

CASE STUDY

University of Plymouth:
strategic vision and
project planning.

The University of Plymouth is one of the UK's most prominent and dynamic universities with an educational history dating back to 1862. Consistently ranked as one of the top three modern universities, Plymouth has almost 3,000 staff supporting over 30,000 students and an annual income of around £206 million.

The University is extremely committed to developing its use of technology and e-business to 'enhance both its teaching and learning offering, its business capability, and lead the sector in the use of new technologies and approaches to business critical issues' and outlines this in its strategic plan.





Challenges and Objectives

The University's Strategic Human Resource Management Framework drives the role of Human Resources within the University, supporting and assisting leaders and staff across the organisation in all aspects of HR and people strategy.

The University's Framework focuses on: resourcing; developing for performance; motivating for performance; customer service and optimising the contribution of its people.

The HR strategy is fully supported by the Governors, Chief Executive Group and Senior Managers, setting out four high-level strategic aims:

- The University's academic agenda seeks to establish excellence because we recruit and retain the right staff in the right place at the right time
- The University of Plymouth will become a first choice, first class University for national and international students because we encourage enterprising staff to achieve results in a fast changing environment
- The University makes a distinctive impact in Higher Education over a sustained period of time because people enjoy working there, are motivated to strive for excellence and feel proud of their University
- The customers of HR services and systems feel respected and valued because our ways of working/processes are efficient and responsive to their needs.

Commenting on the HR strategy, Vikki Matthews, Director of HR at the University of Plymouth said: "The HR strategy is based on the premise that we need to bring together the appropriate mix of HR activities in order to achieve the desired results across the organisation. We also recognised very early on that communication, collaboration and partnership would all play a pivotal role in helping us to reach our goals.

"Our HR strategy outlined the areas of priority which we needed to focus on if we were to achieve the high-level strategic aims. In particular, we were very aware that our customer services needed to be underpinned by robust processes and systems which could also give us the flexibility required to adapt to our evolving needs."

The HR team also recognised that it needed to make fundamental changes to the delivery of its services to meet the increasing demands of changing legislation and the needs of its stakeholders.

Solution and Implementation Process

MidlandHR's iTrent was chosen as the HR platform to support and enable the achievement of eight strategic developments:

1. Develop systems to reduce HR administration whilst improving efficiency and delivery of services. The system must be responsive to customers' needs and feedback
2. Provide key HR information in a pro-active, coherent and user friendly manner so that key performance indicators are set, monitored and managed
3. Enhance the customer service processes and provide training for users across the University so that its customers are able to access the information they need, when they need it
4. Review and develop the University's HR Portal so that HR information and guidance is more accessible, user friendly and customer focused
5. Review and develop the University's HR policies and procedures so that they are fit for purpose and reflect the enterprise ethos of the organisation
6. Develop new systems that enable a reduced reliance on paper
7. Contribute to the optimal interfacing of other systems (e.g. Agresso) with iTrent
8. Keep under regular surveillance and review recruitment and selection processes to ensure that the University continues to secure the best talent from the widest pool.

The University committed to upgrading from MidlandHR's Trent to MidlandHR's latest web-deployed solution, iTrent. This included rolling out iTrent's Employee Self-Service and Web Recruitment modules to support the satisfaction of strategic objectives and drive excellence through modern technologies and e-business.

Lynn Tincler, HR Services Manager at Plymouth University comments: "iTrent helps us to convert

our strategy into reality by using new technologies and a modern approach to business critical issues."

Developing Communication

Running parallel with the systems development, it was clear that the University also needed to strengthen its communication structures, particularly its intranet and extranet. In order to support the successful introduction of iTrent's online Web Recruitment, the HR team also recognised that it needed to provide prospective employees with detailed information about working at the University, whilst enforcing a consistent and desirable employer brand.

"This analysis of the quality and content of our communications channels has greatly strengthened our overall communication offering, to employees and potential employees alike, of the benefits of working at the University as well as the availability of useful and relevant HR related information in general," comments Tincler.

"Our extranet and intranet now regularly receive praise from across the University and the HR team are extremely proud of the feedback that has been given to date."

Developing HR teams

The other key enabler to the success of this project was the HR department itself.

A HR project team was put together to manage the project, developing skills in best practice project management alongside comprehensive knowledge of the iTrent system. The team included four new members of staff who were recruited specifically to see out the project, bringing with them essential skills and experience from previous positions outside of the University. A further investment was also made to remaining members of the Universities HR team to expand the existing skills portfolio and enhance individual roles going forward.

