

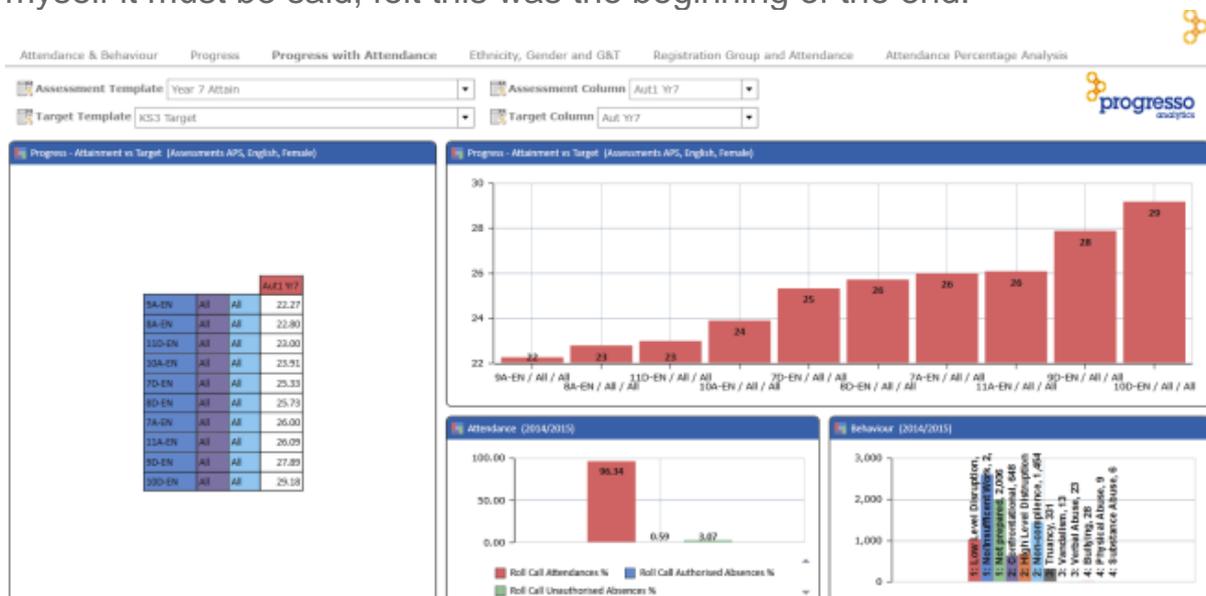
## Advanced Learning Case Study

First published March 10 2015

When I first started writing this piece I wanted for focus on the technology and the recent event I was invited to by Advanced Learning, but quickly I found there was a lot more I wanted to say about how this product and company have gotten from there to here.

Roughly 3 years ago, when I was in the midst of launching Aspen to the UK, the American MIS that nearly made it here, another next generation MIS was also being launched. Progresso, then of Serco, launched with the same fanfare and anticipation I managed to whip up with Aspen.

For the next 2 years it seemed Progresso, whom I had followed extremely closely with great interest since launch, was destined to follow in those footsteps and either be cancelled or worse, bring new owners Advanced Learning down with it. It was a disastrous launch plagued with performance issues in the main as well as issues in migrating schools from Facility, their own legacy MIS platform. All of this and more lead to further publicity when Advanced Learning announced cessation of sales and migrations for over 6 months, and many commentators and experts in the market including myself it must be said, felt this was the beginning of the end.



Fast forward to November 2014 when I attended the Academies Show at the NEC in Birmingham, and I caught up with the Advanced Learning team and was introduced to a refreshed Progresso and a shiny new analytics platform to rival the interface, usability and sheer depth and power of the best in the education market... of any market. Needless to say I was

impressed, if nothing else that investment had continued in a product that looked destined for the programmers recycling bin.

A quiet BETT for Advanced Learning, and I published the latest figures for the MIS market which once again looked somewhat bleak for these guys. But I was really interested to hear about an upcoming user group/prospective user group event at Dartmouth Academy in Devon, and more so honoured to be invited to meet the team, the schools, the Academy making tremendous strides forward thanks to Progresso and their innovative implementation of it. And generally to be able to sit listen learn and represent both my day job (as Groupcall happy to support a long-time partner) and the Eduware Network to provide an honest and objective view of the day and the general feel for how Progresso is looking now. It is no secret that I am vocal about my feelings on the MIS market, the players operating in this market and specifically with Progresso my fears for what should have been a true 21<sup>st</sup> century platform for schools. Should? I should say is, because while the numbers still give me cause for concern, the technology looks far steadier.

