Advisory and Assurance

Te Kura

Student Management System
Benefits Realisation Review

October 2013

Contents

1 Background

Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu – The Correspondence School (Te Kura) implemented the Student Management System (SMS) as part of a wider Systems Replacement Project. Te Kura made the decision to replace the Xtend/ãkona environment following advice received from a number of independent reviews. The System Replacement Project was established to meet Te Kura's need to manage student information (SMS), deliver learning materials to students, store, retrieve and categorise digital learning resources.

SMS was progressively phased in from March 2012. As a result of concerns relating to the usability of SMS, the Board and Management have committed to addressing these concerns and improving the usability of the system. The Board, management and staff worked together to initiate an SMS enhancement programme during July and September 2012. The Te Kura Board approved the progression of the Action Plan items[1] via the Information Resource Group (IRG) to Adapt IT (SMS Vendor) for completion by March 2013. They specifically approved:

- Five of ten Quick win enhancements that were presented.
- One (the top priority) of ten Te Kura Enrolment System enhancements. The ten varied in importance and difficulty to achieve.

There were also a number of core functionality items and enhancements[2] which are being worked on as part of the completion of the project and business as usual.

In December 2012, Internal Audit completed a Phase One review of the Action Plan items that found the action items, which were raised as part of the SMS workshops, were collated and appropriate plans had been developed to address the items and these were being monitored, reported on and progressed. Subsequent to the review, the Action Plan was completed and the IRG established an ongoing SMS enhancement programme to address further usability benefits identified.

2 Objective

The objective of this review (Phase Two) was to perform an assessment, against the intended benefits identified in the System**s** Replacement Project Business Case and ratified in the December 2009 Te Kura Board meeting, of:

- Benefits that have been realised.
- Benefits still to be delivered.
- Appropriateness of the arrangements in place to ensure the delivery of remaining benefits.

The Phase Two review did not consider the project costs or other aspects of the Systems Replacement Project Business Case.

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[1] Action Plan items – the existing issues that staff most wanted addressed or felt would offer improvement in the future
[2] Enhancements – application changes to Adapt IT (SMS Vendor) which would add new functions or features to SMS

3   Approach

In completing this review we have:

- Reviewed and analysed the benefits as described in the Systems Replacement Project Business Case and December 2009 Te Kura Board papers.
- Interviewed key business owners of benefits to confirm our understanding of the benefits, underlying assumptions, and benefits realisation actions undertaken by the organisation.
- Interviewed representatives of key SMS users to assess the achievement of benefits. The key user groups included representatives of the Senior Leadership Team, regional and middle management, and help desk staff.
- Conducted three workshops with teachers and Student Support Advisors to gain an understanding of benefits associated with the SMS implementation. One of the three workshops was dedicated to users with no previous experience with Xtend/ãkona.
- Attended walkthroughs of three scenarios, where there have been usability issues, with Help Desk support staff (expert users), users with Xtend/ãkona (the previous SMS) experience, and users that have not used Xtend/ãkona. The three scenarios included:

    Scenario 1: Ordering work for a student.

    Scenario 2: Changing a student's assessment from Achieved to Not Achieved.

    Scenario 3: Allocating a student to a different teacher.

- Analysed financial information and supporting documentation to validate the realisation of operational savings.

The scope of this review excluded a detailed review of the SMS project costs and therefore is not providing an opinion over the achievement or likely achievement of the expected net present value approved by the Te Kura Board.

4   Key Findings

One of the key benefits from the Systems Replacement Programme Business Case related to the risk around the ongoing stability of the previous Akona/Xtend environment. The implementation of the new SMS and OTLE has successfully removed this risk.

Tangible Benefits

The System Replacement Project Business Case sets out both tangible benefits and intangible benefits that were confirmed by the Te Kura Board in December 2009.

The review team verified the realisation of a number of tangible benefits that all related to IRG savings. Cumulative savings verified between 2009 and the time of our review totalled $1.8M and Te Kura is continuing to work on realising further benefits. We were advised by management that the realisation of benefits was impacted by delays experienced in the implementation of the project.

