

White paper: Saving Time For Teachers, Saving Money For Schools

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Executive summary

Ask teachers about the greatest pressures they face and many will say that there just aren't enough hours in the day to deliver all of the student support, as well as the admin, demanded of them. Ask school managers and administrators about the issues they face and many will say that stretching budgets to meet all the demands on their services is nigh-on impossible. This paper looks at 10 practical ways in which ICT can be used to help achieve the key goals of saving time and money.

Why is time a problem for teachers?

As well as covering the curriculum during lessons, teachers must offer additional thought and attention to students who require extra support. They must plan lessons, keep accurate records for reporting to management, attend meetings, engage with parents, and get involved with extra-curricular school activities.

Add in any desire for continuing professional development (CPD) and many teachers are working deep into every evening and through much of their weekend. Below are 5 ways for teachers to embrace ICT to manage and even reduce workload, and most importantly stay sane!

1. Source lesson ideas and materials online

While creating tailored materials for your class is important, there will be many instances where making use of publicly available resources is appropriate. The internet gives you the chance to draw on the combined wisdom of literally millions of other teachers.

A good starting point is the TES Teaching Resources section at <http://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resources/> which contains over 300,000 lesson plans, revision guides and classroom materials shared by teachers across the UK.

A number of schools have put together their own resources to share, while some sites, such as Coxhoe Primary School's curriculum links section - <http://durham.schooljotter.com/coxhoe/Curriculum+Links> - signpost great free resources from around the web.

2. Use social media and e-newsletters for CPD and staying aware of education issues

You needn't pay to subscribe to monthly journals, nor trawl through newspapers to find articles relevant to your profession. If you have a particular area of interest on which you would like to stay

informed, you could follow a group of experts on Twitter or save a relevant 'hashtag'. For example, those keen on education technology news could look for #edtech. Many web-based publications offer an RSS news feed (RSS stands for both 'RDF Site Summary' and 'Really Simple Syndication'). These feeds can be followed from your browser or headlines can be delivered to your desktop.

Rather than keeping a close eye on industry information, you could subscribe to an education e-newsletter, such as Webanywhere's ImprintEd Newsletter - <http://www.webanywhere.co.uk/education-news> - which offers a regular overview of education trends, upcoming changes in legislation and new educational resources.

Both social media and e-bulletins can provide you with news from a broad range of channels and inform you of CPD events and opportunities that could be hard to stay aware of via offline sources.

3. Use controlled peer to peer support to aid learning

Let your students do some of the work for you by fostering a culture of collaborative learning. Free tools such as Google Apps for Education enable students to work together on a single document or to share documents with each other, while a teacher monitors later or in real time.

Great tools for collaboration include Mahara (<http://www.mahara.org>) and the schools-focused Student Jotter (<http://www.studentjotter.com>). These include an e-portfolio platform for students to build, showcase and keep a permanent record of their work online. They also incorporate blogs and a secure social network, enabling support and feedback between peers.

When interacting with each other online, students' safety is monitored by safeguards within the system, as well as teachers and IT support staff.

4. Use e-assessment and online reporting tools

Many teachers state that assessment and reporting takes up a great amount of time. Managing the data at a central point can minimise the time spent by reducing duplication. Moodle is ideal for secondary schools - and many use it as the hub for the school's ICT - bringing together calendars, email, room booking, lesson management and more.

Moodle and MIS integration (supported by Webanywhere – <http://www.schoolanywhere.co.uk/mis-integration/index.php>) enables teachers to synchronise assessment, behaviour and attendance data, reducing any duplication from input into both systems, while also facilitating real time reporting to enhance parental engagement.

The primary-specific VLE, Learnanywhere (<http://www.learnanywhere.co.uk>), is another learning platform that offers online assessment and reporting functionality.

5. Take the classroom online

For many, Khan Academy (<http://www.khanacademy.org>) is leading the way in helping classroom interaction with students to become more productive. By showing teachers how place the 'lecture' part of a lesson online to be watched as homework or private study, classroom time is freed up for valuable interaction with students. An example of this principle being used with a UK focus is a collection of maths teaching videos being built at Mathsanywhere - <http://www.mathsanywhere.co.uk/videos.php>

Why is money an issue for schools?

Just as in the private sector, budgets are limited, so the cutting of costs and maximisation of budgets are demanded by the bodies that allocate funds to schools. However, there is no let-up in the drive for improved learning outcomes and the meeting of key management agendas, such as Ofsted inspections.

