



Case Study

Alton College

"We have found that Capita ES UNIT-e Student Records and Tracking Solution has several important benefits. It is very flexible and can be configured to our own requirements. We can access all our data simply and the system has excellent reporting facilities."

Peter Dilloway, Vice Principal.

Summary

How Alton College was able to develop a highly devolved information system to serve all the College. How the flexibility of Capita ES UNIT-e SRTS toolkit allowed the College to configure to its own requirements and to produce a system that served the needs of the whole College and was not, therefore, just one used by management.

Background

Alton College is a Beacon College and has a growing student population of just over 3,400 students comprising typically 1,550 6th Form and 1,850 adult. It recruits from an area across East Hampshire and into Surrey.

The College has a long history of using Capita ES systems and decided to migrate to UNIT-e SRTS in January 2003. In the view of Phil Whybourn, the college's Information Services Officer "there were inevitably teething troubles but we were able to input data from day one and the support from Capita ES on key problems was very good."

It was important that the transition to UNIT-e SRTS went smoothly because it coincided with an audit. The inspectors were concerned that the migration may have affected the quality of the information provided by the College and tested it to three times sample size. However, as Phil notes "the integrity of the data was never an issue."

With the new information system in place the College wanted to develop it so that it would produce information that could be used throughout the College and not be seen as simply a management system. The ideal situation was that key people throughout the College, in each academic area as well as in service areas such as Examinations and Personnel, would be able to own their own data and ensure that it was correct. This meant that the capacity of the system would have to be sufficiently flexible to make information more widely available.



Alton has evolved a small but specialist College Information Services department, this title is used rather than 'Management Information Systems', reflecting its role to deliver information across the College. The department has only two members of staff, the Information Services Officer and his deputy, with more than twenty staff across the College involved in data input.

Why Capita ES and UNIT-e SRTS work for Alton College

Although, as Phil Whybourn says, UNIT-e SRTS is a large and complex system its flexibility means that data input can be made very simple because the system allows development of specific pro-forma for data entry within each area of the College involved.

The College has found that UNIT-e SRTS is user-friendly and staff can be swiftly trained because it is similar to software that they are familiar with already. This has allowed the College to employ temporary helpers during enrolment because the information required to complete an enrolment has been reduced to three key points – start, end and status. And even these are defaulted!

The decision to devolve to the College's functional areas has meant that tasks such as timetabling can now be handled by academic heads of department using the UNIT-e Resource Manager facility and that the College's Estates Services can also deal with rooming.

UNIT-e SRTS also has the advantage that its flexibility means that security can be maintained because work can be simply separated into different functional areas.

The College has found UNIT-e SRTS particularly useful in that it provides the facility to input and output data easily to spreadsheets. Because it works well with LSC software, tasks such as the provision of achievement data can be carried out quickly and simply.

Although the College is currently producing ILR funding runs on a monthly basis it is working towards having these available weekly in the near future. And having UNIT-e Columbus alongside means that information can be extended at the student level.

UNIT-e SRTS also provides automatic up-date facilities to ensure that all colleges can share in the new developments immediately. "We have up-graded the system more in the last couple of months than we had in several years previously – a testament to the amount of development going on" says Phil.



Some of the strengths of UNIT-e SRTS

- Large and complex but flexible
"We have been able to use it to configure things just as we wanted them" says Phil Whybourn.
- Continuous and automatic updates
A dedicated software development team.
- Functionality
"UNIT-e has no real limits to getting information in and out."
- Good interface with external systems, such as LSC
- Strong monitoring potential
- Excellent features
Peter Dilloway notes that "The Web front-end is very accessible and looks just like the internet."
- Uniform quality of software with no 'legacy' modules

The Benefits

Alton College has noticed big benefits with the change to UNIT-e SRTS. As Phil Whybourn comments,

"UNIT-e shows a real development on from the three previous Capita systems. With the one single system we are getting the benefits of one dedicated, well-trained software development team."

"The real benefit of being able to devolve our data entry easily has meant that we've been able to move data ownership to where it belongs. This has produced significant improvements in data accuracy as evidenced by successive audits."

UNIT-e products used by Alton College

- ✓ UNIT-e Student Records & Tracking Solution
UNIT-e Finance Management - Aptos
- ✓ UNIT-e Admissions and Enquiries
- ✓ UNIT-e Resource Manager
UNIT-e Performer
UNIT-e Online Services
- ✓ UNIT-e Office Builder
- ✓ UNIT-e Intranet Builder
- ✓ UNIT-e Enrolments
- ✓ UNIT-e Executive Analysis Suite
- ✓ UNIT-e Desktop
- ✓ UNIT-e Columbus
UNIT-e Class Importer
UNIT-e 3rd Party Interface
- ✓ UNIT-e Advanced Configuration Toolset
- ✓ UNIT-e Attendance Manager
- ✓ UNIT-e Curriculum Manager
- ✓ UNIT-e Exams & Assessments
UNIT-e Finance Manager
- ✓ UNIT-e Personnel Manager
- ✓ UNIT-e Report Generator
- ✓ UNIT-e Database Manager
- ✓ LearnWise Virtual Learning Environment