



Microsoft Office System Customer Solution

Case study

“Our goal is to attract new students with up-to-date technology and applications—and by deploying Microsoft Windows XP Professional, Office 2003, and the XML-based solutions, we will.”

Luke Rutherford
*Information & Communications
 Technology Manager
 Northumberland College*



U.K. College Cuts Costs, Solidifies Position as Technology Leader with XML-Enabled Desktop

Founded in 1920 as a training facility for officials of the coal-mining industry, Northumberland College has grown to become one of the most widely attended educational institutions in northeastern England. With a yearly enrollment of 14,000 students drawn from across 2,000-square-mile Northumberland County, the college delivers technical, vocational, and community-oriented instruction through its main site and five outreach centers and Web-based instruction.

To attract students and maintain its reputation as a valuable source of training for industry and business, the college has positioned itself as a technology leader. Now it is solidifying that position through a college-wide deployment of Microsoft Office Professional Edition 2003, which will help to reduce administrative costs and increase the focus on students and results.

CUSTOMER PROFILE	BUSINESS SITUATION	SOLUTION	BENEFITS
Northumberland College serves 14,000 students throughout northeastern England. The college delivers community-oriented instruction in dozens of disciplines ranging from automotive engineering and computer programming to healthcare, social work, and graphic design.	To strengthen its reputation as a technology innovator and to reduce costs, the college needed to address administrative inefficiencies in the processing of timesheets for special-needs education staff and the information gathering required for faculty self-assessment reports.	Working with Microsoft Consulting Services and Sx3 Infrastructure Services, Northumberland IT executives upgraded the school's desktop productivity software to Microsoft® Office Professional Edition 2003 and built XML-based applications to automate the processing of timesheet and self-assessment reports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced ability to ensure special-education funding worth £800,000 Automated timesheet processing for yearly savings of £25,000 Streamlined self-assessment research for greater focus on analysis and evaluation Increased ability to attract new students



“What appealed most to the people at Northumberland was the support in the Microsoft Office System for native XML integration, collaboration, information collection with forms, and information sharing with portals.”

Neil Winchester

Technical Consultant
Sx3 Infrastructure Services

Situation

As a technical innovator, Northumberland College is committed to practicing what it preaches. Not only must it prove its excellence in training students for careers in disciplines ranging from construction and automotive engineering to healthcare and graphic design, but it also must demonstrate that it runs its own operations on sound principles of efficiency and economy—especially because of its status as a publicly funded institution.

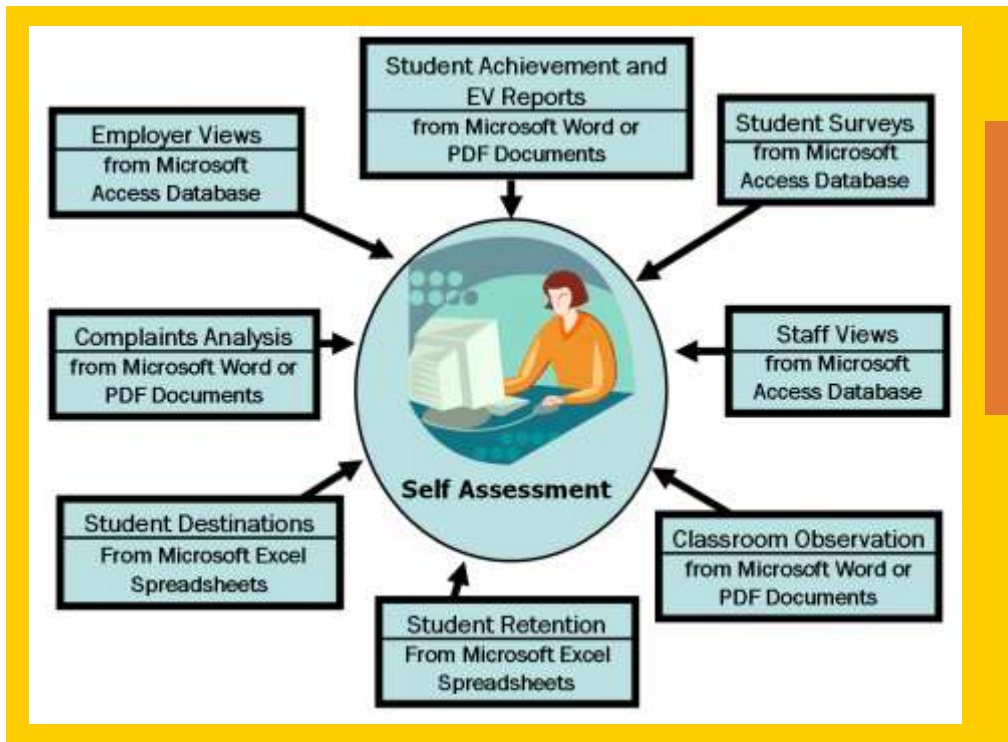
Information and Communications Technology (ICT) executives at the college were acutely aware of this challenge when they decided to enlist advanced software technology to address two key areas of administrative inefficiencies: timesheet processing for special-education staff and information gathering for faculty self-assessment reports.

