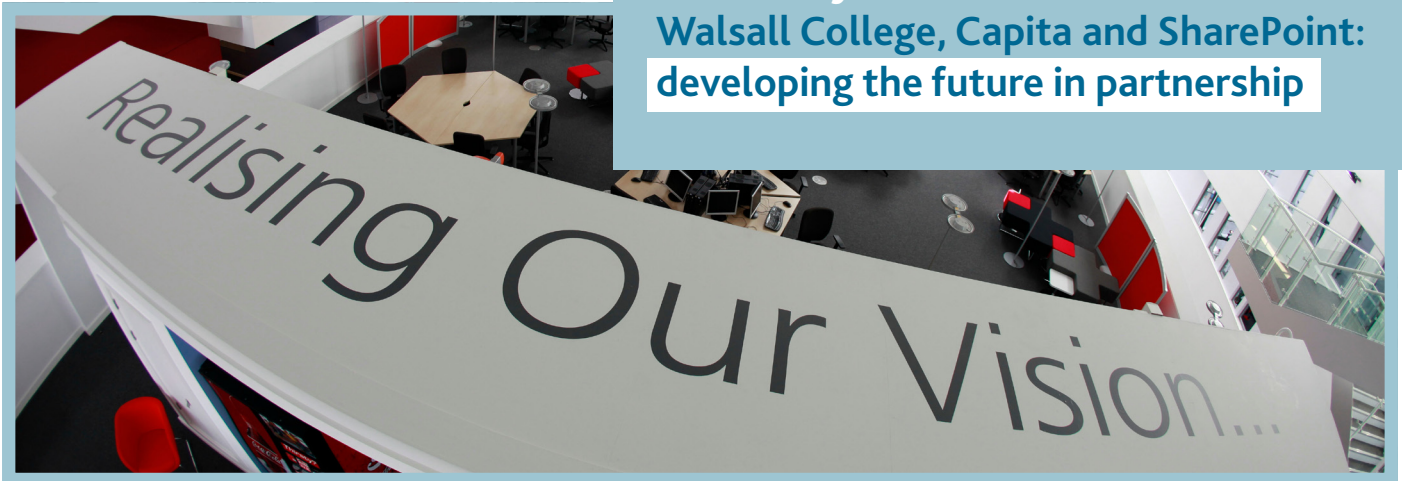


# CAPITA

## Case study

### Walsall College, Capita and SharePoint: developing the future in partnership



“What we have achieved in partnership with Capita over the last twelve months has been absolutely superb. It has certainly propelled the College to a position that it has never been in before.”

Jayne Holt, director of learning technologies, Walsall College

## The background

Walsall College is the largest provider of qualifications for 14-19 year olds in the Borough of Walsall. It places considerable emphasis on a strong vocational curriculum and typically has around 4000 young people enrolled annually. It also provides education and training for 5000 adults.

In the summer of 2009, the College moved to new, purpose-built accommodation in central Walsall and was determined to make this a modern, contemporary knowledge workplace.

- Increased retention, up by 2% to 93%
- £8-10,000 saving per annum by bringing a student/staff satisfaction survey online.
- Savings of £2,000 per annum from moving to paperless meetings
- Savings of £15,000 per annum created by bringing training events online
- Improved learner attendance rates across the College, improved by 4% to 92.6%

## The challenge

As is often the case in educational establishments, prior to the completion of the new premises the College had operated on a fragmented system with a number of different reporting solutions. These were effective in limited areas but could not be personalised, lacked interactive capabilities and were unsuited for delivery to wide and diverse audiences. The move to the new site offered, as Julia Goldsmith, director of information strategy at Walsall College, explains, the potential to “bring everything under one umbrella using a single, technologically-based solution.”

## The solution

The College had a long-standing relationship with Capita Further and Higher Education (FHE) using the UNIT-e software solution in a wide-range of functionality across the College, including student records, human resources and finance.

As Capita is a Microsoft Gold Partner and the College a Microsoft Academy, it was natural to explore the potential of SharePoint, Microsoft’s business collaboration platform. After extensive research, the College decided to go down the Capita/SharePoint route. Throughout the process Capita consultants were, as Julia comments, “extremely professional and helpful.”

An important factor for the College was that Capita’s SharePoint Integration solution provides specialist software working with the Microsoft platform. In fact, UNIT-e and SharePoint are fully integrated providing a common user interface for ease of use right across the College. This level of integration allows the College to have specialist and tailored software for the development of personalised and controlled information available to end-users. This highly versatile solution also allows for the evolving needs of a broad range of business processes.

