

The Procurement and Implementation of a New e-Assessment Solution by:

Clare Ruiz Palma, CACHE

Presentation Transcript & Profile

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Introduction

The following is a transcript of a presentation by Clare Ruiz Palma of CACHE at the 7th Annual Surpass User Group Conference in Amsterdam in 2014.

All the views expressed by the interviewees and presenters are their own.

Video Links

Presentation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=966ubPTjWFQ>

Transcript

Clare Ruiz Palma

Hi everyone. It's good to be here, good to see you all. I'm going to talk about... we just had an implementation of Surpass. The project started about last summer, when we were looking at procurement. We started work then with development in the autumn, and we have just implemented it in April this year.

So where we were, we had Pearson – we were with Pearson for about ten years – and that was all fine, but what happened is that they said “we’re retiring the product, we’ve got a new one coming out,” but unfortunately it didn’t match our requirements. So we started looking around and weighing things up and trying to work out what we could do. We came down to three products, and in the end – after going through a similar sort of tick process – Surpass came out as the clear winner. The reasons that we went for us that it matched our requirements, particularly one of the requirements we needed was block-booking of candidates, and also it was fairly priced and also about the company. Some of the companies we looked at were a bit smaller, we weren’t totally sure how it was going to go with their own app.

How we started, was after we’d chosen Surpass, we went up to Shipley for some training, which was great. I went up with some colleagues who were going to be involved with the question and paper creation process and Quality Assurance, so we were looking at it from a few different perspectives. That was nice, going up to Shipley, and we really got a good understanding of the system. We could see what we could do with it, and how to get to grips with it. Our challenge was to basically export all of our stuff out of the Pearson system and get it into Surpass, so we had a load of questions that have been written over ten years during the database. We had to basically export all of that out, and then get that imported into Surpass. We worked then with Ian, who’s our programme manager, and he worked out a way that we could get all this data in. Then, we had to look at creating our new test papers. We created new test papers, all our exams, and then we had to leave the old ones behind because we would have no tracking data, so we had to start afresh again.

The way we wanted it to work, is that we have a learner database which is a GA product. We had an older version, and we were going to have a newer version: one for our QCF, and we had one for our NQF. So we decided that we needed to integrate. The plan was to move our NQF into our QCF,

which we've just done, but the project started in April where we then had to link our QCF database to Surpass. Before with Pearson, we'd had files being copied over four times a day, and then manually import the results once a day. We wanted to look at doing this API integration where every hour we were going to have a push of eligible learners and all the results coming back in again. So we started working then and seeing how we could do that. GA came up with a specification document, so we all then looked at this, pulled it apart, so it went back and forth with BTL and CACHE, and we smoothed things out as much as possible. Then we all went together, because we're in St Albans, GA are in Cheltenham, and then BTL are up in Shipley, so we all met up in Birmingham to make sure that we definitely had all our key points sorted out, and that we knew how to go forward with the project. Development started in about autumn last year, and then BTL gave GA a Surpass test platform so they could work on all the coding and see how it connected in. That was all toward the end of last year; the project carried on then, with the UAT and tweaking and everything. That was the beginning of the year we came back to start all of that in January/February.

We had to get this done by April because that was when Pearson was going to finish the contract, and they weren't supporting the product any more. Fortunately with good planning and lots of communication, we managed to get to all those key milestones that we had in our project plan and we did launch it in April.

During the whole process, we've had a lot of to-ing and fro-ing to keep up with everything. We've had lots of communication with Ian, weekly meetings, and also the support desk about certain things. Emma's been great for training queries, and we've also had some product development queries which we have been going back and forth with Jim and Sophie. Things that we asked as well actually were the reporting area. That was particular, we got an examiner who picks through all the data to do with the items and the papers and it's essential that she can see all the item performance, paper performance, and we found that a bit tricky at first with the raw data. But fortunately, recently the report area has been updated, and she's able to work a lot more with that now and see which questions are fine and which ones need attention because the distractors are wrong or they're misleading, so that's helped her a lot.

