

Success Story

Open Text Delivers New Efficiencies for The Scottish Funding Council

Open Text ECM Suite provides SFC with one central information repository to improve communication and knowledge sharing and help to meet legislative and compliance requirements

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) plays an important role in further and higher education by ensuring that colleges and universities can provide world-class opportunities for learners and researchers. The organisation distributes around £1.7 billion of funding to Scotland's 20 universities and 43 colleges and has responsibility for developing national priorities such as skills, employability and wider access to education.

In 2002, SFC identified significant opportunities to develop its information management processes and began searching for a strategic solution that would improve how it generated, processed, shared, stored and communicated information. New legislative and compliance requirements, such as the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, Data Protection Act and Records Management were also key drivers for SFC to improve the ways in which it handled information and knowledge.

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Tim Cain,
Senior IT Projects Officer
and Programme Manager,
The Scottish Funding Council

electronic files and in systems with very limited cross-referencing capabilities. This resulted in difficulties in assembling the full information base about each college or university. In addition, lack of retention/destruction standards for electronic information led to an increasingly unmanageable volume of corporate data and concerns for records management and FOI compliance.

Longer term, SFC had concerns for the cost and efficient use of prime office space required to store physical files. In 2002, it had many thousands of physical records stored in filing cabinets and rolling stacks taking up valuable office space.

Complications with publishing and distributing correct information on the Councils' Web site: www.sfc.ac.uk was another challenge for SFC. Its Web site is a fundamental part of the organisation's activities and an important means of communicating with internal users, stakeholders and the wider community.

Business issues

Historically at SFC, electronic files were being stored on networked hierarchical directories drives with a complex permissions model that created barriers to access and problems with file sharing and information management. This led to the duplication of assets and worked against the organisation's desire to work more collaboratively. The lack of systematic version control meant there could be multiple versions of documents and the potential risk for decisions being taken on the basis of out-of-date information.

Other concerns included problems with search and retrieval. Information could be found in different parts of the organisation, spread across multiple physical and

Industry

Government and Education

Customer



Business Challenges

- Reduce duplication and double handling of electronic files
- Create an electronic information and file management system
- Improve integration between records management, document processing and content publishing
- Change culture and attitudes to embrace the new information management processes
- Cost and efficiency issues for using office space to store physical files

Business Solution

- Open Text ECM™ Suite
 - Document Management
 - Records Management
 - Collaboration
 - Communities of Practice

Business Benefits

- A cost effective, central document management system that enables archiving, editing, tracking and easier access to documents
- Streamlined overall processes and ensured compliance with information privacy regulations
- Increased ease of internal information sharing and collaboration
- Opened new opportunities for external collaboration and government efficiency

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Addressing information management objectives

To remedy these issues, SFC developed a knowledge management and information technology strategy in 2003. Of particular significance was the need to improve the way it managed information to meet changing legislation and to better support funding policies, strategies and the way it worked.

“It was critical that we developed our relationships with external stakeholders and our partners through better management and sharing of information and communication. Also, following the e-Government and the subsequent related government initiatives, we wanted to effectively respond to the new legislative and compliance requirements such as the FOI Act, Data Protection Act and provide robust Records Management,” says Tim Cain, Senior IT Projects Officer and the programme manager at SFC. “Essentially we needed to create a central information repository accessible to all users – one that enabled greater control of documents and allowed users to collaborate better without duplicating files.”

In addition, SFC identified the need for greater control that would enable users to label sensitive information; improve search and information retrieval abilities; and introduce new processes for staff and stakeholders to share information.

Following a study into their current system’s shortcomings, SFC came to the conclusion that the new solution would need to meet their technical requirements, but more importantly be able to improve the organisation’s prevailing culture and processes. As a result, the SFC set about to find a truly integrated modular software solution comprising records and document management, workflow, knowledge sharing and content management. “The chosen solution had to be scalable and able to demonstrate a breadth and depth of functionality allowing us to ‘bolt-on’ additional features as we grow,” says Cain.

Creating a central information repository

A key characteristic of SFC is that it consists of small specialist teams working on discreet areas of policy and funding. Connecting these pockets of activity had been a long-held ambition for the organisation.

Recognising effective communication and information flow as a major challenge, paired with the stringent regulations put in place by the regulatory agencies, SFC concluded that content management capabilities available from the Open Text ECM Suite could fulfil its current and potential needs.

SFC implemented the Open Text technology in 2003 to provide a basic Intranet and to signal change to the organisation. The Intranet contained corporate information and some electronic workflows available to all staff.

During this time, an information audit was conducted with the help of Open Text and a third party consultancy. This led to a lengthy process where all branches of the organisation were engaged with its records management team to agree on a single corporate functional file plan structure and consistent standards of records management and governance.

“The ability to create a staff Intranet alongside a new file sharing service was a huge advantage when it came to looking at the all important ‘people’ aspect of the implementation. But for many staff this was their first introduction to information and records management and resistance to change was encountered at various levels,” says Cain.

After identifying further requirements for more seamless integration between records management, document processing and reporting and content publishing, SFC decided to upgrade and upscale their

Open Text environment. This involved Technical Services reviewing the current solution and recommending configuration settings to clean mismatched data and improve performance, creating a stable platform to complete the upgrade.

An architecture review was also conducted to ensure the upgrade was both horizontally and vertically scalable. Consideration also had to be given for the growth of users and data stored on the system. SFC also worked with an Open Text partner to develop integration between the document management system and GroupWise.

“To be absolutely confident in the integrity of information we required an information management system where all content regardless of its lifecycle stage would be managed proactively in the same location within the single file plan allowing users to work on the complete volume of draft documents, store important emails, manage records and collaborate more effectively than ever before,” explains Cain.

