

Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust

“Helping every child achieve their God-given potential”

Overview

Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust (DCAT) consists of 17 academies, 16 primary and one secondary in locations along the south coast of England, from Hastings in the east to Bournemouth in the west.

Established in 2014, the trust is set to expand significantly over the next two years, adding another 10 schools by 2024. This will see DCAT grow from 5,500 children and 950 staff to an estimated 8,000 children and 1,400 staff – an increase of around 50%. DCAT has been a Strictly Education client since 2017 when the trust procured HR and payroll management solutions for its schools.

Students

5,500

Staff

950



Improving efficiencies in the MAT's business operations as it grows, through automation and integration of processes

The challenge

With DCAT about to embark on a major expansion programme it was clear to the trust's leadership that uniformity across systems and a closer integration of the EduPeople HR and payroll system with their Arbor MIS – introduced in September 2022 – was a prerequisite for growth.

They identified a range of requirements to be met by the integration:

- Managing their expanding workforce
- Have a single view of the entire workforce
- Standardise HR practice across the trust

- Gain efficiencies through removal of data duplication
- Improve reporting to trustees
- Provide more accurate data to inform strategic decision making

While the EduPeople system had proven to be a powerful tool for the centralised management of HR and payroll, DCAT was convinced that greater efficiencies could be achieved by removing the duplication of effort when it came to school business managers across the trust entering employees' details into the different systems.

The challenge (continued)

Absence management proved to be the most challenging area for DCAT, and this became the priority objective in the integration project.

“We need uniformity in our central systems in order for us to do our job as a multi-academy trust,” says Stephen Barrett, DCAT’s Chief Operating Officer. “Without this our systems wouldn’t be up to the job of supporting our future growth and expanding workforce over a short space of time.”

The average number of working days lost per staff member across the trust’s 17 schools is seven per academic year, totaling around 3,400 days per year. Before the integration work each absence was keyed

into the MIS and the EduPeople HR and payroll system three times, taking around five minutes for each individual absence. Across the trust’s 17 schools this seemingly small admin task took up more than half a working day each week.

As well as occupying valuable admin time, the approach could lead to errors, said Stephen. “The risk of human error is effectively multiplied by three so I was keen to move quickly towards a true integration which would avoid this duplication of tasks and give time back to our colleagues,” he says. “We are now saving more than half a working day a week on absence management administration alone”.



“

The single point of data entry means we can now be confident that what we’re looking at is up to date, it’s accurate, and it’s consistent at all entry points.

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Stephen Barrett,
Chief Operating Officer

The response

DCAT staff were used to using the Arbor MIS interface, so, in order to minimise the impact of change, DCAT was keen to maintain the MIS as the central data input and inquiry point, with all data synchronising with the EduPeople system.

Always keen to meet their customer’s needs the team at Strictly took this on board. Strictly Education carried out a phased integration, beginning with a two-school trial. Strictly’s team developed close technical relationships with other suppliers involved in the system integration to ensure that the process was as seamless as possible.

The response (continued)

The efforts paid off, with Strictly's engineers creating the capability for absence data to flow from Arbor to EduPeople and vice versa. The absence integration also works with Bromcom's MIS, which is being used by another Strictly multi-academy trust client.

The absence integration is now embedded in all 17 DCAT schools. Most of the schools integrated

through the Wonde data management system initially, however this prompted Strictly's technical experts – driven by the Strictly quality assurance framework and their desire for continuous quality improvement – to build and pilot a direct integration for absence with Arbor.

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Stephen Barrett,
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The result

The direct integration has been live since the beginning of 2023 and is ready to accommodate the absence data management needs of an expanded trust.

The integration has saved valuable admin time, reduced the 'hassle factor' for DCAT's business managers and greatly improved the consistency and accuracy of data across DCAT's central systems.

“It has saved 50% at the time of absence entry,” says Stephen. “Outside of the time saving, it's the annoyance saving. Inputting the same data twice on two different systems is just irritating and frustrating.”

The next stage of the integration process is personal records, which will be inputted into the EduPeople HR

system through an employee self-service system and feed into the MIS - putting employees in control of their personal information and reducing admin time again for the school team.

That integration stage will be followed by syncing the trust's new Xero finance system with the EduPeople payroll module in summer 2023. “My priority has always been to save our schools time, and the EduPeople-Arbor integration on absence management has certainly achieved that, and while our central team has the payroll process as slick as they can get it at the moment it is still a day's work,” says Stephen. “Integrating that process would save our central team hours of time.”

The verdict

School business managers across the 17 schools have warmly welcomed the integration, acknowledging that it has saved time and removed the hassle and risk of mistakes associated with the old approach to absence data input.

The integration with Arbor also makes sure that any incorrect data sitting in the MIS, such as an incorrect NI number, is 'cleansed' because it will be picked up from the employee payroll information in EduPeople.



"The integration gives everyone peace of mind," says Stephen. "What we had was a confusion of systems. If we wanted to pull off absence stats, people would go to two different places, and we had no commonality as to where the data was being drawn from when we asked for it. What we now have as a trust is an ability to pull off absence stats consistently, because there's a single point of entry, which feeds through to all systems. We can now be confident that what we're looking at is up to date, it's accurate, and it's consistent at all entry points."



Working with 900 academies and 180 MATs for many years, Strictly Education has the knowledge and expertise to support all corners of a well-run multi-academy trust. EduPeople offers the best of both worlds, it is based in the cloud but comes with a team

of CIPP & CIPD qualified experts on the ground. From recruitment to retirement, one single system manages your HR, payroll and pensions together, saving time on people management and providing support at every stage of the employee life cycle.



We build and sustain excellent relationships



We value people and their differences



We are trusted to deliver great services



We continuously challenge ourselves to improve our services



We work hard to protect reputations



We strive to deliver excellent services

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