How SAMpeople and Arbor has enabled *centralisation* and clearer *data-driven decision making* across Discovery Trust

Louise Barber, Director of Operations at Discovery Trust, acknowledges that her Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) needed to centralise operations to reduce workload and duplication.

What challenges did you face before choosing SAMpeople?

As we grew and new schools came on board, it became increasingly challenging, especially as our systems weren't aligned in any way. We made a decision as a trust that we really needed a people system. We needed to provide some sort of consistency across the trust, and we couldn't do that with the fragmented systems and software we were using.

During this time, we were also developing our central HR function within the trust, with a primary goal of supporting our schools more effectively. We aimed to take away the burden of HR management and recruitment from our schools. Our schools are still heavily involved in the recruitment process, but the administrative aspects are managed by the central team. This has helped us make sure that our budgets and thinking are aligned, and we've taken some of the burden from our schools.

"As we were taking off some of the burden from our schools and bringing this work into the central function, it was important that we could do this with one product."

Arbor MIS   MAT MIS

SAMpeople

Number of schools
- 15 primary schools
- Three special school

Part of the Arbor Community since
- 2023: Moved to SAMpeople for their HR system
- 2024: Moved to Arbor for their MIS

Louise Barber
Director of Operations at Discovery Trust

Does Arbor and SAMpeople being part of the same company affect how you use the systems?

We purchased SAMpeople and then went out to tender for a new MIS for the trust. Our schools were on different MIS systems, and we wanted to align all our schools on one system. Arbor was chosen for lots of different reasons, and it just so happened that after we moved to Arbor, it was announced that SAMpeople and Arbor were becoming one organisation.

"For us, that was a real sort of wow, we've made the right decision."

We were excited to be a part of this partnership from the get-go, and we could help shape products that really impact us as a trust.

There is no MIS in the market that can do it all, nor should it. As a trust we know we need to maintain two products, a MIS and HR system, so having the two products owned by the same company and knowing the products have the same goal is a real positive.

How has having both systems impacted people management across your trust?

We use SAMpeople and the functionality within the product for all our staff data needs, rather than doing some tasks in SAMpeople and some in Arbor. We're also utilising Power BI, using the BI Connectors from both SAMpeople and Arbor to pull information from both systems, allowing us to have a very clear picture of the whole trust.

A focus for us over the next three years is talent management. We really want to have a very clear picture of our staff, their aspirations, their CPD requirements, and what we can do to keep them on board and happy in the roles that they're doing.

We're really early days on this journey and we've got lots of ambitious ideas that we want to do, but we're confident that by using both SAMpeople and Arbor that we'll get to where we want to be.

"Each system is for a different purpose, we use SAMpeople for staff and Arbor for students."

Arbor

SAM people
Part of Arbor

DISCOVERY

How does having Arbor and SAMpeople fit in with your long-term MAT strategy?

We want to make sure we're getting the insight we need on staff and student absence and that we're doing the right things for our staff and students. We want to ensure that we're providing the right training across our schools to empower staff in their local settings. We need to ensure that we're providing a consistent approach to managing student behaviour and absence, because things happen for a reason. If you don't have the whole picture, you can't be proactive about dealing with it in the future.

Staff absence at Discovery Trust was concerning and below average compared to other MATs of a similar size to ours. SAMpeople has given us the insight to see how staff absence is having an impact on our budgets, with SAMpeople giving us a good representation of the actual costs for a person to be off.

Using these insights, we've been able to make changes across the trust and now our staff absence rates are average. However, there is still work to do; if you compare our staff absence to our student absence, it's worrying that our staff absence is still higher. We want to demonstrate that we're working towards the same absence targets. If we're expecting our children to be in, we've got to also expect our staff to be in as well.

We're also using Arbor to look at Assessment and Behaviour data for our students, helping us to align criteria across the MAT.

"SAMpeople and Arbor allows us to have a very good understanding of each of our schools, especially if Ofsted visit."

As we grow and scale, the integration between Arbor and SAMpeople will support strategic initiatives by providing valuable insights and analytics that will empower our trust and schools to focus on core objectives while efficiently managing HR and any MIS needs.

"It's always good to be working with understanding because budgets at the moment are so concerning, we're having to make some really important decisions, and if we can drive down staff absence, this will have a big impact on our budget."

To find out more about the UK's fastest-growing education HR system get in touch at:
www.sampeople.co.uk