The IRG savings related to FTEs reduction and associated reduction in licensing costs required to support a less complex environment. Other "Operational Cost Savings" were not tracked by the project or the organisation, nor was a baseline established for benefits realisation measurement. We are therefore unable to assess the achievement of these benefits. Refer to the table below.

Further savings related to "Increased Revenue" were unable to be directly attributed to SMS implementation due to the lack of a mature benefits realisation plan. The following table summarises the approved benefits versus those realised and verified.

Table 1: Tangible benefits approved by the Board vs. Benefits realised and verified

Tangible Benefits ($,000)	2009		2010		2011		2012		2013+	
	A	V	A	V	A	V	A	V	A	V
Operational Cost Savings										
Budget reduction across IRG	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
IRG cost reduction	-	-	-	48	170	126	170	174	170	174
Cost savings as a result of efficiency gains	-	-	-	-	194	-	582	-	874	-
Fewer manual rollover of re-enrolling students	-	-	-	-	62	-	186	-	186	-
Improved inventory management	-	-	-	-	20	-	20	-	20	-
	250	**250**	**250**	**298**	**696**	**376**	**1,208**	**424**	**1,500**	**424**
Increased Revenue										
Increased student enrolments	-	-	-	-	-	-	415	-	415	-
Increased student numbers	-	-	-	-	277	-	415	-	415	-
	-	**-**	**-**	**-**	**277**	**-**	**830**	**-**	**830**	**-**
Total	**250**	**250**	**250**	**298**	**973**	**376**	**2,038**	**424**	**2,330**	**424**

Key:

A - Approved (Anticipated benefits approved by the Te Kura Board)

V - Verified Benefits realised and verified to appropriate supporting documentation during this review.

The difference between the Approved Benefits and the Verified Benefits is mostly Unverifiable, not Unrealised.

Intangible Benefits

Management has seen significant improvement in student management and related data quality. Management has also seen an improvement in the accessibility of management information that supports more effective decision-making. Furthermore, the new SMS represents a platform to enable Te Kura's strategic initiatives such as the digitisation of teaching and learning resources. The users consulted during this review perceive data quality as an issue. These concerns may be a result of understanding of the changes in business rules or other technical reasons as management have not identified any specific quality issues.

The review finds a group of users (in particular from the teacher and SSA roles) that continues to experience usability issues in the new SMS. We note that these issues have changed over time from not knowing how to do basic, day-to-day tasks to how to do more complex tasks at the time of this review. This group of users expressed concerns about the appropriateness of the tools to do their jobs. They also indicated an increase in staff time to access data and reports, error checking, and in some instances duplication of effort as staff are entering information into the system and then also capturing information offline in notes and spreadsheets. Te Kura is working with the users and SMS vendor to address specific usability issues. The matters raised by users as part of this review were provided to IRG for further investigation.

The Governance Group is actively overseeing the SMS Improvement Programme – usability benefits are a key part of this programme. Overall, the consolidation of the student management environment and the introduction of consistent processes and business rules have resulted in significant improvement in student management related data quality, with an ongoing emphasis on enhancing usability benefits.

Other

Other findings noted from this review included:

1   The SMS improvement programme was generally seen as a positive step to address the usability issues. However, users perceived that progress in this programme has slowed down and further usability benefits can be achieved. We understand that work is continuing in the SMS improvement programme and Te Kura has put considerable effort into internal communications plan (including the intranet, weekly communication emails, and representatives at team meetings). We also acknowledge that two out of the seven phases of usability benefits were approved by the SMS Governance Group and are being progressed.

2   Staff received a nine-day-training when SMS was first introduced. Subsequently, such intensive training was replaced by training videos and tips and tricks sessions. There are opportunities to review the approach and training – both from an induction and ongoing perspective.

3   Te Kura currently does not have a mature benefits realisation plan for SMS. For future projects, this should be considered.

4   Some of the business rules within SMS are not aligned to SMS users understanding of their roles and responsibilities. For instance, IRG noted teacher allocations are designated to be completed by the IRG team. However, during our system walkthroughs we noted that teachers are making changes to teacher allocations instead of sending requests to IRG. This reinforces the need for effective change management when implementing new programmes.

