



## Pembrokeshire College integrates Perception with le® to assess new student skills

### Background

After a successful online screening of numeracy and literacy skills of 500 new students using Questionmark Perception Pembrokeshire College decided to extend the system to all new students in 2004. They needed to be tightly integrated with the college's Managed Learning Environment, FD Learning le® to provide a single login for students and staff.

FD Learning le® forms the core of the college's eLearning provision to its students and is tightly integrated with all other systems used within the institution.

The FD Learning system had already decided to align with Questionmark's Perception, a decision that was music to the ears of Geoff Elliott, ILT Manager at Pembrokeshire College. He comments, "I have worked very closely with Questionmark when I was at Glamorgan and it was great to be working with the company and its product again. Perception is simply the best software for the job of online assessments and its tight integration with our MLE guaranteed seamless access between the two systems for our staff and students alike. My first job was to drive the introduction of objective testing within the college and to identify key areas where the most significant benefits could be reaped. The first area would be in making sure that we are aware of the levels of numeracy and literacy of incoming students."

Colleges are becoming more conscious that they have greater responsibility towards their students to provide the right kind of tuition. Failing to do so can even lead to legal proceedings. Such problems can be avoided by establishing where problems might lie.

### Objective testing

Objective testing students to ascertain their levels of literacy and numeracy is a great starting point. This allows the colleges to identify areas for additional tuition and highlight courses that would best suit a student.

Before using Perception to automate the process of assessment, this was done manually with handwritten assessments for numeracy and literacy skills carried out for all new students. But this was both time-consuming and laborious, taking approximately six weeks to carry out and tying up staff time with marking rather than planning the rest of the academic year. Test results were slow in coming which impacted on the process of course decisions.

Without this knowledge the staff would have some difficulty in ensuring that students were undertaking the courses that were particularly relevant to their skills.

### Results

Online assessment freed up staff time, leaving them free to address student's wider needs. It provided instant records of numeracy and literacy skills to help in the course decision process. And it would remove the laborious process of marking that all staff dread at the beginning of the year.

Geoff Elliott adds, "We wanted to be sure that the new online system for objectives assessment ran smoothly when it was introduced in September 2003. We did this by writing the question banks and testing them on a group of 500 students. The results were recorded in our MLE and in Perception to be sure that tutors could find the results quickly and learning support tutors could make decisions quickly. It was a resounding success. Not only did it save an enormous amount of effort for the college but it represents a real cost saving."

### Testing New Entrants

The college's senior management decided that the project had proved so successful that it would roll the system out to all its students. The same process was followed and a number of SVT students with learning difficulties was included to test the ease of use of the new system. It was again a great success and all students were able to interact easily with the technology.

Geoff Elliott concludes, "We are already using Perception for assessing our lecturers' knowledge of eTeaching and how it can be used to support traditional teaching methods. That has been extremely useful. We also undertake student induction programmes whereby each student fills out a portfolio. These will be delivered by Perception in September 2004 when we pilot the new online portfolio. We are now planning to extend its use of formative and summative tests across the college which should further help to increase demand for this resource."

### More information

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