

Activate Learning supports growth and generates efficiencies with Civica REMS

Activate Learning is an education group of seven colleges and seven schools based across Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Surrey and beyond. Currently supporting more than 20,000 students and apprentices, the group has rapidly grown from its roots as a merger of three colleges in 2003.

The growth in size has meant that there are now more than 2,000 academic and administrative staff, all of whom require access to learner data in order to operate effectively. To help Activate Learning support learners across multiple sites, the group requires a Management Information System (MIS) that not only holds all of the required data, but that allows it to be easily accessed and reported on.

Civica REMS is the ideal solution for such a key part of the group's technology infrastructure, managing the core data that drives all of its management systems.

As Richard Durston, Director of Institutional Effectiveness at Activate Learning, states: "There is no member of staff who could do their job without REMS – it is the key driver to allow us to monitor progress and achieve our aims effectively".

Reducing the risk of error with a single database

One of the challenges facing a growing multi-site college group is managing learner data that has previously been collected in different systems. Using Civica REMS, Richard and his team were able to incorporate data from newly-acquired colleges into a single system. "A single database helps tremendously", says Richard, "previously, the records would never match and it took time to check which entry was correct. With REMS, we can avoid entering data twice and reduce the risk of human error – and save the time and resource it took to resolve any issues."

A centralised system also means that access to student information is not restricted to that student's college site: "REMS allows us to be flexible with staffing locations", says Richard, "this helps my team respond quickly to any requests for information".

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Making better decisions

For any college, reporting is key – both in terms of meeting statutory requirements and keeping track of KPIs. REMS enables Activate Learning to quickly access and run reports on a wide range of data with confidence that the data is as accurate as it can be. "Better data equals better reporting – this means that I and other stakeholders can be confident in the decisions we make," says Richard.

The heart of the college group's management systems

The data held in REMS powers most of Activate Learning's management systems, including their eLLP, apprenticeship/e-portfolio and work experience systems. REMS also drives the management of student accounts in Microsoft 365, giving students access to the college networks, and supports multiple VLEs.

This has helped the group win tenders for new colleges, as access to these automation systems is a great benefit and can help attract students. With REMS at the centre, the newly merged college's data only has to be imported into one system – making the technology available to staff and students with very little delay.



This flexibility is appreciated by Heidi Miller, Group Data Manager at Activate Learning: "The REMS team are able to respond to our needs and provide us with a flexible infrastructure. We are not constricted in how our college and system grows."

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Sam Reynolds, Product Strategy Director, Civica

The flexibility of REMS has also meant that the group is able to run Canvas and Moodle VLEs alongside each other. This enabled one of their merged colleges to keep their existing system with no negative impact on the students' education. As Richard says, "REMS lets you, it's not closed."

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Making efficiencies

While running two systems in parallel can be useful in some cases, in many cases it makes sense to consolidate systems.

The growth of Activate Learning meant that the group were using two separate timetabling systems, with duplicate data entered in both. Each system had a different supplier and related support and maintenance costs, and each required a member of staff to administrate.

Using REMS, Activate Learning could combine the data and take advantage of the timetabling solution built into their student management system. The group were able to save the costs of both independent timetabling systems, avoid the extra work and risk of errors involved in data duplication, and reduce staffing levels by 50%.

The configurability of REMS is important to Heidi, as it means that her team can manipulate data without approaching the supplier to make small changes: "we've got access to all of our data and don't have to wait on someone else to grant permission." This saves Heidi and her team time, and means that she can respond quickly to requests. "We can provide a much better service to the rest of the college", she states.

A strong support mechanism

Even with a high level of user configurability, "a strong support mechanism is essential", says Kizzie Allum, Reporting and Information Manager at Activate Learning. "We appreciate the support team at Civica – we know that we won't be told 'no' and we won't have to go through a faceless helpdesk."

"Civica's relationship with Activate Learning is very much a partnership which has benefits for all of its clients", says Sam Reynolds, Product Strategy Director for Civica REMS. "By making sure that REMS is optimised for a large college group, we can not only provide Activate Learning with a system that meets its requirements, but also offer some of the same benefits to the smaller colleges we support."

Richard is anticipating an even brighter future with REMS at the centre of Activate Learning's management systems. "We're delighted with REMS, and we know it isn't standing still. More efficiencies are in store, and we look forward to coming developments."