5   Conclusion

The consolidation of the SMS environment from seven separate systems to one has simplified and reduced the cost of managing the SMS IT infrastructure and operational environment. The consolidation in the architecture has also reduced waiting time in Enrolment and despatching (in the Student Resource Centre) processes and resulted in improved data quality and reporting. It has also avoided the risk of systems failure.

The review of tangible benefits identified clear savings in IRG and SRC as a result of this consolidation and supported the view of further benefits to be realised.

Usability and fit for purpose remain issues for some users. The review team explored these issues in workshops with teachers and SSAs, and then assessed these views through walkthroughs, user guides analysis and review of training videos. We find that certain teacher and SSA tasks are complex and involved several steps which impacts on how some users perceive the usability of SMS. Te Kura is working to address these issues through an ongoing improvement programme.

6 Recommendations and Lessons Learned

6.1 Recommendations

1. We recommend IRG continues with regular communications and key stakeholder engagement to ensure key stakeholders remain informed of progress/status. Review the SMS Governance Group membership and Terms of Reference to ensure all key stakeholders are represented and responsibilities for representation of and communication to the wider SMS users group is clearly understood.

   Management comment: Agree. This was done at the conclusion of the implementation project but will be reviewed.

   Responsible position: Chief Operating Officer

   Timeframe: March 2014

2. In addition to the existing SMS Helpdesk, we recommend Te Kura continue to:

   - Encourage SMS users uptake of existing "Tips & Tricks Sessions" and short learning videos on the intranet. Monitor and report on the effectiveness of the training tools.

   - Refresh the train-the-trainer model to ensure integration with existing new employee's induction programme.

   - Identify SMS users who require additional support and implement an effective support arrangement to develop usability among these users.

   - Address any inconsistencies and/or issues in the comprehensive list[3] of feedback from Teaching Staff workshops conducted. (This was provided to IRG).

   Management comment: Agree

   Responsible position: Manager, IRG

   Timeframe: Ongoing

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[3] A summarised version of the feedback from Teaching Staff Workshop is detailed in Appendix 2.

3. We recommend Te Kura develop a benefits realisation plan for those benefits that are still to be realised, establish clear capability required to realised these benefits, create appropriate baselines to facilitate their measurement of progress against these.

   Management comment: Agree

   Responsible position: Chief Operating Officer

   Timeframe: March 2014

4. Consider an adequate change management plan and align business rules with the roles and responsibilities of SMS users for effective business process refinement.

   Management comment: Agree, this will be considered in future

   Responsible position: Senior Leadership Team

   Timeframe: Ongoing

6.2 Lessons Learned

This review has identified lessons learned that Te Kura can bring forward for future projects.

1. The definition of clear benefits in the Business Case supports the project in maintaining focus and managing project delivery. However, the project would have benefitted from developing a Benefits Realisation Plan that describes benefits, their dependencies, expected realisation timescales and responsibility.

2. The project actively engaged with the different stakeholder groups and worked to address all users' needs; however usability concerns remains an ongoing issue for certain users. The project would have benefitted from more focus on usability requirements analysis and testing.

3. The establishment of the ongoing Improvement Programme was widely supported and we would recommend Te Kura adopt similar arrangements for future projects.

7   Overall Management Comment

We agree with the overall findings and recommendations in the report.

However, we believe that two very key points need to be emphasised:

1.   Advice given to Te Kura in 2006-7 by independent consultants was that the existing bespoke systems (ãkona and Xtend) needed to be replaced. By replacing those systems any risk of failure has been removed and the single biggest benefit of the SMS project has been achieved.

2.   When the Board decided to the replace the ãkona and Xtend systems it instructed management to move to a third-party "off the shelf" product rather than develop another bespoke system(s). The benefit for Te Kura would come from having a more robust system and no longer needing to commit significant resources to development and maintenance. However, an implication of this was that Te Kura business processes would need to change rather than undertaking any large-scale customisation of the new system. Although a limited amount of customisation has been, and will be, completed it was always likely that usability would be an issue. Management has worked hard to minimise the usability impacts for staff and will continue to do so.