



Gloucestershire College

USING FLEXIBLE TECHNOLOGY TO TRACK THE LEARNER JOURNEY AND MONITOR OUTCOMES

An explanation of how technology has been used to improve learner tracking and course management to gain a greater understanding of referrals and outcomes.

THE COLLEGE

Gloucestershire College offers a broad range of education and training from A-levels to vocational programmes and work-based learning.



The JobSmart programme is a fully-funded service to help currently unemployed people get back into work. JobSmart receives referrals from multiple agencies including Jobcentre Plus and local Government Work Programme providers such as JHP and Prospect training. The programme aims to deliver skills training to meet market needs, focussing on real local job opportunities.

OVERVIEW

THE CHALLENGE

To replace the existing system with a scalable solution to cater for increasing numbers of learner referrals. The College required a system to track and report on learners within the JobSmart employability programme.

THE SOLUTION

Macleod Associates deployed their **Workpepper** platform customised to the individual needs of the College. The externally hosted solution works alongside existing College MIS and other systems.

THE BENEFITS

- The ability to track learners and report on referrals.
- Improved efficiency and agility with a clearer picture and better communication between staff and departments.
- The capability to respond better to learner and agency queries, providing an improved service.

THE CHALLENGE

The challenge for the College is the tracking of a high number of learners to enable good reporting and feedback to the 14 referral agencies. With over 300 referrals a month the College needed a reliable source of information for every part of the learners' journey, from the first meeting through to employment.

"The JobSmart programme has a unique set of data due to the nature of the contract (roll on/roll off) which did not fit into the current college system. It required a system that had much more flexibility to support its functions"

– Nikki Graham, JobSmart Resource Manager

EXISTING SYSTEM

The department was using a database developed by one of the team to help track learners; this database was local to the department and did not link in to the main management information system (MIS).

"The benefit of having the Access system was that the developer could adapt it at a moments' notice, the problem was that it wasn't scalable and we were reliant upon the expertise of one person"

– Paul Rabbich, MIS Director

2. To improve capabilities for monitoring of the individual action plan (IAP) and create improved agility
3. To create an auditable record of attendance and to evidence learning hours

THE MACLEOD JOBSMART SYSTEM

The JobSmart system queries live data while other systems used in the College work by using overnight exports.

Integration of the **Workpepper** and the management information systems allowed the College to pull data through from their MIS "Unit-E" to the JobSmart system. The JobSmart data could then be downloaded into a sequel database for reporting or exporting to other systems such as Texttools.

"We are starting to go down the Software-as-a-Service route with our systems... We found when we were hosting IT ourselves we were always relatively late in terms of upgrades and that became a potential security issue. If you are externally hosted it just takes the concerns away; you know that it is going to be upgraded as regularly as feasible and it is just one less headache"

– Paul Rabbich, MIS Director

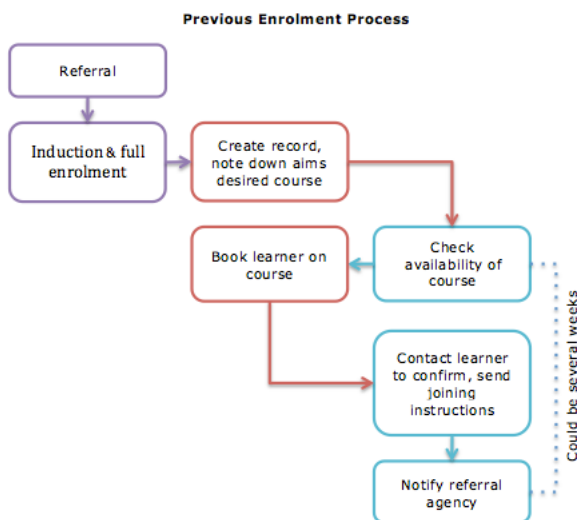
IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation was an iterative "agile" process that allowed the system to be developed based on user feedback. This meant the system could be adapted to fit the requirements of each user and each department as they discovered how to use it.

This process enabled the college to get the most out of their investment; the system is very quick to customise and has changed significantly to address users' specific needs.

