

Top marks for payroll

City College Norwich was by no means a new student to Frontier Software's integrated Complete Human Resource and Payroll Information System (chris) when it upgraded to chris²¹. And this solution is proving to be top-of-the-class in terms of flexibility, efficiency and user-friendliness for the College's Finance and HR Departments.

Previously operating under the auspices of Norfolk County Council, City College Norwich was incorporated as an independent body in 1993 and, now with over 20,000 students, has established itself as one of the UK's largest colleges of further and higher education (FE).

As an independent body, the College appointed Mark Ramsden as Finance Manager with the challenge of setting-up a Finance Department, although, initially, payroll was administered by the County Council as an outsourced service.

While the outsourcing agreement worked well, deadlines imposed by the Council were tight and, notwithstanding the cost of the service (some £28,000 per year), Mark believed that the College could gain much greater flexibility by bringing payroll in-house and realise a saving over five years of approximately £100,000.

Following a rigorous examination of the marketplace plus a reference visit to another FE College already using Frontier Software's chris product, the decision was taken to adopt the chris solution. Implementation went very smoothly, says Mark, with the software being delivered well in advance to allow for a satisfactory test period in the lead up to the chosen go-live date of April 1st, 1999 (going 'live' at the beginning of a new tax year meant that only employee data had to be transferred, as opposed to balances being carried over during the tax year).

Mark continues: "Many payroll packages are simply off-the-shelf products that just do the job of calculating pay. In contrast, chris offers a totally integrated payroll and HR solution that alleviates the need for double entry of data."

chris²¹ makes the grade

Using chris, the Finance Department was able to circumvent the issue of deadlines and realise greater flexibility in terms of the reports and information it could extract directly from the system, rather than having to ask the County Council. "chris gave us the ability to write our own specific reports as and when we required them. It also allowed us to export the information into both our Symmetry™ finance system and Excel™, so that we could extrapolate figures in the way that we wanted," Mark points out. "The strength of the platform's reporting tool – the Report Writer – and its ability to interface with other systems meant that we didn't have to wait too long to achieve ROI."

"The user-friendliness of the chris²¹ user interface was very important."

Following the success of the initial Frontier Software solution, the College's Payroll Supervisor, Simon Jessup, was keen to keep up with the latest product developments and recommended an upgrade to chris²¹. "The improved, Windows™-based GUI, plus the opportunity for integration with new chris modules currently under development



was a key driver," Simon explains. "The user-friendliness of the chris²¹ user interface was also very important. It has a similar feel to that of Microsoft Outlook™ which makes it very familiar to our users."

Last year, following just a day's migration (including testing), chris²¹ went live on City College's existing Windows 2000™ member server. "Frontier's technical staff completed the migration seamlessly," comments Simon, who is a regular attendee of Frontier Software's User Groups. "The User Group meetings are not only an opportunity for Frontier Software to update us on chris improvements and developments, they also allow chris users to get together and discuss their different requirements from the software and spotlight future uses."



HR on report

Another regular user of chris²¹ is the College's Senior HR Officer, Carolyn Penn, who has integrated the capabilities of Frontier Software's Human Resource and Recruitment modules with a wide range of the College's internal processes. "Aside from using the Payroll system, the Recruitment module allows us to record information throughout the recruitment process; from creating and sending out job details, through to writing interview



letters, appointments and subsequent job offers. We can also set-up new employees on the database and track their progress throughout induction."

"It's a great system"

Working with the training department and staff development teams, HR can now keep records of in-house training completed by staff by using chris²¹'s training forms. The College's time-tabling team also leverage chris²¹ to monitor staff availability and schedule time-tables accordingly. These advanced reporting facilities have also proved invaluable for the HR department in supporting the College's operations. "We record and monitor sickness/absence and produce reports for managers on a monthly basis so that trends can be identified and problem areas addressed," says Carolyn.

For Carolyn, chris²¹ delivers real advantages in terms of its user-friendly report-writing facilities and the fact that the user has so much control over how the system is structured. "It's saved us a lot of time and wherever we identify processes that can be simplified, we use chris²¹, purely because of the huge

advantage we gain from having up-to-date information – it's a great system."

Pleased with the success of the chris²¹ application, Frontier Software's sales manager Nigel Coase, is looking forward to the College implementing further Frontier Software modules, with Learning & Development (L&D²¹) and e-Recruitment (eR²¹) under consideration. "The City College Norwich project proved in this case that de-centralising payroll and HR services has not only paid-off in financial terms, it has also provided tangible benefits."



Mark Ramsden, Finance Manager (left) and Simon Jessup, Finance Supervisor – Payroll, have given top marks to Frontier Software's integrated chris²¹ solution.