

Highbury College



Description

With over 16,000 learners, Highbury College is a vital part of the community in the Portsmouth area. Four centres serve part-time and full-time students from pre-16 through to adults. Courses range from adult basic education through to specialist construction and automotive courses as well as AS levels.

Why a Managed Service

Stella Mbubaegbu, who took up the post of principal and chief executive at Highbury on 1st October 2001, believes passionately in the importance of education and the pursuit of excellence. On arriving at Highbury, Stella required accurate, real time, management information so she could assess the status of the college and determine how it could be moved forward. However, the information on the learners and their courses was not immediately forthcoming, as processes did not exist to provide this material crucial for decision making and financial control.

To fill the information gap, Tribal Managed Services, was brought in to provide a strategic review of Highbury's management information system (MIS). The review included mapping business processes that existed to ones that would be required in the future. A framework was developed to streamline processes and make them more efficient, thereby making the college more effective and providing jobs that were as fulfilling as possible. The framework focused on:

- Enrolment review - focusing on people and processes
- Attendance monitoring, tracking and register review
- Retention, reporting, student progression and the timeliness and accuracy of data input and information retrieval
- Structural review of the functions supporting the areas of MIS, student records, examinations advice and guidance and information technology
- Daily reporting

"A managed service gives us the chance to tap into expertise and gain advantage to enable us to fast track forward to fulfil our goals. It is utilising resources to the best advantage and is putting Highbury College at the forefront of education."

Stella Mbubaegbu, Principal, Highbury College

Key Facts

Location	Urban
Turnover	£22m
Courses	650+
MIS	ebs™
Finance System	coda
Learning Environment:	le®
Full managed services from:	July 2002

The managed service at Highbury College covers:

- A 3 year contract awarded after a tender
- A new structure for IS/IT
- Management of the MIS and related functions
- New student record system
- Virtual Learning Environment
- Successful fast track implementation
- Successful on-line enrolment
- Real time data (student numbers/funding)
- Register system

To move forward and implement the findings from the strategic review of MIS quickly, Highbury chose an interim management agreement. The interim managed service covered a three-month period of strategic management of the IT/IS function and assistance with business support reorganisation, including the appointment of key IT and MIS staff. The main tasks during the interim period were:

- Preparation for full on-line enrolment July/August 2002
- Review of the register system to implement new processes from September 2002
- Review of the IT network infrastructure and network topology
- Evaluation of ISR 23
- Evaluation of the college's strategy in respect of disaster recovery

As the interim service progressed it became clear that further time and expertise would be needed to maintain the pace of forward thinking change. Stella explains, "IT is a very fast changing area and keeping up with the relevant changes as well as coping with all the other issues that exist in the College is of great importance. Therefore, a managed service was brought in for three years to give us the time to develop and put into practice the new processes."



Stella Mbubaegbu, Principal, Highbury College

The concept of the 'managed service' is simple: information systems and IT are not the core business of the learning provider. The managed service gives institutions the option to outsource to IT specialists the management of one or more of their key support operations. Stella says, "It allows us to focus on academic, learner and curriculum issues leaving the day-to-day management of the business infrastructure to Tribal Managed Services. Developing staff is also essential to help the college fulfil its potential. Formerly we did not have enough people with the right skill sets or enough resources to take the college forward in the timescales required. It is now imperative to make sure that everyone is given the opportunity to develop and the resources are made available so that the skills gap can be closed."

Stella recommends seeking a partner that:

- Has staff who believe firmly in the partnership approach
- Has knowledge and experience of your sector
- Offers excellent support and training to enable knowledge transfer to your own staff

Stella sees the managed service not as outsourcing, but as a way of getting the specialists she needs to set up and run the system. It also enables her staff to have time to gain new skills so that in the long term they can run the information services themselves with consultancy as and when required.

Benefits to the college

- Review and streamlining of key business processes
- Access to accurate, real-time, management information
- Consistent, reliable level of service ensured by the Service Level Agreement
- Transfer of risk for delivering agreed outputs
- Clear visibility of the cost of delivering support services for ease of budgeting
- Access to breadth of expertise and experience of a specialist IT company to help train and develop staff

Benefits to the learner

- Raises the aspirations and expectations of the learner
- Being at the forefront of technology will equip the students with the skills to be used in the corporate world
- Offers a variety of ways to join the college community and learn in a way that is suitable for them
- Ensures the needs of the learners and community are being met

Good practice recommendations

- Have a clear vision and strategic direction
- Work in partnership with your IT supplier
- Gain the full support of your chief executive
- Be aware of organisation cultural issues
- Appoint an internal contract manager
- Ensure that you have a consultant on-site