The organisational & leadership development approach

The emerging communications strategy is underpinned by an organisational development approach and a clear leadership development process. This is demonstrated not only by the University's strategic plan and the Human Resource strategy but also by a number of other key proof points.

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From a communications perspective, the development approach included:

- Redesign of the HR website and intranet pages
- Regular use of the intranet staff announcements scheme
- Promotion of iTrent’s Employee Self-Service using a strap line on all HR e-mails
- Regular articles in the University magazine
- High level ‘news alert’ messages from the executive group to ensure all employees are aware of developments by e-mail
- Detailed communications to pilot group managers for departmental promotion of changes
- Detailed communications to pilot group members
- Formal and informal meetings to consult with business support and academic staff
- Detailed process/ learning documents
- Close working relationships, collaboration and partnerships across the University.

From a learning and development perspective, it has also included:

- Informal training seminars
- Formal training sessions for users
- Detailed guidance notes for users
- Ongoing evaluation and review.

A committee structure which includes representatives from all University stakeholders has also provided governance for the development of HR systems. The HR team has been focused on further developing systems in order to continuously improve HR processes in terms of administrative efficiencies and delivery of services, and to ensure that the system is responsive to employee requirements and feedback.

Results

iTrent’s Employee Self-Service was implemented on time and on schedule, and received numerous positive comments from across many different departments within the University. The Director of ILS, Penny Holland commented: “All information within the system is up-to-date and it provides people with useful access to manage their personal data”. A management information assistant in Learning & Research Support added, “...It is clearly laid out and easy to understand... No criticisms at all”, whilst a porter from the Charles Seale-Hayne library said he found

the system “easy to use” and the information “excellent”.

As the University progressed through the upgrade from Trent to iTrent, the project team identified 274 improvements they wish to make to current processes and against which they can measure the longer term success of the project.

Tindler explains: “Whilst these improvements have only been clearly identified as the project progressed – and are therefore not all achievable within the timescale of the upgrade – they gave us a clear structure and goals which support our commitment to the continuous improvement of systems and customer service.”

Future Plans

Tindler continues: “It is recognised that our plans are ambitious but there is a strong desire and driving ambition within HR to deliver a high quality HR service and system to the organisation. This is fully supported by the Chief Executive Group and the strategic aims of the University.

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“Our overall approach to technology enables the University and specifically HR to become more dynamic, competitive, responsive and fit for the future of constant change. The close working relationship established with the MidlandHR team has been fundamental in taking our HR strategy forward. We believe that HR within the University is truly proactive and progressive and the driving HR team is consultative and inclusive at all times. We are taking advantage of best practice technology, focusing upon our customer service delivery and recognise that unless there are clear strategic, tactical and operational communications throughout the project, our aims cannot be fully realised,” concludes Tindler.

Strategic Aims

- Recruiting & retaining the right people
- Become a first class, first choice for national/ international students
- Ensure employee engagement
- Ensure HR processes are efficient and inclusive
- Reduce HR administration to enable strategic workforce management

HR Objectives

- Ensure HR and payroll legislative compliance
- Flexible HR solution to respond to evolving needs
- Increase HR efficiency and transform services
- Visibility of key HR info to ensure workforce optimisation
- Provide training for users across the University
- Develop the HR portal to ensure accessibility of key HR information & guidance
- Review & develop HR policies & procedures to reflect the Universities enterprise ethos
- Reduce reliance on paper processes
- Contribute to the optimal interfacing of other systems (e.g. Agresso) with HR
- Ensure the best talent from the widest pool

Solution

Upgrade to the latest iTrent solution

This case study focuses on:

- Employee Self-Service
- Web Recruitment

In addition to the current roll-out:

- Manager Self-Service, e-payslips, Absence Management

Results

- iTrent Web-Recruitment and HR team development enabled advanced recruitment processing, increasing employer brand both internally and externally – ensuring the University is able to recruit and retain the best talent
- iTrent provides the visibility of information essential for setting, monitoring and managing key workforce performance indicators – developing people was key to unlocking strategic capabilities
- iTrent Self-Service and the surrounding communications empower people to manage and access personal information quickly & easily
- iTrent is supporting the HR team in the transformation of paper-based HR services, to electronic, automated processes
- MidlandHR and iTrent ensure the University complies with HR and payroll legislation

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