

Meeting the challenges of coordinated admissions



LAs across the country are under increasing pressure from the government to process parental preference forms more quickly than ever before. After the School Standards and Framework Act in 2002 and the advent of the Common Application Form, the traditional manual procedure for handling parental preferences has been thrown into the limelight.

It is a slow, expensive and error prone process and is no longer compatible with the needs of today's admissions teams. As the volume of admissions data is expected to increase significantly with the inclusion of primary school parental preferences, the new regulations demand a faster and more effective way to meet the challenges of coordinated admissions.



Logistical problem

When Surrey LA decided to re-evaluate the handling of parental preference forms, it was clear from the onset that their existing system of hiring temporary staff to input the data presented logistical problems and did little to ensure that information was accurately recorded and target dates met.

With the increased demands of coordinated admissions, the reputation of the Council was at stake, and the risk of stage 2 appeals and potential maladministration cases higher. The LA needed a quicker, more effective and accurate method of collecting parental preference data. Following a number of trials with other vendors, it was after a recommendation by Capita Education Services, that Surrey LA went to data capture specialists DRS.

Increasing MCQ Assessments

After a number of in-depth discussions, DRS developed a cost-effective solution that would best suit the needs of the Surrey LA admissions team and support services at a very pressured time of year.

The first process involved designing specialist forms and overprinting them with details of known pupils provided by Surrey LA. Once these forms had been filled out by the parent or carer, they were dispatched to the secure DRS Bureau division for processing. This involved scanning the admissions forms on specially designed DRS data capture scanners, which electronically captured the images and data using unique drop out imaging techniques to recognise where fields had been completed.

The records are then validated against databases of names, addresses and schools, and verified before being securely returned to the LA in the standard XML format for uploading to the MIS system.

'The admissions forms were printed and the data was collected in almost half the time it took previously. Our relationship with DRS has not only allowed us to provide a quicker and more accurate way of getting application details onto our MIS system, but it has also reduced the burden and pressure on our staff of meeting such a tight deadline.'

*Margaret Ronayne, Admissions & Transport
Surrey LA*



Reduce the workload of admissions processing

Overprinting

For the 2005 round, this process has been refined to take account of the Common Application Form and the increased requirements of coordinated admissions, and a standard form developed which can be personalised for each LA by laser overprinting.

In 2004 the parental preference information is being captured and returned by DRS to 18 LAs in the DfES standard XML format via the secure medium of S2S, ready for processing by each LA, or transmission to neighbouring LAs or the Pan London Register.



With the known difficulties and inaccuracies associated with manual data entry, LAs need to ensure this data is captured quickly, accurately and securely. From specialist form design and production, to using the latest technology to electronically capture and verify parental preference forms, DRS can help admissions teams to electronically collect the data required within the tight time frames set out by the DfES.

'Manual data punching is a real headache so the use of the DRS service and technology plays a crucial part in enabling Buckinghamshire LA to meet the requirements of the new coordinated admissions arrangements.'

*Debbie Munday, Senior Admissions Coordinator
Buckinghamshire LA*

'DRS was able to provide a fast, effective system that could not only gather and coordinate the information needed, but also validate it at the same time.'

Without this solution we would be concerned about our ability to meet the tight deadlines stipulated by the government, and to manage the increased workload next year resulting from changes with our procedures for dealing with primary school admissions.'

*Martin Jackson, Admissions Manager
Education Bradford*

For further information on the full range of DRS products and services, please contact:

**Tel: +44 (0)1908 666088
Fax: +44 (0)1908 607668
enquiries@drs.co.uk
www.drs.co.uk**

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