Northumberland College employs 35 to 40 special-education staff to address the

needs of more than 500 students with learning difficulties and disabilities. To receive the additional government funding the college is due for this work, the staff must provide detailed documentation of the hours they spend with various students in diverse settings.

Historically, staff recorded their hours using a largely paper-based process that required up to three weeks of faculty and administrative time every quarter. More troubling than the inefficiency, however, was the inability of this approach to support the quick retrieval or cross-referencing of information, much less a complete audit trail. “As a result, there was considerable potential for underclaim, risking some loss of funding that in 2003 will total £800,000,” says Northumberland College ICT Manager Luke Rutherford.

For the faculty self-assessment reports, information is derived from a broad range of sources in a diverse set of formats. These sources include retention and achievement statistics for



Northumberland College faculty self-assessment reports require the collection of information that originates from multiple sources and is available in diverse formats.

benchmarking purposes (in Microsoft® Excel), external verifier (EV) reports (in PDF), statistics on student and employer perceptions (in Microsoft Word, Access, and Excel), external audits, and college-generated enrollment and post-graduation employment statistics. Not surprisingly, pulling data from these various sources and reconciling their diverse formats constituted a tedious and time-consuming process for faculty and administrative personnel, consuming two to three days of time every quarter.

2003 running on Windows XP Professional. Neil Winchester, who as Technical Consultant with Microsoft Certified Partner Sx3 Infrastructure Services helped to lead the upgrade, explains the factors behind the college's decision.

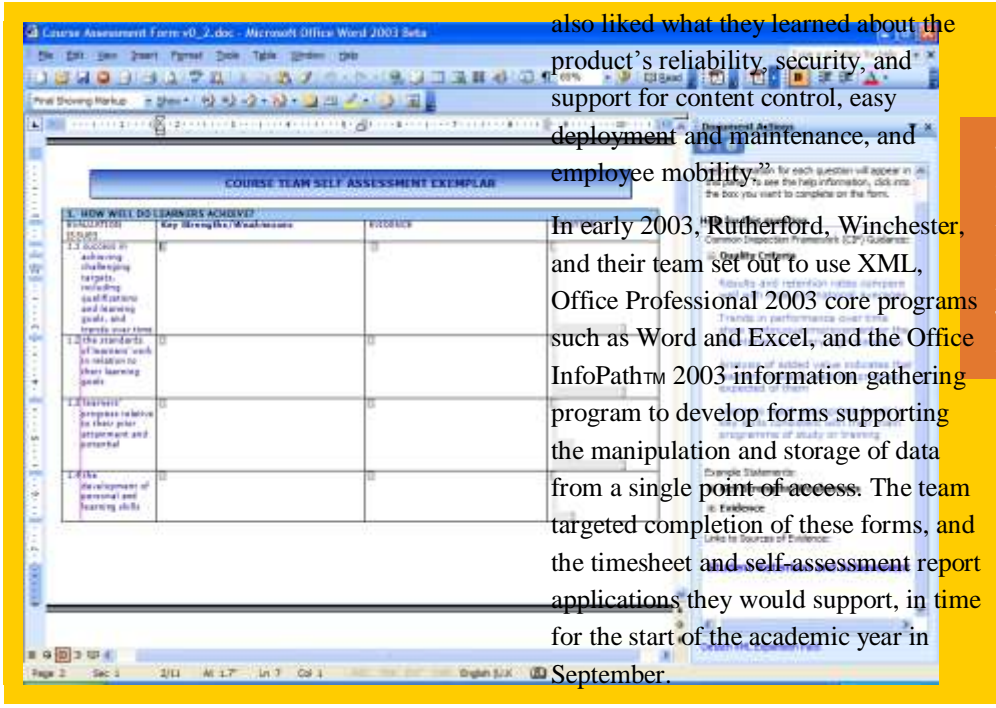
“What appealed most to the people at Northumberland College was the support in the Microsoft Office System for native XML integration, collaboration, information collection with forms, and information sharing with portals.” Winchester says. “They also liked what they learned about the product’s reliability, security, and support for content control, easy deployment and maintenance, and employee mobility.”

