

Neo Payroll case study

City of London Academies Trust

City of London Academies Trust operates 11 primary, secondary and sixth form colleges across six central London boroughs, all within the North Circular.

The trust is set to welcome another school in January 2026 and has ambitions to grow to 20 academies.

The trust employs more than 1,200 members of staff, including a significant number of seasonal employees such as exam invigilators.

The trust has invited tenders for a third-party payroll provider every three years and in 2023 decided to make the switch to Strictly Education.

In 2025 the payroll contract was transferred over to Neo People Management. This was a hugely positive development according to Michael Fisher, Senior HR Business Partner, Payroll, Systems and Analytics, at City of London Academies Trust.

He explains:

“The transition to Neo People Management was straightforward because it’s a similar system, running on the iTrent platform. Neo did a lot of the work for us.

The fundamental thing that has changed is the customer service element, the responsiveness. It’s the fact that I can go and ask queries using the ticketing system and we are treated like a normal human being, and they don’t just tell me the answer, they’ll explain the reason why as well.”

The vast majority of problems and questions are dealt with through an online ticketing system, with solutions and advice coming from Neo People Management’s team of advisers usually on the same day.

This system is smooth and responsive, says Michael. "Neo People Management have got this element to a T. One of the key aspects of this is that it gives you an audit trail – if I had a problem two months ago which has resurfaced, I can just type in what it was in the search bar and find it straight away."

One of the biggest benefits of the Neo payroll system has been the simplification of complex payroll calculations. "One of the things which can be difficult about school payrolls is the amount of term-time only people we employ, such as teaching assistants," Michael explains

"Not only do we have people who essentially work five days a week who are part-timers as well, they also, because of the Harpur Trust vs Brazel case ruling, an entitlement to holiday pay if they work overtime.

If I tell Neo who needs to have this holiday pay, which is essentially all term-time only staff, then they have been able to apply a holiday percentage automatically on top of what they should be earning. That has been fundamentally brilliant."

This feature has removed any risk of over or underpayment and saved a huge amount of manual work, says Michael.

The payroll system's simple and intuitive interface means that it is easy for staff to quickly learn how to use it. "The interface and the iTrent platform is very easy to understand," says Michael. "An hour of taking them through it with some online guidance and videos from Neo has been enough."



If there are higher level issues these can be addressed during a half-termly meeting with Neo People Management. In the run-up to these meetings Michael will get feedback from his colleagues, asking them what is going well and what could be improved.

"We'll have a good hour-long discussion about essentially those things which is really helpful because it gives me the opportunity to give some feedback, as well as giving me the knowledge to troubleshoot any issues."

Michael adds: "I've worked with a fair few payroll systems throughout my career and Neo's is definitely the best one."

He adds: "Everybody who works here will point out the customer service element, especially the ticketing system, is brilliant. With Neo you've got the support of a lot of people with expert knowledge who are keen to help and quick to reply."

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