Now we've actually been running it for about five months, and further suggested developments that we'd love to see would be a diagnostic. So when our centres go and download SecureClient, we've sometimes got problems with their network. Basically our centres are all the schools, colleges, private training providers, and we asked them to do a practice test but often they have a connectivity issue between SecureClient and Surpass. Now, we give them the guidance, there is information provided in the download and there's another document that we give them as well that BTL provided. But, I wonder whether they could be given some sort of guidance to say 'check your firewall, you need to get these proxy server addresses in', or file location or something, whatever it is just give them a bit of a hint, because some of them struggle a bit to get things up and running. So they've got the software downloaded but they put the keycode in and nothing happens, so that's probably one of those challenges we've met so far with it, we get quite a few queries.

Other things that are important for us. For compliance reasons, we've got a test that we only want to offer two sittings for, and then that's it because it's decided for that qualification that you cannot go in again and again and take that test. It would be great if the system could be updated so we could actually set that, and then we know where that is, so that would be really useful. The biggest one at the moment is the question-writing process which I think Leen, you said as well. We have our examiners come in at the weekend, and they do a whole standardisation process, and there's mountains of paper just everywhere and they're pushing piles around here for this exam. And,

you've got the examiners; you've got the principal examiner, and you've got the chief examiner, so there's just piles going around between them. It's probably about twenty people in the room doing it. We really need Surpass to support that. We would like to have workflows so that you could see each other's questions, what stage they're at, goes to a certain examiner who used to do what, and all the versions are kept. Because what they do is they change a question, and then they add something, they take something away. They need to keep seeing all the different edits, because sometimes they end up going back to a similar version, so they need to keep track of it in that way. So that would be really useful.

Thank you for listening to the CACHE perspective, and do you have any questions?

About the presenter

Clare Ruiz Palma, Web Systems Liaisons Manager – CACHE

After completing an MSc in Internet and Multimedia Engineering, Clare followed her IT career through IT infrastructure support whilst qualifying for the MCSE, ITIL and PRINCE II. Followed by a role as an IT Lecturer at an FE college, Clare has for the last 5 years combined her IT and education skills for a systems based role at the Council for Awards in Care, Health and Education in the Systems Liaison and Business Intelligence team. Clare's role encompasses supporting and training both the CACHE team and CACHE centres on CACHE's online services, as well as working on development projects with a particular focus on e-assessment. Earlier this year Clare project managed the Parnassus and Surpass integration for CACHE.

About CACHE

CACHE is a leading UK awarding organisation, based in St Albans and focusing primarily on the child care, adult care, health and education sectors. All CACHE qualifications require the learners to undertake assessment, to measure and confirm their progress towards the achievement of the qualification.

Assessment includes assignments, extended essays, and examinations under controlled conditions. Online exams, wherein the learner's answers are auto-marked by the computer system itself, are a growing segment of the assessment landscape.

Rob Bendelow, Procurement & Project Manager at CACHE comments:

"Four potential suppliers were short-listed. Of course, all four systems could do the job, but the Surpass product from BTL ticked 95% of our boxes. It's pretty easy-to-use and has clearly been developed with awarding organisations in mind. Creating assessments, scheduling tests, candidates taking on the challenge, co-ordinating the results.....it's all in there."

Clare Ruiz-Palma, Project Manager for the Surpass implementation at CACHE, added:

"BTL and CACHE have worked well together on this project. They (BTL) have also gone shoulder-to-shoulder with another of our strategic suppliers to help forge a seamless union between Surpass and our back office learner management system 'Parnassus'. We launched this new e-assessment platform in early April 2014, right on schedule."

Rob added:

“Sourcing a new IT system involves far more than bytes, browsers and bandwidth. People like to do business with people and so far the team from Shipley (BTL) have worked really well with CACHE.”

Statistics: Contract since 2013.

Website: <http://www.cache.org.uk>