

## Fera Increasing visibility, efficiency and operational capacity



Fera is a joint venture (JV) created in 2015 between Defra (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) and Capita. Fera provides scientific solutions, evidence and advice across the agri-food chain to government and commercial customers. The JV supports policy development, growing more and using less, protecting the environment, ensuring a healthy, high yield crop, and bringing chemicals to market through the regulatory process for the public good in the UK and overseas. Fera is based at the National agri-food Innovation Campus near York employing nearly 400 scientists. Fera also plays a key role in the UK's ability to respond to, and recover from, emergency situations affecting the food chain and rural economy.

### The challenge

With a clear remit to provide increased effectiveness of Fera's workforce through resource planning, a detailed analysis of Fera's operations was carried out. The key issue discovered during this phase was the lack of a core tool to facilitate future planning of resource usage and availability, with a lack of visibility around staff skillsets compounding the challenge to plan ahead and effectively schedule pipeline and committed projects.

### The goal - where do we need to be?

The overall early-stage goal for Fera was to attack the challenges that had been highlighted, by implementing a single centralised resource management software platform. The broader aim moving forward was to enable visibility of capacity to support the significant growth challenge – and increased financial returns – that had been set.

### The solution

Retain International's resource planning solution ('Retain') was selected as the system of choice for Fera. Retain International is a Capita business, having been acquired in early 2014, specialising in the implementation of planning systems for major commercial and governmental organisations.

Retain is a cross-organisation tool providing skills and availability management for all levels and type of staff, enabling forward planning and visibility of utilisation, cost and capacity. MI reporting is tightly integrated to ensure that key managers and leaders have access to real-time data to assist in planning resource use, planning project activity, and actively managing performance. A key focus of Retain is utilisation improvement with the philosophy that even a small, conservative improvement can lead to considerable profitability enhancements.

“ Our focus at Capita is on providing the very best service and results for clients, utilising our people and our resources as efficiently as possible. By harnessing the power of a dedicated solution such as the Retain resource management system, and by building its toolsets into our way of working, we can ensure that we continue to maximise operational efficiencies and deliver optimum value. ”

Andy Parker,  
Chief Executive,  
Capita

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## Go live! Winning hearts and minds

Retain has been implemented for all Fera operational staff engaged in science delivery and research, with a careful focus on maximising buy-in from end users. With a large technology implementation, displaying and promoting day-to-day benefits is vital – regular communications, demonstrations, detailed training sessions and easily available user guides all helped to smooth the path for Retain and generate positive reactions from stakeholders.

In addition, tailored messages enabled the implementation team to promote the implementation team to promote system benefits to specific levels of user, for example:

### For front line staff

- Greater visibility of projects they are planned to work on – with early warning of potential overbooking to help even out peaks and troughs in work.
- Visibility of comments in the project booking status that can include detail of the input required – encouraging discussion to clarify activities.
- Integration with Outlook calendars, giving a simple overview of bookings, appointments, and annual leave.

### For delivery leads

- Ability to view pipeline and all committed projects, with the tools to compare 'planning' against 'actuals' to build ongoing improvements.
- Ability to combine capacity and competence searches in order to make judgements for best fit available staff for projects.
- Visibility of planned time and resource for the duration of a project, including specific personnel over configurable time periods.

### For team leaders

- Ability to understand the demands on teams' time, enabling proactive management of 'evening out' during periods of under- and over-utilisation.
- Ability to understand team skillsets and put in place strategies to cover areas where talent falls below desired levels.





## Progress - the story so far

Retain was accessible for all within just 2 months, with over 95% of Fera's operational staff having time planned within the solution.

Retain is embedded within the day-to-day lives of users, helped in no small part by feeds from core systems such as SAP (specifically 'Projects', 'People', and 'Annual Leave'), and into core systems such as Outlook. Two months after implementation, over 40,000 project days were already scheduled in 2016 within Retain, representing £15.6m of resource cost (56% of operational capacity) for the full year.

Bespoke reports, both granular and high-level, support forecasting across Fera's operations and are enabling planned resource costs to be closer to actual costs, compared to historical efforts. Clear visibility of resource availability, Fera's financial strength, and the impact of sales pipeline changes will have positive impacts upon revenue and profitability.

## The future

Implementation of Retain continues, and is focusing upon deeper integration with complementary systems and even better data intelligence.

In terms of integration, a direct interface between Retain and SAP will bring more live data into play and will ensure resource plans are updated to confirm actual time used for pre-population of timesheets. This integration will also see more effective project management by pushing Retain time and cost forecasts into SAP for comparison of financial plans v actuals.

In terms of data intelligence, Retain and SAP will combine to provide live MI dashboards – bespoke to Fera – including a suite of accessible, fit for purpose reports with tailored information. Demand modelling is an exciting future opportunity, exploring how Fera might use data in Retain to improve overall understanding of the nature of demand.

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