**So, what has changed?**

The screenshot displays the 'Advanced Learning' software interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'WELCOME J Smith' and 'ROLE Teacher'. A search bar is located on the right. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- My Registration Groups:** A table with columns 'Reg Grp', 'At', 'Behv', and 'Mkb'. It shows one item: 'RegGrp1'.
- My Teaching Groups:** A table with columns 'Time', 'Tch Grp', 'Sub', 'Att', 'Behv', and 'Mkb'. It lists six items with times ranging from 08:30 to 14:05 and subjects like 'Tutor Tutor', 'MA Mathematics', 'CIT Citizenship', and 'EN English'.
- Notification Widget:** A list of notifications with columns 'Ir', 'Date', 'Cat', and 'Text'. It shows multiple 'Observation Entry has been Added' and 'Reminder Event: PTA Event on 27/02/2015' notifications.
- My Cover Events:** A table with columns 'D', 'T', 'P', 'Grp', 'For', 'Rm', 'Sub', and 'At'. It shows two items for 'ACI Matt Ro...' in 'CR4' rooms, one for 'Music'.

Greeted so warmly by both Advanced Learning staff and Andy Carpenter, Dept. Head at Dartmouth Academy, I was treated to a morning of hearing, seeing and feeling a strong sense of appreciation, excitement and enthusiasm about a product that not too long ago looked dead and buried.

Over a dozen schools, some using Progresso, some moving to it now, and some unhappy about their current rival product and looking to see if Progresso will do the business. An overview of what the product looks like followed, not helping myself by asking obvious questions (if anyone was wondering, they were deliberate to tease out the possibilities of Progresso!). This included some exciting if not unsurprising news about an impending user interface refresh to make better use of the space, make Progresso even more intuitive (I say even more because as we will see it is pretty good already!) and is mostly due to customer feedback. This is a theme for the day I noticed, that a huge amount of effort is being put in by Advanced Learning to be that more responsive to customer demands



where the product is concerned.

Also hot off the press was the news of upcoming mobile apps for Progresso, coming in stages this year. While this is another welcome step in the right direction, early viewings did look somewhat basic. What I am unsure of is the technology used to drive these and the capabilities that will be available: Progresso is a cloud MIS available anywhere at any time on browsers. Progresso clearly is too complex to use properly on mobile devices (well, phones anyway), although the new interface refresh is to be mobile-responsive. So is the app just an interface onto the same platform, scaled and limited to what parents and staff need on the go? Or a whole dedicated app ecosystem. Both have their advantages and pitfalls, yet only one is embracing the future and not just solving a problem.

Overall, the product has not really changed too much in appearance and features since I last looked at it, however everything just feels more stable. Actions and processes are quick, even complex analytics complete timely and as one would expect, which given that performance was by far and out the biggest issue affecting Progresso of years gone by, this was encouraging to see.

But above all I was, and am, starting to see not just light at the end of the tunnel, but a bright shining star in the form of intuitive tools, workflows, processes and extrapolation analytics based on the raw data school are collecting, and real power to make the MIS do what each school wants it to be doing. Dartmouth Academy I know are working themselves on building widgets to pull data and display it aligned with their own KPIs, unique to them. Gone now are the days of just having an MIS and being limited by what it tells schools to do, the power has shifted, through choices of system and integration between systems, for schools to manipulate the data systems and have it truly supporting their processes. Many have tried, Aspen came very close (before leaving), and others are doing well too now. Progresso seems to be taking a slight lead.

Before the real treat of the day, I listened intently to Andy and his insatiable enthusiasm for what Progresso is doing for their school, how they are getting the most out of it by really making it (and Advanced Learning) work for its money. It is plain to see that this has been a journey for all involved, and Andy is not shy in expressing that, but for me that paints a much better picture of the expertise and market understanding of a company recovering. Recovery is not a bad thing, and schools very much need to recognise that.