Capita’s SharePoint Integration capabilities also provide considerably enhanced reporting services. These can be used to import and export data to and from the central UNIT-e system allowing simple and swift validation, manipulation and maintenance of records in a single process.

## The implementation

The move to a new system had some potential problems. Although the new campus was a major factor, it could also be problem if too much change seemed to be happening at the same time. Julia emphasised how the College acted to counter this situation:

"We decided against going for the "Big Bang" approach. We started by initially switching our internet over to SharePoint. Although this was a major step forward technologically, it enabled users to become conversant with the new system. After this we have been able to drip further developments in."

Throughout the implementation process, the relationship between the College and Capita FHE was important. Jayne Holt, director of learning technologies at the College, stresses:

"Things worked really well between us. We were both on something of a learning curve as we pushed into new areas. The relationship evolved over time and we were able to jointly reach some really good and innovative solutions."

## The success

“As a learner I feel that the technology at the College is outstanding because it's really immediate and responsive.”

Daniel Skidmore, Level 1 Public Services student

From Jayne Holt's perspective, there are many major gains by the move to the integrated SharePoint system. Material can be personalised to individual learners and used to differentiate between groups of learners, such as the large HE cohort. She feels that this has really empowered learners giving them a much stronger purpose and direction.

Also important is how data and information can be tailored to meet the needs of the various management teams at the College, including the SMT. With SharePoint real-time data is always available and the College no longer depends upon incomplete data on spreadsheets. Managers are confident that they have updates available on a daily basis with substantially improved data capacity. Teaching staff benefit too, with improved access to their own data and information about their learners.

Another major development for Jayne Holt has been the improvements stemming from e-Workflow. She comments, it has "substantially improved the flows of information throughout the College which had previously been paper-based."

Capita's UNIT-e Workflow allows users to arrange processes such as room bookings, applications, enrolment and withdrawals. The Workflow tools add new functionality to existing UNIT-e applications such as attaching additional data to each task linking to related applications, additional information and the next stage in the process. The UNIT-e system also works with processes that are not specific to UNIT-e itself. The Workflow tools enhance and streamline each process.

For Anthony Webster, e-learning manager, the measure of the success is that he is now seeing data demands coming from all sectors in the College. As well as the expected requirements for management purposes, learners are demanding highly personalised information such as attendance, punctuality and attainment.

In the view of Ryan Pinter, SharePoint project developer, the role played by Capita FHE's consultants has been very important, commenting: "UNIT-e is a vast database and the system has endless capabilities. Working through our MIS team I have really appreciated the clear advice and guidance that the Capita consultants have provided."

This view is echoed by Ben Cotterill, the College's IS developer. He feels that Capita was very supportive throughout the process and he was particularly impressed by the work put in by Capita's lead developer. Sharing his opinion, he comments that it would have been:

“very difficult implementing SharePoint without Capita. Their experience and expertise were extremely important.”

## The benefits

"The UNIT-e system is brilliant but working with Capita's SharePoint Integration gives us so much more and creates efficiencies." Ben Cotterill, IS developer, Walsall College.

- Improved learner attendance rates across the College, improved by 4% to 92.6%
- Increased retention, up by 2% to 93%
- Enhanced communication and management processes throughout the College
- Improved interactivity and enhanced online learning materials.

There have been significant savings in many areas throughout Walsall College, including:

- £8-10,000 saving per annum by bringing a student/staff satisfaction survey online. Response rates also improved and there are now regular online surveys relating to college issues. Current level of use would have cost over £20,000 under the previous system
- Financial and time savings from improved reporting, tracking and monitoring are estimated at £5,000
- Savings of £15,000 per annum created by bringing training events online
- Savings of £2,000 per annum from moving to paperless meetings
- Rationalising databases and phasing out spreadsheets has produced savings into several £1,000s.

## The future

As a Microsoft Gold Partner, Capita FHE is in an excellent position to take advantage of the latest Microsoft developments. Ray Fleming, education marketing manager at Microsoft, states that: "Capita FHE will be well placed to work with us on major technological innovations. This has considerable benefits for Walsall College because they know that they don't just have a system for the present but, by working with Capita, they will have one that will deliver future innovations."

Jayne Holt sees the implementation of SharePoint 2010 as the next stage, delivering: "greater capabilities, greater accessibility and improved document and record management". She sees growth in mobile technologies because learners are increasingly using their own devices. SharePoint 2010 will provide the requisite architecture to deliver this more effectively. Indeed, from Ben Cotterill's viewpoint, the future is exciting holding much potential for further development between Walsall College and Capita FHE:

"Capita FHE's involvement can only increase because there is so much that can be done now we have UNIT-e and SharePoint. There is massive scope for expansion into other processes which can only make things more effective for the College and the learners."