To achieve this to full effect customised software was implemented in a carefully planned change management programme over an 18 month period starting in 2006. Everyone from the Chief Executive to junior administrative staff regularly use the system. The implementation involved staging two very effective half day customised training sessions to help staff use the system.

In May 2008, an external audit of the new system was conducted by Audit Scotland, the body that provides the Auditor General and the Accounts Commission with an analysis that public money is spent correctly. The review identified exceptional levels of good practice including that SFC had successfully introduced a very effective EDRMS and had delivered a culture change across the organisation, moving progressively from the ‘silo’ style of working to one which promotes knowledge sharing and open collaboration.

The audit revealed that SFC had made significant changes to management processes such as how it handled corporate information.

“We’ve now introduced a file plan that is around half the size of the old network drives and provides a central repository for all of our information. The new software ensures appropriate categorisation is applied to all records held within the system, together with adequate technical controls to protect the confidentiality, integrity and availability of the information,” says Cain. “We also undertook a significant data cleansing, file classification and migration exercise, with the introduction of a number of quality assured procedures to weed out duplicate records created under the previous system.

“With the new system, we are now implementing an innovative workflow assisted scanning solution that improves business processes, removes unnecessary paperwork and is designed with reference to the British Standard BIP0008 ‘Code of Practice for Legal Admissibility and Evidential Weight for Information Stored Electronically,’” says Cain.

2.0 capabilities ensure greater user adoption

While document and records management was foundational to the purpose of the Open Text offering, Cain explains that for SFC, this is just part of their longer term knowledge management strategy. “The Open Text system is also our Intranet for keeping staff informed. With Web 2.0 type interactivity we have extended the system’s value and also secured greater user adoption. Applications include skinning the Intranet with an intuitive Web friendly look and feel, providing a roll over navigation menu, exploiting news channels, polls, online forms and workflows and management information reports. This has been achieved using the core Open Text system plus the Communities of Practice module and Web Reports to create an appealing new look and purpose. The result

is our Intranet branded: 'LINKS,' which has a corporate home page containing the latest news and several other communities of practice to help staff access, contribute and share information easily."

The corporate enterprise wide system provides tools and navigational aids for SFC staff to quickly and reliably access all key information within LINKS. Although the page has a new look, users still have access to all the usual Open Text functionality that is provided through the custom appearance.

SFC uses 'LINKS' to showcase corporate projects and to encourage knowledge sharing and collaboration around cross-team initiatives. The communities available keep staff informed of changing legislation and enables members to contribute to debates through discussion forums. Users can easily drill down the file plan and find guidance and electronic forms from the top menu.

Polls and forums have proven to be effective for a variety of surveying requirements particularly for Human Resources when gathering ad hoc anonymous information. "They have also been helpful for IT to gauge the mood and effectiveness of new system changes," says Cain.

The community also keeps staff informed of what's happening at Scottish colleges and universities and also provides Web reports to search the Open Text repository for all documents and information related to stakeholders.

As part of its wider strategy, the Scottish Funding Council is developing its Web presence to provide new and improved information and collaboration services to its stakeholders. "The benefits we have seen by exploiting a Web 2.0 approach for our internal management of information will also help us to explore similar developments with our stakeholders through the Web site," says Cain.

Business benefits

SFC has undergone an amazing transformation since implementing the Open Text technology. The organisation has experienced huge business benefits and importantly has been able to successfully turn around its information productivity and efficiency concerns.

The Open Text ECM Suite has encouraged a better approach to work that is immediately more collaborative. It has supported a culture change that is also having an impact on business processes. It provides SFC with better information security and a proactive response to legislative and good practice requirements.

An example of this is the annual announcement of block grants to universities and colleges. In the weeks leading up to the announcement, documents move quickly between policy teams, statisticians, funding specialists and communications staff. The process has become more inclusive, more efficient and more robust as a result of SFC's investment with Open Text.

According to Cain, the deployment of the Open Text system is enabling SFC to achieve maximum floor space efficiencies. "The benefits have been so great that we're now looking at the feasibility of reducing overall office space and using the reclaimed space more effectively. Through the changes we've made with Open Text, there's potential for major cost savings as well as creating a better environment for staff."

Another area where SFC has seen significant benefits is in the amount of administrative work related to processing and searching for documents. "While it's often difficult to measure, when we take into account the way we used to do things, the cost savings and improvements are staggering, which is a massive contributor to the efficiency gains we are committed to make as part of the Government's Efficiency Program," says Cain.

The new information management system has also radically improved the accuracy of information being communicated online at the SFC Web site and overall external relations.

Stephen Crowe, Head of Communications and External Relations explains, "We are now developing a new content managed Web site to provide further improvements in the way information managed in Open Text is made available outside the organization."

Cain adds, "We believe our corporate reputation has and will continue to prosper from our new information management processes. The new streamlined system allows easier and simpler use of our data that reduces the risk of publishing incorrect or expired information."

In addition to the system benefits, SFC has also signed up to Open Text Technical Services Premier Support Programme. This offers an extensive range of additional support services and is tailored to customer needs. SFC's programme includes proactive service support and management that searches for potential problems. It also offers in-depth analysis on how to implement future proofing throughout the system.

Looking Ahead

In the future, SFC plans to explore developing its investments in Open Text alongside other improvements with the Web site to provide potential new efficiencies through a secure extranet service. "At SFC we believe the current achievements through working with Open Text are just the beginning," says Cain. "Building on our successes in electronic document and records management we plan to explore new forms of collaboration and electronic processing to significantly increase how we do online business with colleges and universities and other partner bodies throughout further and higher education sector."

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