

## City College Manchester

### Environment for Learning

#### *Institutional context*

City College Manchester is a large and complex FE college, formed in 1990 as a result of restructuring FE provision in the city. It has four campuses in Manchester, two in the south, including a large, purpose-built showcase campus development, one in the north and one in the city centre, close to Canal Street and Manchester's Chinatown district. The college also has a site for international students.

Serving the communities of Manchester and the north-west of England, the college has an important socio-economic function. Unemployment in Manchester stands at 7%, well above the national average of 3%. The college is currently involved in a data sharing project aiming to track young people who leave school prematurely. It has also engaged in a recent LSC strategic review of post 16 provision in the Greater Manchester area, encouraging education providers to share their development plans and help build coherent provision to meet the emerging and future needs of the area.

The college is a complex organisation, employing around 2,000 staff, of which 800-900 are academic, with varying employment terms and conditions inherited from merged institutions and other partner providers. In 2003/04, almost 28,000 students were enrolled (over 9,500 FTE). Around one third of full-time students were aged 16 to 18. Over 42,000 qualifications are processed annually.

#### *Key specialisms*

The college is the largest single provider of prison education in the country, with contracts to deliver education at 21 secure establishments. Almost half of all academic staff work in prisons. Other key specialisms are music performance, music technology, design and visual arts. A foundation degree with Bolton Institute is scheduled to be offered from October 2004.

The college is recognised for its positive work with deaf, hard of hearing and deaf blind people, and the practical implementation of its policy of equal access to the curriculum. It is also a major provider of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). City College Manchester is the lead organisation in the Logistics College of the North West, a regional centre of vocational excellence comprising six FE colleges and the Transport and General Workers Union.

#### *Current MLE*

Student Record System	Quercus <sup>1</sup>
Management Information for Staff	My Campus – draws data from Quercus, makes detailed management information available to staff
Virtual Learning Environment	Blackboard Learning System <sup>2</sup> ( <a href="http://bb.ccm.ac.uk">http://bb.ccm.ac.uk</a> )
Library	OLIB-Worldview <sup>3</sup>
Timetabling	Syllabus Plus <sup>4</sup>
Registers	Tokairo <sup>5</sup>
Retention/Achievement/ Progression	ProAchieve <sup>6</sup> – provides detailed analysis of ISR and ILR data, particularly in relation to success, retention and achievement
Curriculum Planning	In-house Tool
Finance	Symmetry Financials <sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.campusit.net/products.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.blackboard.com/worldwide/gb/en/ls.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fdggroup.com/fdi/products/olib4.html>