"I think all IT projects need to be of this iterative style because inevitably requirements change as you move into the projects, for example we identified the need for archiving students which we had missed in the planning stage. We had to go back relatively late into the project and say this is an essential part of what we need to do. With these kinds of projects you never get it right the first time and it is important to be able to tweak things"

– Paul Rabbich, MIS Director



OBJECTIVES

The main objectives set out for the Macleod Associates solution included:

1. To enable easy learner tracking

Further additions included the development of a comments box to allow notes to be attached to each record. This small feature has made a big difference for staff as it allows centralised notes to be made about learners and courses that be accessed by all users.

"From my perspective the implementation process was very smooth and I was impressed with the timescales that Macleod Associates were able to work to"

– Amie Nutbrown, Employment Partnership Coordinator

The timing of the implementation of the new system meant that it had to be up and running very quickly. The JobSmart system was introduced in September as the new academic year began; the sudden influx of referrals put added pressure on both parties to have the system implemented and users confident on how to use it.

Despite apprehension over adapting to a new system so quickly the general user interface was found to be intuitive and self-explanatory and therefore fairly easy to use.

"When we first had training and I had a look at the system I thought it would be difficult to get my head around, but now I am using it every day it has certainly improved things dramatically; it helps my role and I don't think I could survive without it!"

– Sally-Ann Hennessey, Administrator to the Director

"Some members of staff have got more administrative work, but over the whole department I think we have gained more time because we save it elsewhere, for example we no longer need to send joining instructions for courses"

– Lin Sheppard, JobSmart Tutor

BENEFITS

The key benefits of the solution can be identified in 5 areas:

1. Ability to track clients from referral to employment
2. Improved planning and monitoring of the IAP (Individual Action Plan)
3. More streamlined bookings
4. Agility
5. Additional learner benefits and a better service offered

"Our old system did not have a facility for tracking the learner journey and learner progress, the new system has addressed this. The previous system we were using also had no reporting functions, which we now use. I was impressed with the system and felt it could provide us with what our original system lacked."

– Amie Nutbrown, Employment Partnership Coordinator

TRACKING

The ability to track learners has enabled funding to be claimed a lot more quickly. It is easier to identify who has completed learning hours and to identify and address why others haven't completed.

"We are able to identify learners with less than 9 guided learning hours. This enables us to have a discussion with these individuals to see if there is appropriate training to offer them and this also ensures we may be able to claim appropriate funding"

– Lin Sheppard, JobSmart Tutor

With little time for one-on-one tutorials, tutors have found it easier to identify learners who require additional support. Highlighting these learners earlier improves completion rates.

Useful outcomes of learner tracking include the ability to report to JCP and other agencies on attendance and progression of learners through their individual action plan. Tracking enables early identification of clients who have failed to attend or complete their IAP and easy reporting of progression into work.

"This would not be possible within the College's own Management Information System because staff would need to look at several reports and systems to gather the appropriate information. The College's MIS system does not collect this level of detail on progression"

– Angela de Gandy, JobSmart Manager

The single centralised online system provides easily accessible client information that can be utilized for many purposes; from tracking the IAP of each client to improved communication with agencies such as JCP and Work Programme Providers. Staff have found that by sending the IAP back to the referral agencies it gives them a detailed

picture of what is happening with their clients and improves referrals.

"It is much easier to use and the records have a lot more detail on them. If someone phones me up I just have to ask them their name and I can look them up. I have everything I need to answer their questions in one place"

– Lauren Thompson, JobSmart Administrator

PLANNING AND MONITORING THE IAP

The online Individual Action Plan allows for both hard and soft target setting. The hard targets are around the training and the soft targets are focussed on what the client needs to do to help themselves. These are agreed and arranged between the clients and the tutors at the initial meeting (the hard target is normally mandated by the referral agent). Progress is reviewed with the client regularly. This is a dynamic action plan and is constantly changing.

A detailed, online IAP has enabled Gloucestershire College to offer a better service to candidates and agencies, as it provides clarity on what is happening with each referral.

"It has definitely made us more efficient as it is easier to find where someone should be and answer questions when you have all the information at your fingertips. It allows me to give the director a clearer view of what is going on; it is easier to pull off reports and give the director the information she needs"

– Sally-Ann Hennessey, Administrator to Director

Personal tutors are able to track the IAP from a secure network. Hard targets are linked to attendance registers and are automatically updated; soft targets are updated manually during reviews between the client and the tutor.

It is a lot easier to schedule courses and ensure required attendance levels are achieved by having the ability to look ahead and plan which courses are under-booked and adapt the way they are run accordingly.

