporate some of these into my sessions”. We need to keep doing this to share more across the College"

The ‘Feast’ has made staff more receptive to CPD. It encourages staff to come together across College, form relationships and makes staff think about each department in a different way.

Teachers and support staff can find it difficult to gain confidence in the use of technology to support their roles. This initiative encourages the use of technology with straightforward techniques in a safe environment with sometimes hobby based contexts.

Due to its success the Feast will be extended every year as long as staff demand it – it is getting bigger and better! Staff have already identified over 100 ideas for this year’s sessions.
The outcomes

The formal feedback from staff has been really positive:

“More of the same please. I think the mix of informative and fun activities are an ideal morale boost for all staff and a great way to meet colleagues from across College who would not normally come in contact with in our normal roles.”

"Excellent to have fun activities like golf which showed the great work that is taking place in Brickwork but also allowed you to make a connection with other staff who work at the College. It mixed fun with work related activities.”

“I took something valuable away from each session and I will use it in my teaching. I also met other staff from across College. Excellent and informative events!”

They have seen an increase in staff involvement since staff development has been expanded in this way. Creating a two or three week timescale it gives staff a chance to learn new skills for the following year whilst having fun at the same time inspiring them to think of teaching students this way. Staff practice the skills they learned over the summer to help plan classes the following year. Workshops sessions are also available for staff if they require any further help.

Although it was mandatory to attend a minimum of three sessions the majority of staff attended more.

After the ‘Feast’ a non-compulsory evaluation form was emailed to all staff via Moodle. There were 159 responses out of 360. Everybody rated the ‘Feast’ as excellent. There were a few comments on how things could be made even better which we will take on board. Jo explained: ‘It’s really hard to get people to complete questionnaires, so this was a fantastic response.’

The impact

There was a massive impact in terms of people coming together from different departments and areas of the College. Staff attended events led by departments that they would never normally have any involvement in, such as ‘the voice’ in the Creative Arts and Media department.

- The session on iPads resulted in bookings increasing dramatically for use of iPads in the classroom. The number of iPads the College bought as a result has more than doubled. They are always booked out.

- Apps and other technologies are being used in lessons a lot more since the Appletics sessions.

- One session taught staff how to use presentation software Prezi which resulted in an increased usage of this software across the College.

- A Level subjects can be very theoretical so the ‘Feast’ helped teachers think about how they can embed technology into teaching and learning. One result
of this was a ‘quick photo’ revision aid for chemistry reducing a one hour lesson to a one minute clip.

- Colin has noticed an increase in staff using the Apple TVs to share Apps with students to get them interacting. For instance in the Health & Social Development Division, they use the Pregnancy App to show development of the foetus. This is then tested through Questions and Answers with the teacher using packages such as Socrative.

- An A Level Computing tutor is piloting a Raspberry PI group and they have already started writing programs for it to carry out different functions.

- Many students can now be seen filming with iPads in the corridors – students are so much more engaged now.

- Staff use Moodle more now. The resources from the ‘Feast’ were all stored there, so if a staff member couldn’t make a session they could get the resources and hand outs off Moodle.

When Moodle was first introduced, more than 4 years ago, less than 25% of staff used it for their teaching resources. Since the ‘Feast’, the profile of Moodle has been raised and it is now used for resources and as a platform for videos and interactive activities. Many more staff are using it now. It’s no longer just a storage area for hand outs and PowerPoints: it has developed into a much more interactive area and will develop further this year.

**The lessons learned**

It's really important to have senior management buy in and cross College support to drive the project forward and to make sure everything is set up and running correctly. The activities need to be well organised, managed and planned - one person must take control of that. A good booking system is required to ensure there are no clashes. Once the ‘Feast’ starts, it more or less runs itself. It is planning that takes time and lessons are continuing to be learnt in making the process run smoothly.

It is important to encourage as many people as possible to volunteer to deliver sessions. Many staff have hidden skills that they can contribute and having a non IT specialist showcase technology increases the buy in from other staff. There needs to be a whole organisational involvement with the activities.

Finally, it is important to be flexible with the sessions and timings of them so staff have a choice and have the capacity to double book the session by opening up a second room at short notice if necessary.

**Useful links**

Burnley College
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