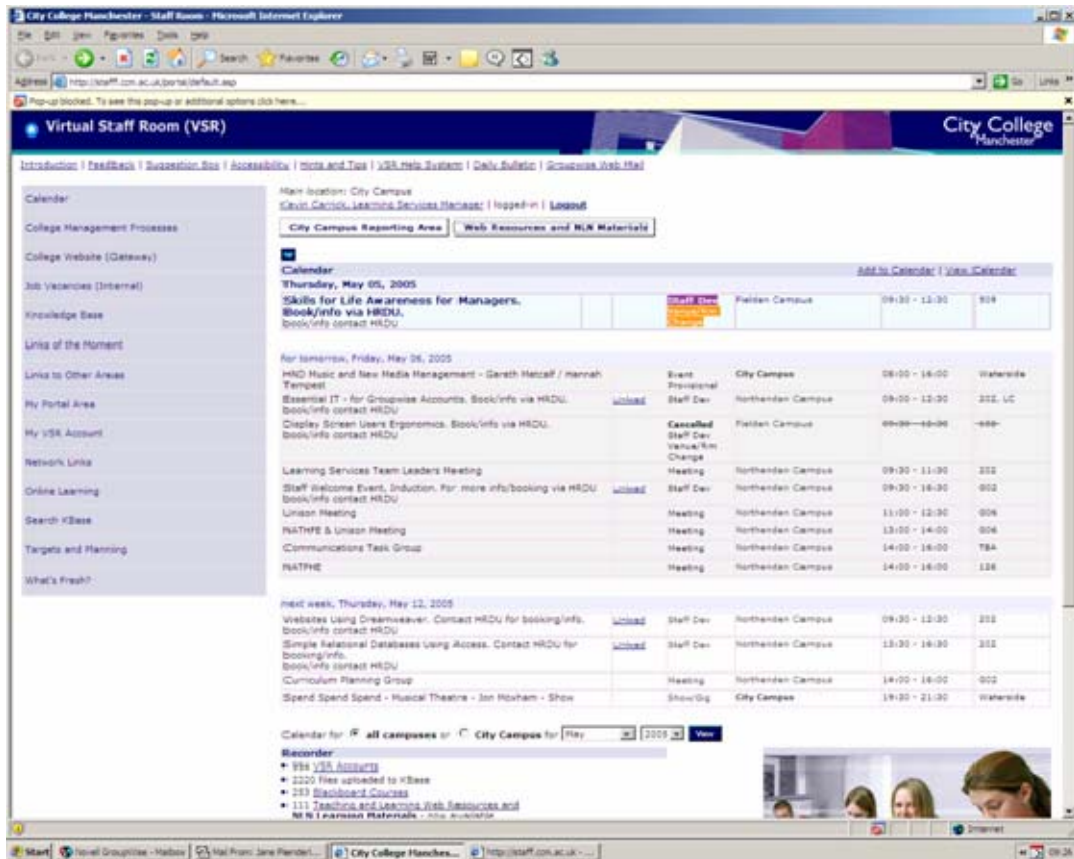
<sup>4</sup> <http://www.scientia.com/products/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.tokairo.com/attendance-management-software.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.compasscc.com/proachieve/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.symmetry.co.uk/financials2.asp>

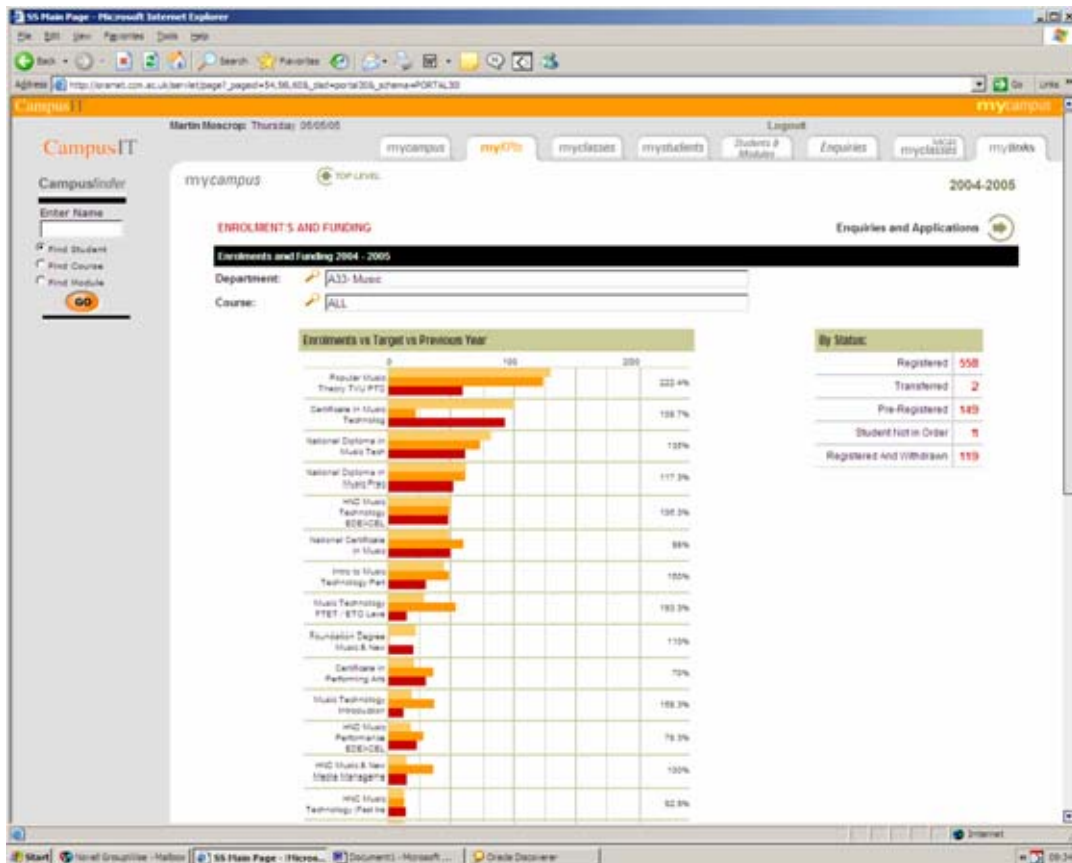
Human Resources	Workforce HR <sup>8</sup> – needed to interface with other systems eg timetabling, allocation of personal tutors and class tutors
Staff Portal	Virtual Staff Room – staff can personalise, add quick links
Student Portal	Knowledge Base (K-Base) content management system tool for staff, subscribe to areas, get information about changes to courses
Other	Under development as part of My Campus Discoverer <sup>9</sup> – reporting tool that produces learner profile