In such an environment, schools are increasingly run in a business-like manner, so ‘cheap’ options are not what is sought - ‘efficiency’ and ‘value’ are key. Below are 5 ways in which schools can save money through effective use of ICT, while delivering excellence to their students.

1. Use the DfE’s new IMLS framework to find government-approved suppliers of best-value ICT

It is with value in mind that the DfE put together the Information Management and Learning Services (IMLS) framework. The framework was prompted by government studies in 2005 and 2010, which reported that the market for management information systems (MIS) was “stagnant” and uncompetitive.

With the new framework, the DfE have announced 9 approved MIS suppliers, and 15 approved learning platform suppliers. The full list can be found here:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/procurement/b0069801/buying/ict/information-management-and-learning-services-framework/supplier-listing>

The companies on the list, which include Webanywhere Ltd, were rigorously assessed for their processes for and commitment to delivering best value ICT services over the coming years.

2. Use multi-functional learning platforms that are quick to implement and reduce the need for multiple applications

Some learning platforms are much more than a place to store lessons, with systems such as Learnanywhere and Moodle acting as a place for teachers to share knowledge and resources, for students to collaborate and for achievement to be celebrated by all. MIS integration allows the automatic transfer of student data from Moodle to the MIS and vice-versa.

Google Apps for Education is a suite of free applications that complement the functionality of a learning platform. Learn about Webanywhere’s accredited provision of these apps:

<http://www.webanywhere.co.uk/blog/2011/12/webanywhere-official-reseller-google-apps-education/>

3. Encourage communication between ICT and teaching staff to increase engagement with new systems

A common reason for ICT projects to fail in schools is that teachers don't always receive the necessary support to really get going with them and to learn about the benefits to their daily routines.

Comparing use of a single ICT product across several schools may show vast differences in its uptake. For example, at one school, staff may turn a learning platform into a virtual version of the school itself - well branded, attractive and warm. Both teachers and students will be much more likely to engage with such a platform.

A common complaint among even IT-literate teachers is that they have new technologies thrust upon them with minimal guidance, and that they are then expected to use them to their full potential. If the basic set up, such as adding existing teaching materials to a VLE, seems to create more work rather than less, then the project may be doomed from the start and ultimately prove to be a waste of money.

Close alignment of ICT and teaching staff will reduce this risk and help form a partnership where regular evaluations and roadmapping of ICT's role in teaching will take place. By using in-house or expert, third party trainers at an early point in the adoption of a new system, schools can help to ensure that teaching staff are enthused by and capable of maximising the use of new technologies. In this way, they can also help to ensure that real benefits are gained from the investment.

4. Save on energy costs with Windows Multipoint Server

Multipoint Server is a technology that allows several students to work from a single PC at the same time, which reduces energy usage, space required for computers and, in turn, costs. Modern desktop computers are powerful machines and their capabilities are often under-utilised on a day to day basis.

From the student's point of view, they are using their own PC as usual and their experience is unchanged. As well as saving on electricity costs by up to 50%, Multipoint Server can help a school to meet its green agenda by reducing its energy consumption.

<http://www.microsoft.com/uk/windows/multipoint/>

5. Use ICT to communicate with parents and guardians

Relying on 'snail mail' for home / school communication not only reduces speed, but involves costs that are often unnecessary. An easy to use school website that can be managed by staff, such as School Jotter (<http://www.schooljotter.com>), allows much of the routine communication of school news to take place online, eliminating postage costs.

If communication at short notice is required, such as notification of a closure due to snow for example, virtually all parents and guardians could be informed in an instant via an SMS messaging service like Parent Messenger (www.parentmessenger.co.uk) With limited phone lines available for calling hundreds of students' homes, such a service can help to reduce delay of messages and the subsequent disruption.

Secure payment processing can also reduce the administrative costs associated with chasing payments for school trips, meals, events etc. This can be facilitated by tools like Payschool (<http://www.payschool.co.uk>) which make sending payments to school easier and in turn, quicker.

About Webanywhere

Established in 2003, Webanywhere began as a school website design company. Since then we have expanded our product range to include VLEs, e-portfolios and other e-learning tools, alongside curricular content.

We're an official Moodle Partner and Capita Technical Partner, as well as a Mahara Partner and Google Apps Authorised Reseller. Our product range supports schools in improving key metrics such as pupil achievement, quality of teaching, effective leadership and behavioural standards.

Our staff includes former teachers and education ICT professionals, while drawing on feedback and advice from teachers at customer schools. For more information on how Webanywhere's services can help educators to save time and money, please get in touch.

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