The screenshot shows the 'Advanced Learning' software interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'WELCOME J Smith', 'ROLE Teacher', and a search box. Below this is a progress bar with four steps: 1. Learner Selection, 2. Incident Details (highlighted with a blue circle and a hand cursor), 3. Actions, and 4. Additional Info. The main content area is titled 'Add behaviour' and shows the following fields and options:

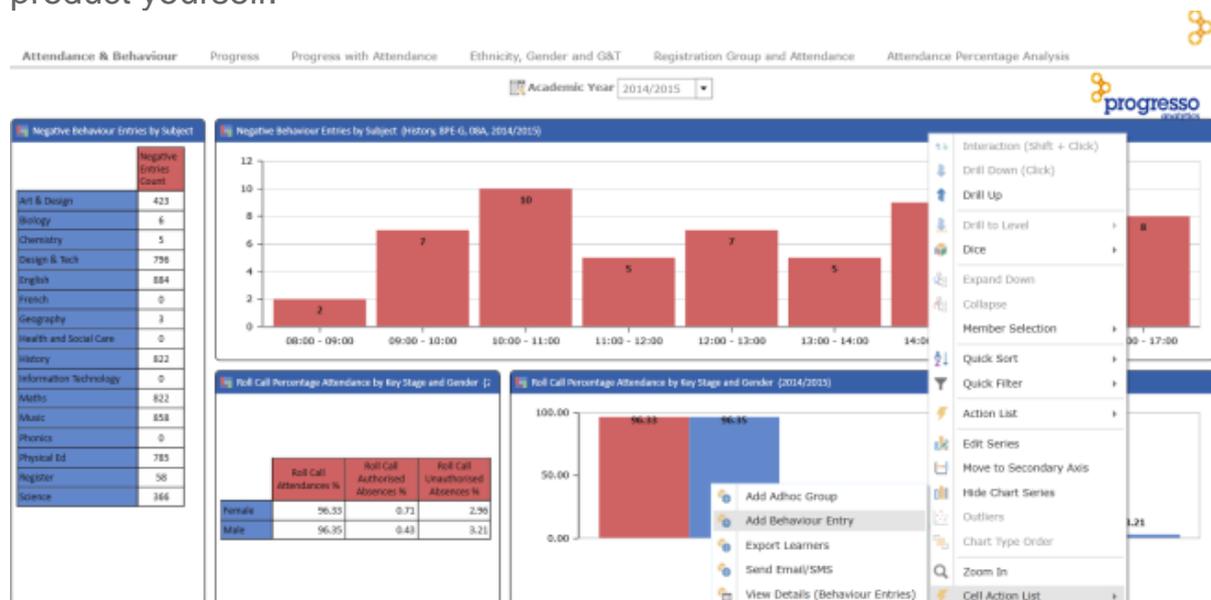
- Learner Selection:** Wednesday Addams, Clarke Kent
- Incident:** Radio buttons for Positive (selected), Negative, and Neutral.
- \*Incident Date:** 27/02/2015 13:16
- Subject:** Select (dropdown menu)
- Category:** Empty text input field
- \*Type:** A grid of checkboxes for various categories:
  - After School Club
  - After School Revision
  - Contribution in Class
  - Cooperative Behaviour
  - Excellent Attainment
  - Excellent Classwork
  - Excellent Effort
  - Excellent Homework
  - Form Tutor Rewards
  - Head of Year Reward
  - Leadership
  - Lunchtime Club
  - Representing School
  - Senior Leadership Reward
  - Supporting Others
  - Working as part of a team
- Comments:** A large text area with a rich text editor toolbar (bold, italic, underline, list, link, font family, font size) and a 'Confidential' checkbox.

Without boring the audience with 'it can do x, it can do y', highlights include

highly configurable interfaces for individual users, particularly around behaviour management. For a moment I thought I was looking at Salesforce at the level of interactive data points. I also got a glimpse at the timetable engine and features, all very graphic and looking draggy-droppy! To be honest, the product looks great now, but listening to Andy and what they are doing with it now and plan to do next with it is the real story, because it inspires others on just what they can do with reams and reams of raw data, and turn it into information pillars to support their school life. The MIS itself is not exactly ground-breaking any more, and is not vastly changing the way schools use and consume information, but then no one is yet! It is however doing the job that a school is asking it to be doing.