Screenshot 1: Virtual Staff Room (VSR)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.kronos.com/Products/wf\\_HR.htm](http://www.kronos.com/Products/wf_HR.htm)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.oracle.com/technology/products/discoverer/index.html>



**Screenshot 2: CampusIT mycampus**

### *Standards and specifications*

The college is committed to the principle of interoperability, recognising the value of integrating various component systems to share data seamlessly. Staff were involved in the initial drafting of the IMS Enterprise specification.

All underlying college systems are Oracle-based, and standalone systems make use of clean data. Interoperability was a procurement requirement of Campus IT. This system is understood to be interoperable with Blackboard, based on existing standards.

### *Institutional strategy and policy*

City College Manchester has an explicit strategic aim to develop online services and play a leading role in the development of a 'virtual college'. Another strategic imperative is widening participation, including developing partnerships with sixth form colleges, adult continuing education providers and employers.

Senior managers recognise the importance of internal communications for a multi-campus institution with such a large number of staff working off-campus. A Communications Strategy Group has been established to oversee internal communications, and all staff have access to the college intranet regardless of location.

Recognising that MIS requirements should not drive curriculum and pedagogy developments, responsibility for MIS management and ILT development has been split at senior management level.

### *Rationale and context for MLE development*

The institution recognised the need for robust management information to enable business process analysis and review of business effectiveness. The external value of being able to provide such management information was confirmed during a recent Ofsted inspection process.

Quercus was selected to replace the outdated FEMIS system following a tendering and presentation process to a panel including managers from Finance, Web-based learning, Registry, MIS, IT, Marketing and Examinations sections. Registry staff users particularly appreciate this system's combination of a relatively sophisticated appearance with the technical fulfilment of the functionality required by the institution.

Blackboard was judged to be the most appropriate VLE for the college because of its relatively intuitive functionality, making it easier for staff to create and upload content. It is also well supported technically, and has built-in accessibility and contextualisation facilities.

The in-house Funding Analysis tool provides college funding analysis by teams, courses and student enrolments. It relies on a valid Individual Learner Record (ILR), and calculates income by location. With clear data, an accurate funding position is provided for each section and location, and college managers are confident that no better financial management tool is currently available on the market.

The college timetabling system produces one data set for all staff regardless of campus, and provides an analysis of timetabled staff hours and the number of students taught. The Discoverer reporting tool produces a learner profile by curriculum development teams, to match the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) learner profile. One week after enrolment, the college can view learner profile targets and actual enrolments and take appropriate action. A series of routines for data cleansing has been devised.

#### *Access to resources*

The college benefits from a 10Mb internet connection with 100Mb LAN connectivity. The system is considered robust, with minimal downtime. However, college managers are aware of some issues for the large numbers of part-time staff requiring high bandwidth provision off-campus in order to access the college intranet effectively.

