

The results

Academy QA has transformed the volume of assessments being checked. Prior to implementing Academy QA, the Council was checking just 4% of assessments - the minimum amount stipulated by the Department of Work and Pensions. It is now checking 60% of assessments and has also become more targeted in its approach.

"We now decide on an individual basis what percentage of someone's work to check. For example we check 100% of new starters' work and 100% of new claims. We tried to do this before, but it relied on staff recording that they've done a new claim, something that they might forget to do if they're not sure that they've done it right."

When errors are found, Academy QA provides a facility to record them in a structured manner, allowing an authority to analyse their errors and generate reports.

"Recording the errors in spreadsheets didn't work well. People recorded the same error in different ways so it was inconsistent and difficult to analyse the data. With Academy QA we have been able to find out what the weaknesses are and address them. We've recently provided training on 'dates' for example," explains Loraine.

Following the introduction of Academy QA Loraine and her colleagues have noticed a definite culture change. It enables staff to quickly identify any errors and it has

encouraged them to be more thorough with their work. They know that if it's wrong it will end up coming back to them so every effort is made to get it right first time.

"We now have a culture where if a member of staff thinks they have made an error they will inform their Manager rather than waiting for their Manager to find it. I don't recall this ever happening before Academy QA," explains Loraine.

As well as improving efficiency, the module has also had a direct impact on customer service. Not only are the financial details being checked, the quality of the letters is also looked at. There's a definite perception amongst Eastleigh's customers that its letters are significantly better than they used to be.

Having now used Academy QA for 12 months, Loraine is convinced that no Academy site should be without it.

"I couldn't recommend the product enough - it will quickly pay for itself. With Academy QA you no longer have to resend letters, you don't generate overpayments and you don't have to explain errors to your customers. It's automated yet you're still in control."

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Loraine Radford, Head of Revenues and Benefits, Eastleigh Borough Council

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Case Study

Eastleigh Borough Council
Getting claim assessments right with
Academy Quality Assurance



Getting claim assessments right with Academy Quality Assurance

Having used Academy Revenues and Benefits since the early nineties, Eastleigh Borough Council is one of Academy's most established customers. During that time the Council has not stood still and has made numerous improvements to its Revenues and Benefits operation, including many that have stemmed from introducing new Academy modules.



Background

Eastleigh is located within Hampshire in the South of England; it serves a population of 177,000. The Benefits department has a caseload of 6,300 and processes around 3,500 new claims per year.

In 2005, Amber Valley Borough Council was the lead local authority to secure a grant from the DWP Performance Standards Fund to develop the Academy Quality Assurance (QA) module - an integrated software package for standardising and automating quality assurance and checking activity for all authorities using Academy Benefits. Eastleigh was selected to be one of the pilot local authorities.

The challenge

Loraine Radford, Head of Revenues and Benefits at Eastleigh Borough Council comments: "We were initially a little unsure about joining the pilot but it turned out to be the best thing we ever did."

Before the introduction of Academy QA, the process for quality checking was completely manual and very dependent on staff following the Council's process.

"We relied on staff to record what work they had done and Officers and Managers to complete spreadsheets. These were often messy and inconsistent. There was no way that we could guarantee that we were finding all the work. Looking back it was a nightmare!" added Loraine.

The recording and monitoring was not the only problem. The process of checking was very much a case of shutting the door after the horse had bolted. The Council's aim to get things right first time was not being achieved.

"We'd send out letters then we'd check to see if it was accurate. If it wasn't we'd then have to send out the letters again. This often led to overpayments or further confusion especially if the letters both had the same date as customers didn't know which was correct."

The solution

Eastleigh implemented the Academy QA module during the summer of 2006 and saw some dramatic improvements.

"The biggest benefit was that it allowed us to get things right first time. With Academy QA the system suppresses notifications of payment until it has been checked. This removes the overhead of sending multiple notifications and then having to explain to customers which was correct," commented Loraine.