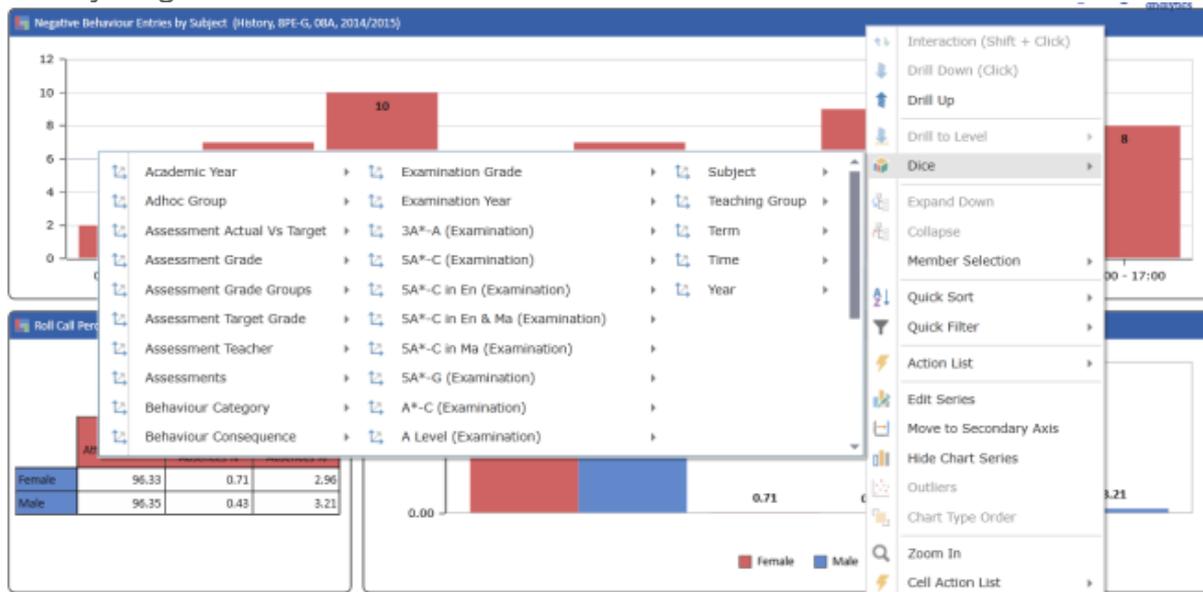
## Analytics

At the Academies Show in November, I was shown Progresso Analytics; white-labelled Pyramid Analytics, a business intelligence tool for data cubing. Rather than try to explain how clever this all is, have a look at the product yourself.



What this does for schools is provide a simple interface for ANY staff in the school to comfortably use to analyse, drill down and extrapolate data and slice and dice the outcomes in whatever way they want, and in almost real time (data is up to one hour out of date owing to the fact data is pulled from the main Progresso database). I am blown away by the complicity of the interface, the sheer number of options available to drill down and combine datasets, and the variety of presentation and graphical overlays. In seconds (and I did secretly time this on the day), the presenter was able, from scratch, design and present a chart showing all female students from year 9 who receive FSM and have <90% attendance this term. Drill down further and see which of those have a behaviour points total greater than

10... you get the idea.



What is critical and in comparison to other options on the market that I have seen so far (I have not seen all the offerings from all competitor products), is that a large proportion of the database of fields is available from the off. Since this event I have learned that it is not the entire database at this time, but the teams at Advanced Learning and Pyramid Analytics are working a vastly increase the scope of fields available. It is by no means a perfect solution, but for it's first release is somewhat further ahead than others at that stage.

What this does for Advanced Learning is propel Progresso towards the all-encompassing solution it was predicted to be 4 years ago and certainly starts to ask questions of competitor's analytic superiority, both inbuilt and third party solutions.

### What now

Advanced Learning continue to have this quandary in that the market still sees a failure to launch; a product that does not work, that is a nightmare to work with. The technology works – simple. The team is listening to their customers. Tick. Customers DO like the product.

The numbers will paint a picture, which is unfortunately directly related now to schools impression of the product and company, a hangover from 2013 still. Some mixed messages do still come out of Advanced Towers, some trying to sidestep or hide the issues of the past like they did not happen, others taking a more honest, believable and ultimately trustworthy approach of exploiting the past to show the progress that has been made, and showing that the company can and has responded to the issues as well as what schools really do want from their MIS. For me, this is satisfying

as I have been telling their staff to do exactly this for the best part of a year, but less selfishly this is the better story to be telling. To be able to have turned around such a low of 2 years ago to a stable, competent and exciting product today shows incredible skill, determination and investment. Just imagine what they can do in the next two years...

More so, imagine what their competitor will have to do to combat this as this re-rise continues, and so how will Advanced Learning continue to adapt and change to meet competition demands from schools.