CHALLENGE
Delivering practical experience in ERP and reporting to business students

Founded in 1425, the Katholieke Universiteit in Leuven, Belgium, is one of Europe’s oldest universities and provides a range of programmes at masters and doctoral levels. Its affiliate Leuven University College, KHLeuven, and more particularly the Department of Business and Management studies, provide three year bachelor and one year bachelor after bachelor degrees to students both from Belgium and on an exchange basis with the University of Coventry in the UK.

Some 1,100 students of the school specialize in business and economics, taking degrees in marketing, insurance, banking, accountancy and office management. In addition to teaching core academic subject matter, the school is also keen to ensure students are highly productive as soon as they arrive in the workplace.

“As a school we want to deliver students that are fit for the market so it is essential to update the training on a yearly basis,” says Gert Van Assche, Lector ERP, KHLeuven.

Having delivered training in office tools such as Excel, Access and Word in recent years, for the 2007/2008 academic year the decision was taken to expand the students’ exposure to key technologies by embracing ERP and reporting.

“ERP has become a standard business tool, so it is important to provide students with an understanding of both ERP software and the methodology,” says Van Assche. “They also need to understand how to use the data from the ERP system, so it is important to provide experience in a leading reporting tool.”

APPROACH & SOLUTION
Crystal Reports is the market leading solution

Having adopted a local ERP product, the school decided to use Business Objects Crystal Reports to deliver the reporting component of the course. “These business students will have to do a lot of reporting in their jobs; choosing a market leading technology will ensure students are familiar with a tool used by many companies,” says Van Assche.

The school provides training during the four project weeks that occur each year, delivering four days of ERP and one day of Crystal Reports training. “Six to eight hours of Crystal Reports training is not a lot but the tool is so intuitive and easy to use that students are incredibly confident after just 30 minutes,” he says. “In addition, the software is available on the internal network, enabling students to use Crystal Reports in other classes instead of Excel or Access.”

Having sent a number of lecturers on Crystal Reports courses, the school has created a training manual with exercises that students can work through. “This guided self study encourages students to use the excellent Crystal Reports help system,” he says. “It is very important to make individuals self sufficient – they need to learn how to use Help systems and how to search online for the right information to resolve a problem,” says Van Assche. “The goal is not just to provide training but to create the right attitude in students.”
RESULTS

Creating employable and productive students

In the first year, the school provided 500 students with Crystal Reports training, with courses tailored to the specific bachelor degree courses. Students learn how to create their own Excel and Access files and use Crystal Reports to query these files. They will then build on this expertise to undertake queries against a database they have not built themselves, learning to find relationships between the tables and use that knowledge to build correct reports in Crystal Reports.

Van Assche explains, “Students learn how to bring information together from different parts of the database and different parts of the ERP system to attain delight insight into cross company performance. They also learn how to make the reports attractive, which is particularly important for the marketing students.”

Feedback from students has been extremely positive with over 80% stating they were either happy or very happy with the new ERP and Crystal Reports component of the course. “The only negative comments were from students wanting more training,” he adds.

Over the next two academic years, the school plans to extend the training beyond accountancy and office management to embrace the entire 1,100 population of business students, including marketing, insurance and finance.

“The school will also build on the experience gained in year one by providing incremental Crystal Reports skills to year two and three students that will enable them to develop more complex reports and leverage the full functionality of the software,” he says.

In addition, the plan is to provide the bachelor after bachelor students with more complex reporting expertise, using Crystal Reports to report on information within a SQL database. “Every student that leaves the Department of Business and Management Studies of the Leuven University College will have a good understanding of ERP and be able to build reports in Crystal Reports from databases they have not constructed themselves,” Van Assche concludes.

Benefits of the Crystal Reports training include:

Employable students: The school management has regular meetings with captains of industry in Belgium to ensure courses reflect the needs of the market. “They are all extremely happy that the school has introduced ERP and Crystal Reports into the curriculum,” he says.

Productive employees: The school’s students are in great demand, with the majority receiving job offers before they graduate. By providing this training in ERP and Crystal Reports, the graduates can be immediately productive as soon as they enter the workforce. “The problem for companies is not just the cost of training but the loss of productive time. Businesses want people to be as productive as possible from day one, so it is a great asset if the school’s students already know how to work to Crystal Reports,” Van Assche confirms.

Teaching innovation: Other universities are watching the success of the programme at ECHO. In the meantime, the school is using this addition to the curriculum to attract exchange students from these universities.