

Esher College

Implementation of SharePoint Portal Server 2003 in Further Education



Background – Esher College

Esher College is a successful and growing Further Education organisation in Surrey with over 1400 full time students as well as classes in the evenings and weekends for adult students.

The college has a track record in providing excellent IT services with a fibre-optic backbone network, 450 PCs and 15 Windows 2003 servers. Benefiting from the [Microsoft Academic Licensing Programme](#) the college bases its IT Strategy on Microsoft products.

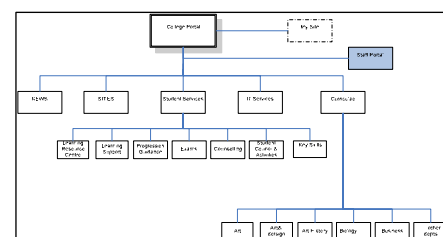
Esher College had developed an intranet for use by staff and students and were using an application which gave some collaboration facilities, but they felt both systems needed upgrading incorporating a single point of access. It was also desirable to make it easier for users to work from home – rather than using floppy disks and memory sticks to take files home. In addition they wanted to take this opportunity to integrate with other databases and make this information accessible via the intranet.

The College's existing commitment to Microsoft technologies meant SharePoint Portal Server was an ideal solution for an intranet and particularly for collaboration given the powerful integration features with Office XP. Esher College chose Parabola as their partner from the 4 suppliers they considered. This was partly because they felt Parabola could be more flexible and also because they seemed to understand the needs of Esher better than the competition. The project was undertaken with a key deadline of 05/09/2005 - the start of the new academic year. If the project did not meet this deadline the implementation would probably be delayed by a full year.

Parabola's approach – the project

With SharePoint implementation projects, understanding both the aims of the organisation and their existing information structure is absolutely vital.

A Parabola consultant spent time talking to Esher College before submitting the proposal to ensure we understood exactly what the objectives in implementing SharePoint were. Once the project started the first task was to produce an Information Structure Plan. This included interviewing a broad cross-section of



the college to find out how they currently use and access information, and also to consider whether improvements could be made. The resulting *Information Structure Plan* documented the proposed structure of the new portal in terms of key factors such as its taxonomy, entry points and sites.

Project Management was a vital element of the service provided. The fixed deadlines, diverse dependancies and broad team involvement required careful planning and control. Regular project meetings were conducted to review the project plan, the risk log and the outstanding project issues.



A key element of the project was the implementation of a pilot system before the Portal went live. One of the aims of the pilot was to try to assess the general needs of a department, the History Department was selected as they were enthusiastic users of IT. Many issues were raised during the pilot which had to be

addressed before the project could go live. Finding these issues during the pilot saved some time but as importantly, it meant that when more resistant users were introduced to the system they did not experience these difficulties.

One major issue identified during the pilot was the task of transferring and structuring existing documents in Sharepoint document libraries so that they could be browsed and searched with ease by Students. The very large number of documents required a semi-automated load which was completed by Parabola on Esher College's behalf during the college summer break.

The system went live on schedule and is proving to be a great success with the college.

The resulting system



"...more than a portal it is the whole way that we work."

David Lloyd Esher College ILT Manager

The final project delivered to Esher College included:

- deployment of SharePoint Portal Server 2003,
- development of bespoke web parts,
- integration of an existing college Management Information System into Sharepoint,
- implementation of a High Availability Server Farm,
- integration of Active directory with the college Management Information System (MIS)

The college now has a successful intranet, a document library with appropriate access levels, powerful searching across all the resources and integration with Management Systems and Office 2003.

Staff and students are able to work from home with ease.

An example of a web part that we developed is the one which takes timetable data from the existing SQL Server database and presents it to the user in the appropriate format – either as a student, staff member or for a whole department.

| My Timetable - DML | | | | | | |
|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----|--|
| | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | |
| 08:55 | Z:ADB:C2 | Q:ADV:A1 | Z:ADB:C2 | | | |
| 10:05 | G001 | G002 | G001 | | | |
| 10:05 | BREAK | | | | | |
| 10:25 | | | | | | |
| 10:25 | Q:ADV:A1 | | | Q:ADV:A1 | | |
| 11:35 | G002 | | | G002 | | |
| 11:40 | DML | | Z:ADB:C2 | DML | | |
| 12:50 | O3D4 | | G001 | O3D4 | | |
| 12:50 | LUNCH | | | | | |
| 13:50 | | | | | | |
| 13:50 | | | Q:ADV:A1 | Z:ADB:C2 | | |
| 15:00 | | | G002 | G001 | | |
| 15:05 | | Z:ADB:C2 | | | | |
| 16:15 | | G001 | | | | |

Timetable Web Part

This means all staff and students have access to their timetable information at home or at college and any changes to timetabling are available immediately.

The benefits

Esher College feel they have a college wide system which has significantly improved their infrastructure.

A lot of time has been saved through the integration of the college's MIS with SharePoint, in particular with regard to the creation and management of user accounts. Previously, user accounts could not be created until after courses have been allocated to the students, but once allocation has taken place teaching starts. Thus the creation of the accounts had to be done over just a couple of days, inputting the information from the enrolment process into Active Directory. There has been a 25% time saving through Active Directory being automatically updated from the MIS database.

More importantly though is the improved management of users. For example when a student leaves, previously this would have involved personnel updating one system, passing paper to another staff member who then updated another system. All systems are now always in line and the data integrity has improved. Esher estimate this would equate to a 40 man hours saved during one academic year.

Another benefit is offsite access to information. Students and staff can work smarter. Because of the popularity of Esher College students can live as far a

field as Finchley, Wandsworth and Guildford. If they are unable to stay late at the college to access resources it is now simple for them to work from home.

Esher College are finding the system also impacts on their teaching processes, for example one class of students created a short PowerPoint presentation each from digital photos they had taken over the summer. Each put their work in the shared area of their Mysite section on SharePoint. The tutor was then able to log on to SharePoint, and search for the different students' work using their ID. The work was displayed on a projector without the need for any one else to log into the system.

Technology

The technology used for the implementation of this project:

- SharePoint Portal Server
- Windows SharePoint Services
- .NET web parts
- Office 2003
- SQL Server 2000
- Microsoft Exchange 2000



References/Links

<http://www.esher.ac.uk>

<http://www.parabolasoft.co.uk/Products/SharePoint/Overview.aspx>

<http://www.microsoft.com/sharepoint>

Further information

For further details and a quote based upon your particular requirements please contact Richard Gray + 44 (0) 20 8399 5920, rg@parabolasoft.co.uk