A 21st Century Institution Delivering a 21st Century Curriculum

Blackboard learn⁺

Middlesbrough College

Middlesbrough College has over 10,000 students and 600 staff making it the largest further education college in the Tees Valley region of the United Kingdom. It offers courses ranging from university-oriented academic subjects to more vocational subjects. The College offers a range of higher education courses that exist by virtue of a partnership arrangement with Teesside University.

The College existed on four different sites across the town until 2008, when it relocated to a single campus at Middlehaven, Middlesbrough. The college's modern, state-of-the-art campus offers a wide range of facilities to both students and local community, helping to create an inspirational learning environment. Local partnerships were established with Tees Valley Regeneration, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Middlesbrough Council, English Partnerships, One NorthEast and the University of Teesside to offer the widest range of opportunities to students.

Focus On Using Blackboard Learn To Its Full Potential

Middlesbrough has been using Blackboard Learn™ since 2004, having previously used Learnwise. With the college's new, £70 million flagship, state-of-the-art campus it was imperative that it fulfilled its academic commitment by delivering a 21st century curriculum. Additionally, as Blackboard Learn is being used by the majority of universities in the north east including Northumbria, Teesside and Durham, it was an obvious choice for Middlesbrough to follow suit: many of its students progress to one of these local universities so already being familiar with the system is an obvious benefit.

Middlesbrough College plays a central role in the community and aims to provide courses that meet the needs of the whole community. It has a diverse range of learners and reflects this diversity by offering both part-time and full-time courses, distance learning, employer involved courses, and courses for learners with special needs. . Having made such a significant investment in Blackboard Learn and delivering over 300 courses to a diverse range of learners from young learners to mature students, Middlesbrough needed to ensure it was using the VLE solution to its full potential.

middlesbrough college

The Challenge:

How to deliver a 21st century curriculum that is attractive to both students and employers in the North East of the United Kingdom.

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A Comprehensive Program To Drive Adoption

To achieve its objective, Middlesbrough's strategy was focused on enhancing its educational offering by developing and deploying a varied set of Blackboard Learn platform features, as well as branding the Blackboard Learn platform with the college's corporate colors, introducing a 'What's On' tab, and a redesigned Student Service area.

A major challenge for the college was that with such a dynamic range of courses, understanding the grade system could quickly become very complex. Learners found it difficult to keep track of their progress, particularly if they needed to convert grades into UCAS scores to gain entry to university. Having previously used spreadsheets to record scores and track progress, Middlesbrough fully embraced Blackboard's Grade Centre and rolled it out across all departments. It was an immediate success: learners now have all course scores in one place, can track their points as they're accumulated, see what they need to achieve, and most importantly, see what they're on track to achieve as an overall grade, and be able to convert those grades into UCAS points. Teachers can now monitor student progress and students can evaluate if they're below or above average – a feature which has proven to be invaluable to Middlesbrough College by encouraging its students to challenge themselves and reach higher results.

"Other features of Blackboard have also become increasingly popular," comments Fiona Jennings, e-Learning Manager, Middlesbrough College. "As they have been implemented, the interest generated has inevitably spread across campus and speaks volumes for the popularity of Blackboard."

Examples of implemented features include:

- Blackboard Learn's Assignment Handler which minimizes the volume of paper students need to carry around the college and saves the students' print credits;
- Podcasts which are used to provide audio inductions to the library;
- An e-bookshelf which provides students with links to a growing number of available e-books;
- The college has embedded training videos within Blackboard to help foundation learners overcome exam anxiety and better prepare for their assessments, increasing their chances to move to the next level.

Middlesbrough College is not stopping there – it is keen to take full advantage of the Blackboard Learn platform in the coming years. A-Level examining boards now request that colleges check for plagiarism. Middlesbrough College is testing Safe Assign this year to answer the boards' request. For its next project, the college is looking to run a pilot of e-portfolio for one group – if successful it will then be deployed across all faculties.

Educational Success As A Result

Implementing Blackboard Learn has been a resounding success. Middlesbrough College has developed and implemented a plethora of successful enhancements to its curriculum to benefit both its students and the community at large. Middlesbrough College is celebrating its first year at the new Middlehaven site with its best ever results in BTEC National Diplomas and A-level qualifications. And while students across the country struggled to gain places at university, Middlesbrough College's vocational qualifications have confirmed its status as a basis for progression to university with 75% of students progressing to higher education courses on the basis of their performances in BTEC National Diplomas.

For More Information

If you are interested to learn more on how Blackboard can help you and your organization increase the impact of education, please contact your account manager or visit us at www.blackboard.com