

The University of Hull integrates systems for connected finance

Combining its in-house developed systems for procurement, reservations, student records and payroll, Dream helps The University of Hull pull critical financial information into one place.



Transaction handling

Analysis tools

Smarter processes

Expert services

When The University of Hull's finance department decided to replace its finance system, it went through a thorough and consultative evaluation process and a clear decision was reached. Having implemented Dream, developed by CODA, the software has proven itself more than suitable for the needs of this academic organisation.

In fact, the main features of Dream which led to the purchasing decision – its flexibility and ease of navigation - are still clearly providing benefits for the University five years after implementation.

THE SELECTION

Paul Marshall, Faculty Finance Officer recalls: "I was part of the team involved in selecting the new software system. The industry leader in education at the time was Agresso. The easy decision would have been to go with them but we chose to go with Dream because we were impressed by the way Dream handled ledgers and its flexible functionality".

The University's previous accounting system was cumbersome and often appeared unreliable to those outside the centralised finance function. The implementation of Dream followed the re-engineering of financial processes and procedures which saw many of the financial administrative tasks devolved to faculties.

Dave Parkinson, Head of Exchequer Service at the University, says; "The previous accounting system lacked credibility with faculty staff. It was a very laborious process to get hold of information and output reports were non-existent, so it had to be changed".

Julie Bosworth, Systems Accountant at the University, adds; "Most people (outside the finance department) had no grasp of it. It was regarded as a corporate system".

MEETING COMPLEX REQUIREMENTS

Implementation of Dream proved to be a complex process because the University has developed a range of its own in-house systems which support the administration of

student records, accommodation, purchasing and events booking. However, Dream's flexibility was tested and passed with flying colours, particularly as the University could make use of its range of purpose-built integration tools to make this possible.

Dave Parkinson describes some of the key processes now handled by the University's new system: "All student finances operate on Dream. We collect approximately £30m of debt annually but now collect a significant amount by direct debit from students. EPOS is also embedded. The key advantages of Dream are that it is far quicker to import and export data, and far more efficient. The user defined screens make allocations much easier too".

According to Julie Bosworth: "The purchasing system was developed in-house and interfaces with Dream – it works wonderfully. There are also interfaces with Payroll, and functions booking which means information is picked up and transferred from that system into Dream."

EMPOWERING NON-FINANCE USERS

Devolving much of the finance processing work now means there are 200 users of Dream working throughout the University. As the system is based totally on Windows technology, with highly intuitive, easy-to-use screens and interfaces, administrative staff find it easy, swift and accurate to use. Dave Parkinson notes: "Individual faculties can access their own data and drill down as far as they want – the audit trail is excellent. In essence, Dream has provided non-finance staff with a secure self service facility".

Crystal reporting, which integrates with the Dream software, gives the University yet more flexibility by providing staff outside the finance department with clear, easy-to-understand financial data. All users can access the reports they need directly through Dream on their desktop.

Paul Marshall is one of those who has experienced the advantages of faculty-based financial processing using the Dream system first-hand: "We are very much in control of what we're doing now – we are able to provide a range of staff with reports they can understand".

EFFICIENCY GAINS

Dave Parkinson notes: "Importing from other systems works very well. Someone can write a payments list and upload it into Dream so that we can make payments immediately. It's now a split second job."

Dream has also had an impact on efficiency at the University in other ways. Julie Bosworth comments: "The efficiencies achieved through implementing Dream have grown over time as we have become increasingly proficient with the system".

As Dream is a unified ledger system, it is always in balance, allowing immediate access to the latest data and making period- and year-end closing significantly faster. The University estimates they have cut a massive 12 days off period end closing as a result of the implementation, freeing up staff to work on more value-add activities.

As much of the financial processing work is now devolved, and budgets and re-forecasts are now done at a local level, the Central Finance function has also seen a saving on staffing levels.

IMPROVED SYSTEMS MEAN IMPROVED PERFORMANCE

The University of Hull has not let time stand still since it implemented Dream from CODA. The major internal project which saw all of the University's systems move from Oracle to a SQL database in summer 2005 has led not only to an improvement in the way the systems they use are running, but there has also been a noticeable growth in the use of Crystal reports as the improved infrastructure makes it easier and quicker to run applications across the board. With truly connected systems and efficient processes, real-time performance-related financial information is always at hand.

About CODA

CODA is the choice for finance professionals who need business software and services they can count on.



We provide award-winning Financial Management solutions that help organizations to streamline and automate their finance processes (from accounting and procurement to reporting and analysis) and to achieve better compliance and corporate governance. CODA applications work seamlessly with each other or independently and they integrate with other leading operational systems to maximize the return on your broader IT investment too. And our products are all underpinned by expert consultancy, training and support services, delivered by teams of experienced accountants, business analysts and technology specialists.

Founded in the UK in 1979, the CODA Group now employs around 600 people and has offices around the world to deliver easy, local access to sales, service and support. Around 2600 medium and large organizations, across all sectors, use CODA solutions to control costs, drive performance and ensure compliance, while remaining agile and responsive.