The college's ICT strategy includes a four-year replacement and renewal policy. City Campus is moving away from the use of IT suites to laptops and wireless provision, although there are some staff development and security issues.

The college has produced a cd-rom containing a range of exemplar materials created by college staff for making use of e-learning. The cd-rom includes guides on ILT and accessing the VLE, sample schemes of work and materials for a range of curriculum areas. Inclusivity and accessibility are important issues for the college. The website supports languages other than English (Systran<sup>10</sup> is available, but is not considered to be particularly reliable). Running an applet enhances the information on the page for the user.

#### *Functional access issues*

All staff receive training in basic IT literacy, including use of email and intranet/ Internet access. The use of online forms is being made mandatory for all staff. College managers are aware of the need for a strong senior management steer to encourage widespread use of the VLE and ILT.

## **Pedagogical Aspects**

#### *Curriculum and quality issues*

While every FE curriculum area is represented in the VLE, the college's HE provision is less well represented. There is extensive use in some specialist curriculum areas such as music technology. Much use is made of online key skills provision, particularly the DfES resources at [www.keyskills4u.com](http://www.keyskills4u.com). The target is for every full-time course to be represented in the VLE by the end of academic year 2004/04. There is increasing demand from students to have consistency across courses and modules in the availability of assignments and handouts in the VLE. The recent Ofsted inspection revealed a strong correlation between high-scoring curriculum areas and the use of ILT.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.systransoft.co.uk/index.html>

### *Support for learning*

The VLE is integrated with the MIS where appropriate, linked to a number of tools that give access to required data, including ProAchieve, the funding analyser, income and performance managers.

An email address for each student is automatically generated on enrolment. Induction processes clarify the expectations and responsibilities for staff and students in responding to communication by email.

### *Assessment*

e-Assessment is emerging as a major driver for e-learning. It is anticipated that the introduction of online assessment and testing systems by key examination bodies such as City & Guilds will help to encourage staff to engage with e-learning on a more widespread basis across the institution.

## **Reflections**

### *Benefits and opportunities*

The key benefit identified by college managers lies in the opportunities for time-saving and efficiency improvements that are presented by more widespread use of the VLE and electronic data access. Managers are aware that staff respond positively to a reduction in the administrative burden, leaving more time to concentrate on enhancing learning and teaching.

### *Risks and challenges*

Managers are aware of the need to nurture enthusiastic staff in order to encourage others to make their teaching materials available online. While some members of staff are willing to seize the opportunity to showcase their materials in an open area, others perceive this as a threat to their continuing employment or a violation of their intellectual property rights (IPR).

Security is a major issue, particularly on City Campus, where recent front door security and student card checks have been introduced in an attempt to increase personal security for staff and students, and reduce damage and loss of equipment.

Given the burden of a full-time teaching load (820 teaching hours/year is the norm, that is 23 hours/week), investment in staff development for e-learning can be problematic as it is difficult to release teaching staff to attend courses. This limits the pace of e-learning developments in the college.

### *Future plans and vision*

While there is extensive use in some curriculum areas, senior managers recognise that in general e-learning developments are just taking off at City College Manchester. A clear need for staff development has been identified, to encourage clearer focus on the use of technology throughout the institution as a whole.

The second phase of the college's portal development will start in 2005 and should be complete for session 2006/07, providing a suite of resources for viewing all college systems and information. An inexorable drive towards access and autonomy for learners is perceived. There are plans for further developments focusing on student-related data, personalised learning environments, individual learning plans, e-assessment, contextualised access to relevant systems, and the provision of support for learning through diagnostic testing and key skills assessment.

Next stage developments will include the introduction of additional tools and interfaces for management purposes, for example interoperability with Tokairo which is used for generating registers with Quercus. A web-based standard reporting system is planned. The provision of robust management information provides opportunities to address marginal inefficiencies and improve funding income, including optimisation using postcode or disability data.