

UNIVERSITY OF KENT



KENT
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40 YEARS 1965-2005 ■■■■

UNIVERSITY OF KENT MASTERS FUTURE PLANNING. HOW COGNOS IS HELPING TO ENSURE BETTER FORECASTING AND IMPROVE DECISION-MAKING.

INTRODUCTION

The university sector is changing fast with ever increasing numbers of students from both home and abroad.

These changes bring with them the need for improved forecasting and better decision-making to allow universities to plan for the future.

THE ORGANISATION

The University of Kent was granted its Royal Charter in 1965. Today, there are 21 academic departments in three faculties serving more than 14,000 students from over 110 countries.

The main campus is in Canterbury with additional facilities across Kent in four other locations. The University also has four associate colleges, Canterbury College, Mid-Kent College, South Kent College, and West Kent College, and works with a number of overseas institutions.

THE CHALLENGE

The University of Kent is a multi-campus university with ambitious plans to develop at both a regional and international level. As a result, there is a real need for more detailed forecasting to ensure the required levels of funding and the necessary resources, such as staff, student accommodation, facilities and equipment, are in place.

As planning project manager in the Student Planning Data Office, Silvia Dobre's role is to analyse student data and prepare annual forecasts on student headcount and teaching loads. This information is then used by the various departments across the University to plan for the future.

"We're a multi-campus university so the data I need is spread across many different sites," explained Dobre. "This means it's a time consuming process accessing this data let alone analysing and sharing it across the 30 departments and sub-departments within the University."

Forecasts into student numbers, courses, degree modules, and staffing levels were produced on an annual basis and could take up to three months to prepare. This included data collection as well as intense data manipulation of over 1,000 spreadsheets.

Once complete, forecasts had to be circulated to each of the 30 departments and sub-departments within the University across 10 different locations.

"Not only was the process extremely long-winded, the fact that we were having to manipulate the data manually meant there was room for errors and we couldn't always be 100 percent certain that the final forecasts were correct," explained Dobre.

THE SOLUTION

In May 2004, the Student Planning Data Office started working with Cognos to automate much of the data collection, analysis, and forecasting processes.

The Student Planning Data Office as well as the Finance Department are now using Cognos planning tools to speed up the reporting process and provide better forecasting information across the organisation.

Student data from the central records system is processed in an Access database before being analysed with Cognos.

Cognos tools are used to produce a variety of five year forecasts into student headcounts per department, student type, location, programme of study, and likelihood of completing courses.

The technology also allows the Student Planning Data Office to publish these forecasts in a number of different formats including over the Web. This means it can be accessed by staff across the University, regardless of their physical location.

THE RESULTS

“Cognos Planning allows us to plan and budget far more effectively than before,” explained Dobre. “It gives us a single, accurate view of the information we need and allows us to communicate this information right across the University.”

As a result of the Cognos implementation, the University can now undertake detailed data analysis far more quickly than before. Instead of the annual reports and forecasts, information can now be updated on a weekly basis. This is having a direct impact on forecasting across the organisation and is improving the decision-making process.

“Information is far more accessible than before so heads of departments have a much better picture of how their areas are performing and how this is likely to change,” said Dobre. “Because it is easy to use, users can analyse the data and undertake complex analysis themselves so can answer questions that are specific to their particular areas.”

The Cognos technology also means the University can take a more proactive approach to modelling and forecasting. For the first time, it can analyse recruiting trends, examining where students’ interests lie, and tailoring courses to meet these requirements. In addition it can review scholarships and bursaries against student requirements to better meet their needs.

GOING FORWARD

The University is now looking to incorporate student applications into the planning and forecasting process rather than just focussing on existing student numbers. This will allow it to develop a number of ‘what-if’ scenarios, which will improve longer term planning and forecasting allowing it to better adapt to the ever-changing university sector.

ABOUT COGNOS

Cognos is the world leader in business intelligence and enterprise planning software. Our solutions for corporate performance management let organizations drive performance with planning, budgeting and consolidation, monitor it with scorecarding, and understand it with business intelligence reporting and analysis. Cognos is the only vendor to support all of these key management activities in a complete, integrated solution. Founded in 1969, Cognos now serves more than 23,000 customers in over 135 countries.



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