



University Sponsored Technical College
Aston University Engineering Academy, Birmingham

BlueSky



Paperless performance management supports teacher development

The University of Aston Engineering Academy uses BlueSky systems to fit its innovative and highly technical ethos.

About the school

Aston University Engineering Academy is the first major university-sponsored technical college in England. Based in the heart of Birmingham, alongside its main sponsor Aston University, the academy caters for 14 to 19 year olds from across the city. The academy's unique focus on engineering and science is enhanced through strong links with local and national industrial partners.

Since opening in September 2012 with 120 students in years 10 and 12, the academy's roll is now 475, with one more year to go before it reaches capacity of 600.

What were the challenges?

Principal, Daniel Locke-Wheaton explains, "From day one as we built the academy up from scratch, there was a real need for a clear and concise system to draw together the process of CPL, professional management and lesson observations.

"We were early adopters of BlueSky and so there were no outdated paper systems to replace. Our vision for a paperless environment was supported by our only having four printers in total across the whole academy.

"Key for us was a system that could permeate all aspects of teacher development. Most importantly we

wanted the opportunity to listen to our staff who would then use their review to self-reflect on their teaching standards, identify their own development needs and drive focus through personal learning plans.

"By selecting and measuring the impact of their CPL in this way they can ultimately present their evidence for performance progression.

Why BlueSky?

"After seeing three or four performance management systems, we chose BlueSky. We'd been developing our own parallel lesson observation software, but soon realised BlueSky did everything we needed and more, such as learning walks, observations, and CPL which we hadn't even considered managing in this way.

"The software is intuitive, with things within it found where you would expect them to be. Combined with easy navigation, this means that staff quickly pick up its use with only a small amount of training."

How is BlueSky helping?

"From a senior leadership perspective, BlueSky equips us with the ability to track and access reports very quickly,

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Daniel Locke-Wheaton, Principal



continued Dan. “Ofsted inspectors have particularly praised the efficiency and professionalism of the reports that we are able to generate at the click of a button, demonstrating not only the standard of teaching at any one point, but also the standard of teaching over time.

“The academy uses all aspects of BlueSky – the system has filtered down from senior to middle leaders, helping them all to analyse and support their staff development needs. All courses are booked through the system, including all impact and development training needs.

“I’m delighted by the way BlueSky has worked to produce the reports for us, especially visual reports.

“Along the way we have pushed the barriers of what BlueSky can do, specifically in terms of the reports we needed for governors because it is secure and easy to access. All governors are on BlueSky because it is secure and easy to access – there’s a special facility allowing governors to access confidential information. My Blue is used for the governing body and its forums, with each forum having its own project. Since opening, no single piece of paper has ever been sent to a governor.

What impact is BlueSky having?

“BlueSky is the glue that holds lots of processes together,” said Daniel. “I speak to other schools with different electronic systems and senior leaders working in silos. That doesn’t happen here because we’re using all the tools BlueSky has to offer.

“In BlueSky, everything is tied together with the performance review and is open and transparent. Everyone is involved and when staff request to attend a training course, we can see why, its relevance and what the impact will be.

“The biggest impact of BlueSky is the ability for staff to

- assess their needs,
- highlight their strengths which can be used to support others with coaching and mentoring,
- identify their areas for improvement,
- link this to a personal learning plan,
- identify training needs,
- complete the training,
- capture CPL evidence,
- record impact,
- provide evidence for totality of their role and make pay progression, and
- have all this information within one online system that they can take with them if they come to leave for a promotion.

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“In November 2015 we were awarded the Silver Mark from the Teacher Development Trust, through their CPL audit of Quality and Culture of Professional Development. The audit highlighted the significant impact BlueSky had made throughout the Academy and with the personal development of staff.

What’s next?

“We will continue to work with BlueSky to develop ways to capture the holistic view of teaching over time,” said Daniel. “We are also moving on to collaboration projects with other schools, sharing resources and ideas. Longer term we would like to move our students on to BlueSky systems too.”

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