

chris²¹ delivers proactive & strategic HR management for Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

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Richard Mears, HR manager,
Brecon Beacons National Park Authority.



Summary:

Established in 1957, the UK’s Brecon Beacons National Park in Wales spans 519 square miles and contains some of the most spectacular and diverse landscapes in Europe. Administered by the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA), this important conservation area is managed by a committed staff, comprising a Chief Executive and 137 employees – including wardens, visitor and tourist information centre assistants, planners, community development officers and supporting administration and management. When BBNPA adopted a new, five-year ICT strategy, it implemented Frontier Software’s chris²¹, which replaced a mix of spreadsheets and paper files with a dedicated HR system, enabling resources to be managed more proactively. Today, chris²¹ continues to meet the HR department’s requirements in terms of core functionality and reporting, while allowing more effort to be focused on strategic initiatives.

Challenges:

- Implement a dedicated HR software system to replace cumbersome manual procedures
- Meet user requirements for efficiency through good reporting, ease of use and system administration & maintenance
- Seamless integration with the new IT infrastructure

The solution:

- chris²¹ (Complete Human Resource and Payroll Information System for the 21st century) – core module: Human Resource

Top benefits:

- Proactive management and automation of HR business processes
- Low maintenance system delivering ease of use and reliability
- Straightforward and rapid implementation with full data migration

The BBNPA’s HR (Human Resources) department deals with numerous date-driven processes – such as CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checks, fixed-term, renewal and expiry of contracts etc. Historically, the process of HR management had been conducted manually and relied on a mix of Excel spreadsheets and paper-based files that were proving to be increasingly cumbersome to administer. A full ICT review conducted by an external consultancy in 2003 further highlighted the requirement for a new system that would offer a more proactive HR approach, in terms of managing resources (i.e. staff records), while delivering new capabilities, such as recruitment monitoring and reporting.

It was recognised that a new ICT strategy could provide a coherent framework for future development of the authority’s communications infrastructure, and facilitate delivery of organisational goals. HR was a key area addressed within the proposed ICT strategy that was to be implemented by the BBNPA’s newly appointed IT manager, Paul Funnell. Working closely with HR manager, Richard Mears, Funnell was able to progress the project rapidly. “Having both come from a commercial background, we quickly established a good working relationship and worked very closely on the project from justification through to selection and implementation,” recalls Funnell.

chris²¹ meets ICT objectives

Funnell conducted a system-wide audit and risk analysis, and then commenced replacement of all PCs and thin-client computers with a new standardised hardware and software environment based on Windows XP/Office 2003. Working together, Richard Mears and Funnell also evaluated a number of HR systems in the context of the new ICT strategy. From an IT perspective, it was imperative that the planned HR system meet user requirements for efficiency through effective reporting and ease of use, and also integrate seamlessly with the new IT infrastructure. The system also needed to be robust and easy to maintain.

“As well as evaluating Frontier Software’s chris²¹ solution, we looked at products from ‘Computers In Personnel’ and ‘Select HR’,” explains HR manager, Richard Mears. “All the systems had certain ways of addressing our requirements, but the key differentiator was growth potential. The cost and licensing model applied by the other vendors was less attractive in that they were based on the number of staff the system covered. Frontier Software’s model however, was based on the number of concurrent users, which gave us a method of controlling costs.”

In addition to providing a more cost-effective solution – both in terms of initial investment and ongoing support – chris²¹ met Mears’ operational requirements perfectly. “Their experience in the HR sector was excellent (unlike some of the competitors) and chris²¹’s Report Designer was more user friendly than those employed by the other vendors... it was so much easier to use.”

“From a technical standpoint, chris²¹ has the strongest combination of features, design and usability, with a clear and convincing message about ease of implementation,” adds Funnell. “The product was obviously mature, but up-to-date in terms of the underlying technology and development platform, and offered the best business case from a cost/benefit perspective. It integrated well with existing and planned applications and looked like it had been through a planned development rather than growing organically to try to be all things to all users.”



Paul Funnell,
IT Manager, BBNPA



Richard Mears,
HR Manager, BBNPA



Driving performance management

Implementation of chris²¹ commenced in March 2005 and completed by August. “Installation, as promised, was straightforward and rapid, and migration of existing data was handled very well,” Funnell continues. “The system has continued to meet HR’s requirements in terms of core functionality and reporting whilst being remarkably low-maintenance and, from an IT perspective, trouble-free. Administration is sufficiently straightforward to be handled by a non-technical HR team and, in general, it has been one of the most painless and successful implementations we have undertaken during the five-year strategy.”

HR manager Richard Mears says that chris²¹ has enabled the department to achieve its business objectives, while freeing up resources to address more strategic initiatives. “Although benefits are difficult to quantify, the fact that we don’t have to flick through paper files and contracts makes a huge difference. So chris²¹ has enabled the HR function to be more proactive and focus on strategic activities. We’ve done huge amounts in terms of introducing performance management systems, childcare schemes, in-house training, and freeing-up time to run management development programs (without having to spend time on administration).”

All staff records held within the extensive chris²¹ database can be maintained and reported on easily, while letters and documents are created in Microsoft Word and copies attached to staff records. Additionally, chris²¹ allows users to define and merge any information held within the database with third-party applications such as Word or Excel, while comprehensive security rules mean that attachments can only be viewed by those with authorisation. The system has also helped BBNPA in managing sickness and absence, by enabling Mears and his team to analyse statistics and identify any patterns.

“We are now more proactive and have much better reporting capabilities,” Mears continues. “By populating Outlook’ task diaries with information provided via chris²¹, we know when CRB checks are due (renewal is required after two years), and we can be more proactive on contract renewals. The amount of time saved is phenomenal.”

chris²¹ was tailored to BBNPA’s specific needs, with any extraneous data removed and additional fields created for staff records. “We said what we wanted and Frontier Software delivered all the features right there and then. I was really impressed,” Mears concludes.