Summary

Priestley College has found a robust, easy to implement solution to the common problem of how to manage resources and student work so that it can all be found quickly and easily, wherever staff and students want to access it.

The solution originally suggested proved not to be the best one for this institution, so the ILT development team went back to the drawing board and found a more workable alternative in Google Classroom. This is a solution that students like and find easy to use, to such an extent that they are now driving adoption of the platform right across the college.

The challenge

Priestley College is located south of Warrington near Stockton Heath and offers an extensive range of AS and A-levels, a variety of BTEC and vocational programmes at Levels 2 and 3 and a comprehensive enrichment programme. It has a reputation for its supportive and caring ethos, “in which every learner really matters”.

In 2014, staff identified a problem that many colleges will recognise – teaching staff and students were saving resources and course work in many different locations making them hard to find and placing barriers in the way of collaborative working.

The college’s initial solution was to test the online office suite Microsoft Office 365 to create a central, collaborative platform and offer a range of services including unlimited cloud storage. Having already invested in Microsoft services this seemed like a practical solution – however, pilot trials identified issues that meant students and staff became resistant to using this particular platform. Recognising that the success of the project would depend on the goodwill of service users, the college’s ILT development team began to investigate other solutions.
The solution

For Priestley College, Google Classroom proved to be the answer.

Google Classroom is a suite of tools that support collaborative working and students have taken to it enthusiastically because they find it intuitive and easy to use. In Google Classroom each individual’s work is saved and assigned to them automatically, so that it doesn’t get misfiled, is easy to locate and can be shared with other learners and with staff. It is a highly collaborative tool – teachers can see how projects are progressing in real time, and offer advice and actionable feedback that enables the final piece of work to be improved before it is handed in. What’s more, students can start a piece of work at college and then pick up where they left off when they get home or anywhere they have internet access using the Classroom app on their phone or tablet; they can work collaboratively with other students, wherever they happen to be.

Google Classroom is supporting learners to work more innovatively – enabling them to publish their work to their blog or to include a video with their assignment.

A survey of students conducted by the college shows the many reasons they like using Google Classroom – ‘feedback from teachers’ (20%); ‘work is saved in one place’ (18%); ‘it saves automatically’ (16% -with a further 13% saying ‘it can’t be lost’); ‘better organised’ (4%). These are just some of the reasons why students are now driving adoption of the platform. If teachers aren’t using it, they are increasingly likely to be asked why not.

Impact

With growing pressure from students, more teachers are taking up the challenge and getting to grips with Google Classroom via bite-size training sessions offered by the college’s ILT development team and feedback from their experiences is very positive; see the More information box below for more details.

Teachers are using Google Classroom to:

» Arrange folders and make it easy to save work
» Share documents and resources
» Comment on work, even as learners type it in remotely
» Give actionable feedback on assignments
» Ensure all assignments are completed and submitted
» Foster collaboration and reflection
“Students really like getting fast, actionable feedback. For a teacher, it is very powerful to be able to watch students in real time as they improve their work in response to your comments and to be able to offer additional timely input if it is needed.”

Wendy Winnard, teacher, Priestley College

Key points

Wendy Winnard’s tips for supporting students and staff to work successfully with Google Classroom:

» Identify someone within the organisation who has enough technical knowledge to help teachers set up their Google Education accounts

» Ask a technology champion to try things out first – when it goes well, their students will probably do the “selling” for you

» Show a technophobe how easy it is to use - if they can use basic Microsoft packages they will find Google Classroom even more intuitive to use

More information

Wendy Winnard, teacher, Priestley College

Email: w.winnard@priestley.ac.uk

Read the teachers' comments on Priestley College's blog