BlueSky

Linking professional development to individual and school objectives to support all staff

Streamlined processes provide evidence of achievement for individuals and for accreditation purposes

About the school

UWC Changshu China is a member of the United World Colleges, one of eighteen UWC schools and colleges around the world and received World IB School Status in 2015. UWC Changshu China provides education for students aged 15 - 19 and teaches the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma as its formal curriculum, a qualification that UWC played a major part in developing, while also emphasising the importance of experiential learning, community service and outdoor activities.

What were the challenges?

Leaders at UWC Changshu China had developed processes and practice internally and were looking to streamline appraisal and professional development for both teaching and support staff. They wanted to invest in an online platform to support a bottom-up approach to individual target setting. Leaders needed to see a total picture of a staff member's progress in one easy to access online platform, and at a strategic level, they wanted to be able to align and report on individual targets linked with the school improvement plan.

How is BlueSky supporting UWC Changshu China?

UWC Changshu China uses BlueSky for objective and goal setting, self-review and reflection, objectives review meetings, peer to peer observation, formal lesson observation, and professional learning.

> " There is such amazing support from BlueSky. No problem with the time difference. They always work hard to find a solution - super helpful, and that really makes a huge difference. "
>
> Christoph Genz, Deputy Dean of Faculty at UWC Changshu China.

The main purpose of using BlueSky is as an evaluation and appraisal system for staff. Before BlueSky there was no centralised point for collecting information, now it is all in one place. Staff set goals for themselves through their objectives, and these are reviewed mid-year and at the end of the year. They have also introduced peer to peer observation.

Christoph says, "We use BlueSky with all staff. We wanted staff to think about their goals, they are completely free in their goal setting. The line manager is there to have a conversation around those objectives, check that objectives have been set and to support their achievement."

"At the start of the academic year staff set their goals, and how they link to certain objectives of our school. It's become part of our normal routine," says Christoph. "Staff definitely feel that they are accountable for the goals and objectives that they set themselves and take the reviews seriously. As an International school our contracts are for two years and the information provided during these reviews helps with renewal conversations because of the evidence recorded in BlueSky. It has become an important source of information for decision-making."

Christoph continues, "One of the great aspects about BlueSky is that you can customise any form that you want, such as peer to peer observation or mid-year review templates, they are all simple and for staff who do not have English as their first language you can structure it in such a way that it does not present an issue."

"Another good thing about BlueSky is that it is transparent. Both staff members and line managers have access to the same information."

What is the impact?

"For us, one aspect of most impact is the peer to peer observation where we encourage people to drop in to other colleagues' classes. These are not formal lesson observations, they can stay for a minimum of twenty minutes, not to evaluate other colleagues but to reflect on their own practice. Staff then record their reflections in BlueSky to help with their professional development," says Christoph.

"Another aspect of using BlueSky is the evidence we can provide during accreditation. We are going through the process to be accredited by NEASC and their principles are linked to our vision building programme as well as our school learning principles that staff relate their objectives to and can upload evidence accordingly. The NEASC Accreditor is very happy because all the information is in one place!" adds Christoph.

"We also use BlueSky for formal lesson observations. We expect line managers to do a certain number of formal lesson observations and they are slightly more in depth to address a range of areas, not just a couple of points

as with the peer to peer observations. I do like the option of customising everything, of making it really pertinent to your school, your needs and organisation. We created the review templates ourselves, although BlueSky does have a large variety to choose from. Being able to create your own is really useful as it makes it individual to your school," says Christoph.

Professional development is also managed through BlueSky. "Staff are able to record their professional development activities through BlueSky and use that as reflection when talking about career progression. They can link their development with their objectives and upload evidence to support their professional development activities.," says Christoph.

"When new staff join our school there is an overwhelming amount of information in the induction and orientation programme. BlueSky is the last element to be introduced, we guide them through it bit by bit. We start by guiding them through the process of setting objectives, and the next aspect is their own self-review. Then we have the mid-year review with their line manager so they are introduced to it step by step in a normal natural way," Christoph adds.

Christoph continues, "BlueSky is well established now, we collect all this information and staff build their BlueSky profile and their whole career portfolio where they can upload all their evidence. The more people feel like they own it and they feel they are building and progressing something the more useful it becomes. For staff who have been here for a few years, to then be able to take their portfolio with them somewhere else makes it an impressive tool, and a great resource for staff to take with them throughout their career."

BlueSky made the whole online interaction easier during 2020 when school campuses were closed and teaching moved online due to the COVID pandemic. Christoph explains, "You can access it from anywhere because you do not need to be in the same room together. This helped with keeping our processes as normal as possible during this time. It was really very helpful to us."

What's next?
"We are definitely thinking of expanding evaluation and feedback. I am also going to discuss the idea of the Projects aspect with my colleague, the Dean of Professional Learning and explore how this can also support professional learning. Our professional learning groups could have a project each which is not part of the appraisal process but supports continuous professional development," says Christoph.

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