

A school introduces a personalised learning approach for GCSE students

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Case study: **#04**

School profile: Samuel Ward Arts and Technology College is a mixed-ability, open access 13–19 Upper School with Arts and Technology status, one of two comprehensive upper Schools in Haverhill, Suffolk

What was the school trying to achieve?

The school aim was to provide an education that the students found relevant and which gave them the skills and confidence that they needed in the world beyond school, instead of simply pursuing qualifications. It had been felt that although the art and design department was successful, it was giving students experiences that they didn't necessarily value or find useful beyond the confines of the classroom. Therefore the department introduced a personalised learning system some six or seven years ago.

How was learning organised to achieve these aims?

The content and structure of the Art and Design department syllabus is similar to that of most other art and design departments but the development of the students understanding and skills is based on the students' own choices and practical work. At the beginning of key stage four, all students are given a course booklet. This contains five units that the students are expected to complete. These include media studies, ICT and film; graphics and illustration; fine art, 3D sculpture and product design. Together the five units cover most aspects of art and design but the order they are done in, the speed at which they are done and, even whether are all done, is decided by the pupil according to their ambitions.

Students choose a unit, decide on their own theme and then write a scheme of work for themselves. The course booklet also contains scheme of work pro-formas and evaluation guides, and provides guidance on organising student work rate and project content.

One of the department's classrooms is divided, using exhibition flats, into bays where each student can work. Each area can be personalised though as the room is used by eight groups through a week each bay is used by eight different students. Thus they have to show consideration for those who will share the same area but they are nevertheless able to be individually located independent learners within their teaching group.

How well did the school achieve its aims?

The quality of the work produced by the students is of good standard.

The students' results are one justification for the schools approach.

Whilst there is no lack of regard for skills such as drawing and painting, neither is there a perception that these skills are practiced out of context, simply 'to get marks'. The breadth of approach and outcome suggests that the department's aim, to put the students personally in charge of their work, and therefore assign personal responsibility for the results, has been achieved.

Students demonstrate a sense of ownership of their work and their achievements, having learnt the creative process through practice rather than by rote. They organise themselves and are constantly aware of how much effort they are making and the impact of this on their artwork and their eventual grade. Teachers are therefore empowered to teach more flexibly as a result of the reduction in pressure to lead and judge students throughout the lesson.

Students speak positively of this approach to the organisation of learning.

Unusually, Year 12 students said that they felt there was no significant change in their learning experience on progressing from their GCSE to AS Level practice.

Personalised Learning is supported throughout Samuel Ward College. This non-selective school, in an unfashionable, industrial town is achieving good results with a pleasant atmosphere; the students are taking responsibility for their education.

