

UCISA – CISG 2009 Conference, St Andrews

Birds of a Feather: The Philosophy of In-house Development

These are brief notes based on the discussion at both Birds of a Feather sessions on the Philosophy of In-house Development and do not purport to represent all of the views of everyone who took part. Thank you to all those who expressed an opinion, if you wish to correct or add to this please email Anne Rodgers a.rodgers@sheffield.ac.uk

This was an extra Birds of a Feather Session added because of interest expressed in the few days leading up to the conference. The people expressing an interest belong to the Student In-house Forum, led by Nathalie Czechowski from Coventry ccx202@coventry.ac.uk It meets twice a year and we take turns hosting it. If anyone is interested in joining please contact Natalie.

We did not restrict the Birds of a Feather session purely to those who had student in-house systems. The 2 sessions benefitted from having people who had recently moved from in-house systems to implementing package solutions. Whether it be Finance systems or Student systems, we all shared the same pain and costs.

The main point that came out of both discussion groups was that there has to be a very strong driving force that would make you want to move from any in-house system to a package solution. (or vice versa)

The reasons are as follows:

1. Need a very large budget initially (an independent consultant estimated 3 – 4 million pounds would be needed to implement a student package. Others quoted millions of pounds needed for implementing Finance systems.)
2. Typically development resource doubled to support packages, once implemented.
3. Package solutions were less responsive to business change.
4. Loss of competitive edge.
5. Change Management was very difficult if implementing University wide.
6. Packages like SITS have 2 upgrades a year and can have 30 minor changes a month. Agresso has about 1 a month.
7. If you go best of breed buying different package solutions for different applications then the end users have to learn how to use these completely different packages and this can be difficult. (Stirling went best of breed but retained their own in-house Portal so everyone had a common entry point)
8. Reference was made to the HEFCE Good Management Practice Project led by the University of Essex in collaboration with consultants from Southern Universities Management Services (SUMS)

Thanks to everyone who took part to make these sessions both interesting and informative.