In early 2003, Rutherford, Winchester, and their team set out to use XML, Office Professional 2003 core programs such as Word and Excel, and the Office InfoPath™ 2003 information gathering program to develop forms supporting the manipulation and storage of data from a single point of access. The team targeted completion of these forms, and the timesheet and self-assessment report applications they would support, in time for the start of the academic year in September.

With a new application built on Microsoft Office Professional 2003, InfoPath 2003, and XML, users can retrieve data for the faculty self-assessment reports directly from a Word 2003 research pane. Shown here is a template for one of the key elements of that data, a student retention and achievement report.

System and XML to maintain and strengthen our commitment to being a technology leader.”

Luke Rutherford
Information & Communications
Technology Manager
Northumberland College



Solution

To correct these administrative inefficiencies up front and maintain the school's position as a technology leader over the long term, Rutherford and his colleagues decided to upgrade the school's desktop productivity software from Microsoft Office 2000 Professional running on the Microsoft Windows® 98 operating system to Office Professional Enterprise Edition

By that time, the team will have outfitted all 800 client computers across the five college sites with Windows XP Professional and Office XP Professional (to be updated to Office Professional Enterprise Edition 2003 when it is available), some of those computers with InfoPath 2003, and a number of Tablet PCs with the Microsoft Office OneNote™ 2003 note-taking program. Other Microsoft desktop products, including Office Project Professional 2003 and Office Visio® Professional 2003, will be deployed to several dozen computers.



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Neil Winchester
Technical Consultant
Sx3 Infrastructure Services

Benefits

Saving Money and Focusing on What Counts

With the special-education staff timesheet application, users will document their hours through an XML-enabled form based on Office InfoPath 2003. By filling out this form, users will automatically submit hours-worked data into a Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 database from which the school’s finance staff can process funding and salary claims. “Instead of spending three weeks on a nontrackable, paper-based process, the teaching and finance teams will use familiar software on their PCs to be done with timesheet processing in just two to three days,” Rutherford reports. “This will save the college roughly £25,000 yearly in administrative costs.”

Even more important is the ability to provide a complete audit trail for the funding of what has become a major aspect of the college mission—to provide every special-needs student with the support he or she requires to succeed. “We’ll finally be confident that all the hours our teachers are devoting to special-needs education will be fairly compensated,” Rutherford says. “We’ll also more easily meet certain governmental reporting obligations, which in themselves carry significant impact on the availability of future funding.”

For the faculty self-assessment reports, an Office Word 2003 template that uses XML integration will enable users to pull information directly from a Word research pane. “Instead of spending two to three frustrating days hunting down information from multiple sources and wrestling with formatting inconsistencies, faculty members will work entirely inside an application they are comfortable with—Microsoft Office

Word—and finish the job in less than a day,” Rutherford says. “We’ll shift the focus from gathering information to the more valuable activity of evaluating and analyzing it, while saving about £4,000 in faculty time yearly.”

“Only the Beginning”

In addition to saving time, money, and headaches for faculty and administrative staff, the timesheet and self-assessment report applications are expected to give ICT executives a look into the future. “At Northumberland College, there’s a continuing eagerness to develop Web-based applications and XML-based functionality in a Microsoft Office System environment,” Winchester says. “These applications are just the start of what they’ll be doing with those technologies.”

For example, Rutherford and his colleagues are planning an extranet for delivering new applications to students, staff, and faculty, and they’ll use XML functionality to integrate the extranet with the Office System. They also will consider deploying Microsoft Office Outlook® 2003 as a front end to the college’s existing messaging environment so they can take advantage of document and meeting workspaces and other functionality available through Office Professional Enterprise Edition 2003 and Windows SharePoint™ Services. In addition, they’ll provide OneNote 2003 for staff and students who may eventually use Tablet PCs for AutoCAD and technical applications.

“These applications represent only the beginning of the college’s ultimate plans for using the Microsoft Office System and XML to maintain and strengthen our commitment to being a technology leader,” Rutherford says. “Our goal is to attract new students with up-to-date technology and



applications—and by deploying Microsoft Windows XP Professional, Office 2003, and the XML-based solutions, we will. We'll also be able to increase our focus on students and their results to better serve the needs of both industry and the local community.”

Winchester also believes the Microsoft Office System deployment at Northumberland College will significantly benefit his company.

“Adopting Office 2003 early and showing that Sx3 Infrastructure Services can deliver solutions based on that technology represents a gigantic business opportunity,” he says. “If we can provide successful Microsoft Office System–based solutions here, we can do the same for other educational institutions—and that’s a major advantage for us.”

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For more information about Northumberland College, visit the Web site at:
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