

International School

Ulink College of Shanghai, China



Staff centred appraisal, development, and professional learning

Giving staff the onus to be at the forefront of their own development by bringing everything together in one online platform

About the school

Ulink College of Shanghai (UCS) in China was founded in 2005 and is the flagship school of the Ulink Education Group which has eight schools in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Beijing, Suzhou and Wuhan. UCS offers A Level and IGCSE courses through Cambridge International Examinations and has IB World School status. It has an experienced international faculty and takes pride in its provision for staff professional development.

What were the challenges?

BlueSky was highly recommended by their sister school, Ulink College of Suzhou, which had been using it for about a year before. Emmanuel N Barthalomew, Academic Principal, had just redesigned their performance evaluation system and was looking for an online platform. They wanted a teacher-led, evidence based platform to make it easier for teachers to document their practice.

Emmanuel says, "It was an immediate sell for me, because when I saw BlueSky was easier, all in one place, with standards incorporated with professional learning and objectives, I thought 'this will be really, really good for us.'"

"We were dealing with the challenge of having a paper-based system. There was a lot of paperwork and we needed something to ease the workload on the teachers and those doing the evaluations."

“As soon as we had decided to proceed with BlueSky, implementation was smooth and quick. Our set up was bespoke using our own standards. It came out even better than we thought!”

Emmanuel N Barthalomew, Academic Principal
at Ulink College of Shanghai in China.

“The support service is really, outstanding. I’ll send an email, and even though we are eight hours ahead, before I know it there is a reply. The time difference is not an issue. If I have an urgent enquiry we have a phone call otherwise we set up a video chat or email.”

Emmanuel N Barthalomew, Academic Principal
at Ulink College of Shanghai in China.



“In the demonstration, it was highlighted that BlueSky is accessible by the individual teacher, the immediate line manager and then me, for example, as the academic principal so I can have mid-term checks, see what is going on and I can nudge people as well as congratulate and encourage staff on an ongoing basis,” says Emmanuel.

“BlueSky makes the process more developmental rather than judgemental. It means that staff can track their progress and highlight areas they are struggling in, or show what they have done so far, backed up with evidence and reflective practice, and it struck me that this is exactly what we were looking for.”

“As soon as we had decided to proceed with BlueSky, implementation was smooth and quick. Our set up was bespoke using our own standards. It came out even better than we thought!” says Emmanuel. “The training was very effective, straight forward in bite-sized hands-on steps.”

How is BlueSky supporting Ulink College of Shanghai?

Emmanuel says, “We record all our observations and learning walks, both formal and informal. The way it has been designed makes it so much easier. There is immediate feedback for staff which helps to support professional development.”

“We use BlueSky for our appraisal process to set our goals - individual, departmental and school goals. Initially we had performance evaluation for teachers and then I introduced another form for Heads of Department which was easily adapted and incorporated into the system. We also introduced 360 Reviews,” Emmanuel continues, “and we use BlueSky to support our PD provision for our professional learning communities. It is integral to the life and running of the school.”

What is the impact?

“It has created a sense of ownership, which helps with staff reflecting on their practice,” says Emmanuel. “When I log in I can see my goals, what I have achieved, and to move forward, what I need to do next. I can see my observations, peer observations, and 360 reviews with meaningful and genuine feedback.”

Emmanuel adds, “If you want to make teacher development, professional learning and appraisal teacher centred, and give the teachers the onus to be at the forefront of their own development then you need a platform that you can set up and hand over to the teachers. BlueSky is perfect for this because it brings it together so well.”

“BlueSky focusses on being developmental rather than judgemental. A developmental appraisal system is much more beneficial and tangible when it comes to incremental learning. It helps teachers grow and reflect on their practice,” says Emmanuel.

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Emmanuel N Barthalomew, Academic Principal
at Ulink College of Shanghai in China.

“BlueSky is value for money because of all the added value benefits that it brings. I have recommended it to other schools.”

Emmanuel N Barthalomew, Academic Principal
at Ulink College of Shanghai in China.

“BlueSky is a management system to help and support staff to reflect on their practice, document their progress and cater for individual needs whilst at the same time providing managers with information to help with school and departmental evaluation,” says Emmanuel.

“It has helped to standardise everything from teacher observation, lesson plans, feedback, appraisal etc. One of my major challenges was aligning standards, I didn’t want departments having different standards. If you are saying to me that a teacher is underperforming then the criteria for that is the same across the school. We have our own six bespoke school standards which are contextually appropriate, blended and taken from the UK eight standards, various international standards as well as Cambridge International Examinations (CAIE) standards.”

What’s next?

“At the moment we are designing KPIs and OKRs for our supporting staff, and once created we will introduce BlueSky to the supporting staff so that it becomes school-wide, making it even easier having all staff records in one place,” says Emmanuel.

“In regards to Professional Development, we have invested in BlueSky Learning, the online CPD content library. During the COVID pandemic in 2020, many of our staff attended BlueSky’s Festival of Learning, a programme of CPD webinars to support teachers’ professional learning during difficult times. We knew that BlueSky CPD content is done well and the modules are very good. We decided to subscribe to BlueSky Learning because it’s really good value compared to other PD opportunities out there, and there is a lot out there!”

“We are using it to tailor professional development for staff, for example, if I know that a teacher needs to develop further in behaviour management and there is a module in BlueSky Learning I can direct them to it. Staff can also engage with any modules they wish to. There will be targeted modules but then there will be ones where staff have the freedom to do whatsoever they choose if they want to upskill in a certain area they are free to go ahead. It is all recorded in BlueSky and managers can see what modules they have engaged with. We like that you can come back to the modules whenever you want, you don’t have to do it all in one sitting - it’s a very flexible platform. Support staff also have access to BlueSky Learning which has been really beneficial for them too,” explains Emmanuel.

“BlueSky Learning is now embedded and represents solid professional development. We like how easy it is to link these professional development activities straight into the evidence folder,” adds Emmanuel.

“We decided to subscribe to BlueSky Learning because it’s really good value compared to other professional development opportunities out there.”

Emmanuel N Barthalomew, Academic Principal
at Ulink College of Shanghai in China.

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