

GRIMSBY INSTITUTE OF FURTHER & HIGHER EDUCATION

Delivering a reliable and accessible learning experience
to a diverse student community

LEVEL:
Further education

INITIATIVE:
Making digital learning accessible to all

THE CHALLENGE

The Grimsby Institute of Further & Higher Education, located in the centre of Grimsby, is the main provider of technical and professional training in the region. The college is rated Ofsted Grade 1 and TEF Silver for Higher Education, and it provides a broad curriculum that encompasses full and part-time provision from 14 years onward. Grimsby is committed to helping a diverse student base garner the skills and knowledge needed to make an impact in the workplace.

“As part of our drive to ensure all students are work-ready, we know how important it is to prioritise digital literacy,” says Deborah Millar, Group Director of Digital Learning Technologies at Grimsby Institute Group. “But even knowing how important digital tools are, the education industry isn’t great at heeding its own advice, and can be slow to adopt tech. At Grimsby our tech use wasn’t consistent, and we had outgrown the tools we were relying on.”

Grimsby was a long-term Moodle user, but found that the free tool was limited in features and took much more maintenance than expected. “A free tool can be initially compelling,” continues Deborah, “but a resource such as Moodle requires an experienced developer to update, adapt, backup

the system – and if that person isn’t around for any reason, there’s a serious risk of online learning being disrupted.”

Grimsby’s growing portfolio of online courses, and a commitment to delivering blended learning, meant that downtime or disruption simply wasn’t an option – and so a change was urgently required.



KEY FINDINGS:

- Canvas replaces an unreliable free VLE, which was time consuming to manage
- New system meets the needs of a digitally savvy, diverse student base

“WE WERE LOOKING FOR A ROBUST SYSTEM WHICH WOULD BE LESS INTENSIVE TO MANAGE AND OFFERED US MORE RELIABILITY - AND CANVAS DELIVERED THIS IN SPADES.”

—DEBORAH MILLAR

Group Director of Digital Learning Technologies at Grimsby Institute Group

THE DECISION

“We need a tool that is quick, reliable, and easy to use from a teacher and student perspective. Not all of our staff are tech savvy, so the tool needed to be as easy to use as possible in order to ensure widespread adoption,” said Deborah.

Canvas was the natural choice for Grimsby. It was easy to navigate and intuitive to use, and offered seamless integration between many resources, with the Office365 integration proving particularly compelling for both staff and students.

Deborah continues: “For us, a hosted service promised to reduce risk and provide service level assurances – vital when you’re making such a fundamental change across an institution. It also means that many voices can request the next developments or changes to the system. Canvas is effectively developed and improved by a large number of users, whereas tools like Moodle are very dependent on a small group of developers deciding when, or if, they wish to update a feature or plug in.”

“We were looking for a robust system which would be less intensive to manage and offered us more reliability – and Canvas delivered this in spades. The ease with which Canvas could be accessed on a variety of devices, including a mobile phone app, was also particularly compelling,” added Deborah.

THE RESULTS

After an initial testing period and following a full roll out in 2017, Canvas has significantly impacted on the way in which teaching and learning is delivered at Grimsby.

“Canvas is now an integral part of our education offering, and importantly we’re able to bring learning to students – however and wherever they want to learn – not visa versa.

The reaction from teachers has been positive, though as with any new system it has taken some time to adapt, which is where training and support from Canvas has helped. Looking to the year ahead, Deborah tells us that Canvas will also support staff development.

“This year we are introducing a development programme where staff must achieve criteria for four competency badges. This is all built in to Canvas and will demonstrate best practice of Canvas too,” says Deborah.

Deborah praised the support provided by Canvas, which worked as a true partner to the Grimsby team. “Canvas has a willingness to engage with educators, and finds ways to make the VLE more specific to the UK FE sector via annual working groups and virtual support systems.

“I also believe that the Commons library is a really strong selling point for Canvas, allowing us to work with others in the industry to get the most out of the tool.”