# MOUNT GRACE SCHOOL
GCSEPod: A nice to have extra recomes a core teaching and learning resource

When James McAleese joined Mount Grace School as Assistant Head in 2015 his challenge was to embed digital learning across the school. Having regularly used GCSEPod at his previous school he knew that the resource could play a huge part in the digital transformation of the school.

However, faced with increasing budget constraints, James needed to think creatively; he decided to ask parents to try and meet the cost. So confident was he in the power of digital learning, he approached the then Year 11 parents to ask them to contribute towards the cost of a digital support package which included GCSEPod at the forefront together with Learners' Cloud.

"Roughly speaking it worked out about £10 per year per student, so I put it to the parents that for only £10 they could have a huge impact on their children's results and transform the way in which they learn," said James. "We set up Wisepay and were over the moon with how many parents could see the potential of digital learning for their children, who consume content in a very different way to days gone by."

Having enlisted some financial and emotional support of parents, James knew his plan must work. He said: "I would live or die by the roll out, so I knew we had to ensure we gave every student and indeed staff member the opportunity to engage fully with the resource."
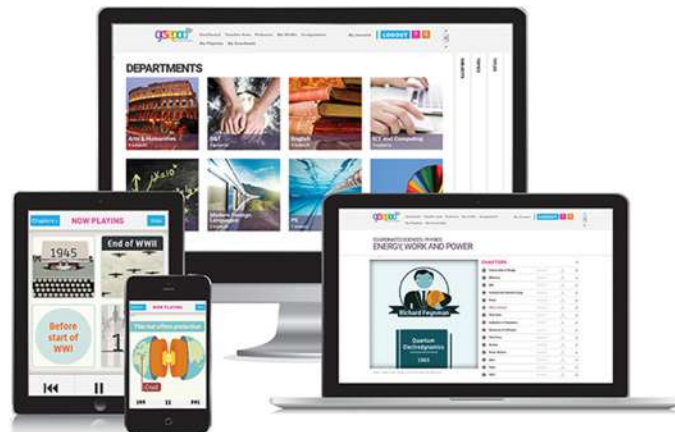
James set up sessions within the resource centre where he personally helped students and staff to log on to GCSEPod. Once students were logged on, they needed very little in the way of support as the content is intuitive and accessed in a similar way to some of the most popular social apps.

However, James knew that for GCSEPod to become really entrenched in to school life, he needed to get the staff on board too. He held briefing sessions with the whole staff and then smaller follow up groups to demonstrate how GCSEPod can be used in the classroom, used to set assignments, how they can create playlists to focus on specific topics and basically how GCSEPod could successfully be rooted in to schemes of work.

"For it to work, it needs to be used," he said. "So I made it my mission to

ensure that everyone was exposed to it and encouraged and incentivised to use it. GCSEPod provides readily available data, making it easy to see who is using it and how and more importantly the impact that it is having on individuals, particular groups and individual departments. So we kept GCSEPod usage front of everyone's mind and held full school assemblies to celebrate individual usage and we even included such information in our regular newsletter HEADlines which goes out to the full school community."

GCSEPod has become a cross curriculum resource which every Mount Grace student in Years 9, 10 and 11 has access to and is proactively encouraged to use both independently and to complete assigned tasks. Inevitably, it is used by some more than others.

However, those who use it the most, benefit more and James believes

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it is no coincidence that the highest using departments saw the biggest progress in last summer's exams.

He said: "Our English department were quick to embed GCSEPod in to their schemes of work and it has become a key component of classroom learning and homework. The English Literature teachers set weekly assignments using the videos and it is little wonder that this one department has 'podded' more than a typical school of 1,200 students. But more importantly, our results in English Literature -in a year of significant change to the curriculum and exam criteria – went through the roof and we enjoyed our best ever set of results." Our English Head of Faculty said that GCSEPod was a major contributory factor in the success this year. In the first 10 weeks this year they have accessed 1,600 pods with questions set around each pod.

For James every day is a school day and he has invested time and energy trying to learn from the success of the English department and emulate it across the school. He has tracked usage against individual results and worked with assigned 'GCSEPod Stars' to find out how they use the content in order to help others to use it more effectively.

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>
> James McAleese, Assistant Head , Mount Grace School

"Students are encouraged to use it daily and create playlists at the end of each day based on asking themselves 'what don't I know?'. We ask them to spend half an hour or so using the pods to go over the things they are not too sure of as a reinforcement of their classroom learning and we are confident this is making a huge difference."

James has adopted a RAG system in order to monitor weekly usage. He has set targets for the number of pods to be watched each week and rates usage against a traffic light system of red, amber and green. This simple technique alerts James immediately to any areas of concern or indeed extra high usage so he can begin to examine patterns emerging.

Interestingly, James who has championed the resource since joining the school has made a conscious decision this academic year to stop extolling its benefits and has opted instead to sit back and watch quietly as a means of gauging just how embedded it is amongst students and teachers.

He adds: "Without having to say a word, or provide any reminders I have watched usage increase week on week; a number of departments are now using it as their homework resource of choice and a growing number of students are adopting the 'what I don't know' approach to their individual learning, using the pods daily to consolidate what they have learnt that day in school in to a short half an hour burst."

For a resource which only two years ago was part-funded through a voluntary parental contribution, GCSEPod has quickly found a place in the heart of the school. So much so, that the school has made the decision to stop all other online subscriptions and instead uses GCSEPod across all subjects.

For more information on how GCSEPod could make an impact in your school please contact us on 0191 338 7830.

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