AGILITY

"It has reduced the burden of administration hugely because there were two aspects of setting up students that we used to do on Unit-E to enrol them which used to take around 6 minutes, and then we had to track their attendance at various sessions. Setting up registers, room allocation and monitoring attendance was a huge administrative burden; we were starting to sink under the weight of these additional students coming in and the complexity of the registers and so on. One of the reasons why we wanted to put this into a completely separate system to be able to record that attendance elsewhere"

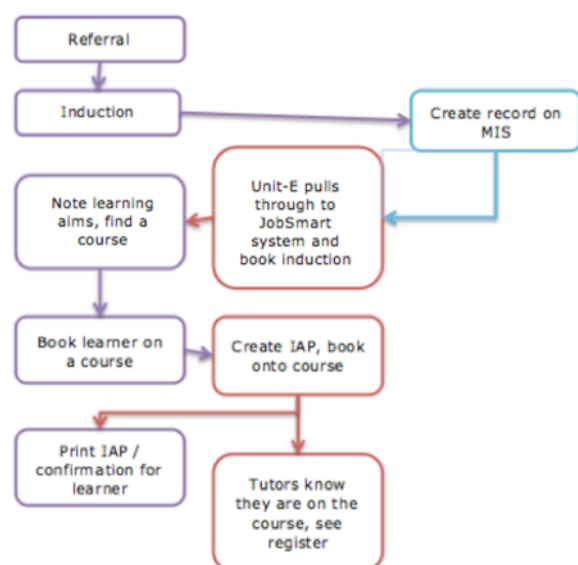
– Paul Rabbich, MIS Director

The College wanted to be able to highlight where learners are coming from to identify growing needs for training and to create new courses according to demand.

"The system gives me the agility to make swift changes to meet the needs and demands of the local labour market. I can plan using the events management tool and quickly turn planning into reality...Using the event function to plan I can check important information like staff hours to ensure that I am working within their allocation, which reduces overtime and eradicates under-hours staff. This has a financial benefit to the department. "

– Angela de Gandy, JobSmart Manager

THE NEW INDUCTION PROCESS



FOR LEARNERS / BOOKINGS

The new system has enabled staff to streamline the booking system. Before, learners would have to wait until after the induction to hear back about courses. Now they can be booked onto the course at the induction and can take away a printed copy of their IAP which contains the dates of their hard target training.

This way the learners leave with their IAP knowing what they are doing; where they will need to be and when. The JobSmart system automatically produces letters to confirm the booking and sends SMS reminders ahead of time. Being able to confirm this at the induction and provide reminders has resulted in improved attendance as well as learner motivation.

"It is much more satisfying for us and for the learners to be able to book a course there and then and give them their IAP. Learners have the dates; they know the room and exactly what they are booked on. It is a much better way for them to start, rather than building an action plan only to send them away to wait for us to be in touch."

"The jobseeker feels more empowered, which is important."

– Lin Sheppard, JobSmart Tutor

FUTURE

"With the current government it is very difficult to predict the future of funding but we are getting so many people coming through our door... With the JCP there are two routes that the jobseeker can go down for further support; either to an independent organisation or to an organisation like us. Because we have smartened up and we are more professional and organised, they know that we get results, so there are a lot more referrals coming."

– Sally-Ann Hennessey, Administrator to Director

When looking into the new system, the College was also planning ahead. They needed a system that could be used on a broad and wider area than just the JobSmart programme; something flexible that could be used with other full-cost recovery students, as well as anything where there is high volume but low value.

The system will enable the College to take on similar types of projects; ones from other referral agencies. These will not just be aimed at the employment programme but other types of courses where students are not required to produce a full ILR.

"I would say it was probably too early to see the true value of the new system, I would probably say that we have got value for money but we will need to see how this pans out over the next couple of years to see our full return on investment"

– Paul Rabbich, MIS Director

The **Workpepper** system can be used by colleges and training companies to improve the delivery of provision and to track learner outcomes.

This year **Macleod Associates** began working directly with the Association of Colleges to try and tackle some of the problems faced by its members in delivering outcome-focused contracts and adapting to the QCF.

People Involved

Angela De Gandy

JobSmart Manager

Nicky Allen

Referral Partnership Coordinator

Lauren Thompson

JobSmart Administrator

Lin Sheppard

JobSmart Tutor

Amie Nutbrown

Employment Partnership Coordinator

Sally-Ann Hennessey

Administrator to the Director

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MIS Director