

Aberdeenshire Council Automated Payroll Data Collection

Aberdeenshire Council solved its data collection problem by installing DRS automatic forms recognition systems. It is able to process large volumes of timesheets quickly with minimal manual intervention and maximum accuracy.

Faced with the daunting task of collecting data from around 1,800 timesheets every week and entering the information onto a payroll system, Colin Brown, Commercial Operations Manager at Aberdeenshire Council began to realise he had a problem, so contacted DRS. His team had inherited the Cleaning and Catering function after local government re-organisation resulted in the removal of a joint DSO covering the former Grampian Regional Council.

To minimise incorrect payments, Aberdeenshire decided to change its payroll policy for cleaning and catering staff. Instead of paying its staff on a default payroll, the objective was to convert to a timesheet based system, paying only for hours claimed. Naturally this resulted in some difficulty, not least from the completion of 1,800 forms every week. Arriving every Thursday, the dedicated payroll clerks found it difficult to cope with the workload and senior officers would have to be drafted in to key data. Accuracy would suffer, incorrect payments could result from forms not being completed properly, illegible handwriting or human keying errors.

Alternative methods

Colin's team wanted to look at alternative methods of data capture, including data entry at source. However, they were not satisfied that having expensive skilled staff spending valuable time entering timesheet data was an effective use of their resources. Instead they carefully considered the benefits of automatic forms recognition, both Optical Mark Reading (OMR) and Intelligent Character Recognition (ICR).

Colin was already aware that other authorities had successfully implemented OMR systems that required very little intervention by clerical staff, and used forms that were very simple for services staff of all abilities to complete. When talking to DRS, Colin's team could immediately see the potential opportunities presented by ICR, and decided that the ICR system supplied by DRS was the solution they wanted. They felt that the additional benefits of this software far outweighed the other systems that they had reviewed. More importantly, Colin felt comfortable with DRS' reputation for solving data capture problems all over the world, from ballot counting in Bosnia, examination processing in Nigeria to electoral registration in Kenya.

Contract management

The commercial team decided to interface the new system directly with their costing system, which enabled them to monitor the wage bill on a site by site basis. This in turn allows them to monitor expenditure against contracts, a requirement that they had never been able to achieve. The hours are then interfaced directly into the payroll system to generate wage payments.

Rapid payback

Aberdeenshire were delighted with the results delivered by their first ICR system. They easily achieved their target of payback in less than a year, and have since applied it to other applications such as monitoring income from services to schools and providing building maintenance surveys.

They are now intending to implement other performance monitoring related tasks around the council such as Grounds Maintenance.

So successful have their efforts been in designing their own scannable forms through the integral design package the ICR software offers, that they have started to promote their expertise to other departments in the council and hope to derive further revenue benefit from offering a mini-bureau service.

Aberdeenshire Council now has three ICR systems operating at distributed offices throughout the county. Staff training has been minimal and an audit trail ensures that everything processed is traceable.