



RAWLINS ACADEMY

From intervention to independent learning success

Within a year of subscribing to GCSEPod, Rawlins Academy in Leicestershire had already joined their elite club with more than 50,000 revision videos (known as Pods) watched. Just months after students and staff embraced the teaching and learning resource, evidence had already emerged of the vital role GCSEPod plays in helping to improve the school's exam success.

People wear badges for many reasons in the workplace: security, professionalism, branding, identification, customer relations, even to help boost morale and make employees feel more connected to each other.

Cathy Robinson wears one too, much to the amusement of those around her.

Her chosen badge is meant to be sported by a select group of Year 11 students at Rawlins Academy in Quorn, Leicestershire.

But it's an emblem the English teacher and Vice Principal at the 1,500-strong school near Loughborough, is proud to show off herself - for emblazoned across the badge pinned to her blazer are the words: 'I am a GCSEPod expert.'

Laughing, Cathy says: "It is supposed to go to the students who are brilliant at using GCSEPod. The fact that I walk around with it on amuses everyone, but I get lots of students coming up and asking me about GCSEPod."

Cathy is the GCSEPod lead at Rawlins Academy - a place with a rich history. It was originally founded in 1691 by one Thomas Rawlins, who having escaped the plague rampaging through London in 1665, found himself in the village of Woodhouse near Quorn.



Fearing infection, only one family was charitable enough to take Rawlins into their home. He later expressed his gratitude by building a school for 22 poor boys in Woodhouse, which - more than three centuries later - has morphed into the current Rawlins Academy catering for 11 to 19-year-olds.

Much has changed in terms of education provision since Rawlins' day, not least the way in which students now learn. Blackboards, wooden flip-top desks and stacks of learned tomes have been replaced by iPads and smartphones as students tap into the information superhighway.

The way they revise has also changed. Assimilating hundreds of pages of wordy text books or written notes is no longer the only revision option. Technology is helping guide students learning and find solutions in new and exciting ways.

And at Rawlins Academy, it is the online teaching and learning resource GCSEPod - with its easy to access three to five-minute revision videos (known as Pods) - that both students and teachers turn to. The Pods are packed with relevant subject knowledge covering 25 topics and all the major exam boards.

GCSEPod is an essential tool in Rawlins Academy's learning arsenal for Years 10 and 11, whether it be at home, in the classroom or on-the-go with a smartphone or tablet.

Yet, prior to November 2017, GCSEPod wasn't available in the school.

But such is its popularity with both students and teachers, that by November 2018 an astonishing 50,000-plus Pods had been watched, and it had become firmly rooted in the school culture.

Few are more enthusiastic about GCSEPod than Cathy, although she was not the one who initially pushed for it to be introduced to Rawlins Academy. That honour falls to former Principal Callum Orr, who retired at the end of the Christmas 2018 term, after more than a decade at the school.

Having attended a course and heard other delegates talking in glowing terms about GCSEPod, Cathy says, "his interest was sparked and it was pretty much sold to him. He brought it back to school, presented it to the leadership team, and I was appointed the GCSEPod lead."

It was an exciting opportunity for Cathy, who had already been aware of GCSEPod and the success other schools were having with it. She admits that in the 2016-2017 academic year, Rawlins Academy's GCSE results "hadn't been great. We wanted to put an intervention programme in place for the Year 11s and we had heard great



Rawlins Academy



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things about GCSEPod.

"I had first come across it in my previous school eight or nine years ago, but it was in its infancy at that point. But it has grown enormously in that time, and just keeps on developing. There is so much content available and it is constantly being reviewed and added to with new Pods.

"We had brought resources into the school in the past and they hadn't worked, so it was important to us that we got something that promoted independent learning and was current, was visual, that students could use on their tablets or phones, and which they would want to use without the teachers having to constantly crack the whip.

"GCSEPod ticked all those boxes. The students love it, all the staff are on board with it, and the parents like it too as, just as the teachers can, they can track their child's progress."

The real test of its efficiency, however, was always going to be the GCSE exam results. The summer 2018 marks didn't disappoint.

Rawlins Academy conducted its own research into GCSEPod's effectiveness. Cathy says: "It showed that the top 25% of GCSEPod users were 0.6 above national estimates for Progress 8, whilst the bottom 25% of GCSEPod users were -0.6 below, suggesting that the more students watch the Pods, the higher their chances of exceeding their target grades.

"Our Progress 8 improved quite considerably; we can't say it was all down to GCSEPod, as our teachers worked tirelessly to support our students, but the students tell us that GCSEPod really helped them."

Cathy says a number of students flourished as a result of GCSEPod.

"We had one student last year who was mid-ability, and she smashed her target. She was one of the top GCSEPod users. She wanted to succeed and used every revision and learning source available to her. She was always on course to do OK, but she went even further.

"Her attainment 8 was predicted to be 35 and she got 47. In every subject she did, she got a grade better than estimated. We are all very proud of her.

"It was a combination of things that worked for her, and the same will go for all the students. But for so many of them GCSEPod was a real revelation. It complemented, but didn't replace, what we do in school."

So impressed has Rawlins Academy been with GCSEPod that the initial year's subscription has now been extended to a three year deal.

Kate Storey, a Customer Relationship Manager and Engagement Specialist with GCSEPod, who works with Rawlins Academy, is full of praise for the way the resource has been welcomed into the school.

"It has been incredibly exciting to watch Rawlins Academy's usage soar over the last year. Cathy launched GCSEPod to staff and students in November 2017, and has played an instrumental role in ensuring its success.

"Cathy is a phenomenal lead with a key vision on how she wants GCSEPod to be used and embedded into teaching and learning."

There has been no issues with keeping students engaged – especially when you have teachers like Cathy, who are only too happy to sing GCSEPod's praises. "They laugh at me because I talk about it obsessively in school! But I look at it this way, if something isn't a priority for you, then it's not going to be a priority for anyone else.

"If we keep talking about it, the students will keep using it. If we stop talking about it and stop being enthusiastic, then that keenness is inevitably going to drop off.

"But, thankfully the students find GCSEPod accessible, interesting and easy to use. And that means it's not a chore for them."

English Literature is top of subject usage league (perhaps not that surprising given Cathy's field of expertise), followed by Biology, Physics, Chemistry and Maths.

GCSEPod is used as a revision tool, for homework and has proved especially useful with keeping students who may be off on long-term sickness, on track with their studies.

Cathy says Rawlins Academy is lucky to have



aspirational students who want to achieve – one of the reasons the school doesn't have to handout incentives to encourage GCSEPod use.

The bigger prize, she explains, is hopefully better GCSE results.

Instead, certificates of achievement are presented to students who reach 150 Pod views. "Our research has shown that 106 Pods watched is a significant number, so we have set this target of 150 for the year. Just three months into this school year, and we already have a number who have achieved that.

"We have found that students are competing amongst themselves and spurring each other on to up their game. They want to be up the top and to be seen as a GCSEPod expert.

"Quite often in lessons now I will be talking about something and a student will volunteer information we haven't yet covered. I'll ask where they got their facts and they'll say GCSEPod. They're getting ahead, which is fantastic."

While GCSEPod is aimed at those in Year 11 and below, Cathy says it still has a part to play for Year 12 and 13 students. "It can still be useful for A-levels for those students taking a subject they may not have done at GCSE, or who will be sitting retakes."

Rawlins Academy is aiming to more than double its Pod views by the end of the 2018-2019 academic year and to see even greater improvements in its GCSE results for the 240 students set to sit them in the summer.

But whatever happens, it's a sure bet Cathy won't be giving up her GCSEPod expert button badge any time soon.