

Williams Woodward assists colleges in Essex Shared Services partnership to save £80,000 a year

Case Study May 2017

Challenge

Essex Shared Services Ltd is a joint venture by South Essex College and Chelmsford College that was established in July 2014. The idea was that the new organisation would provide both institutions with back office services for the finance, payroll and procurement functions.

This was for two main reasons. Firstly, the two organisations wanted to respond to budget cuts by finding new efficiencies. Secondly, they wanted to explore new ways to improve their processes and planning.

Specifically, the partnership was designed to help the colleges:

- Divert costs from back office operations to front line learning
- Develop more financial awareness across both institutions
- Make finance management and collaboration easier

Solution

As one of its first steps, the new Essex Shared Services organisation established a single back-office finance, payroll, procurement function to serve both institutions.

To make this work, it wanted to source a finance ERP system that would scale with the institutions' needs and help optimise productivity. Unit4 Business World was chosen for its finance capability, its inbuilt FE-friendly processes, and its track record in both the further education sector and delivering shared services. With Williams Woodward's help, the colleges successfully implemented the Unit4 ERP system on time and to budget.

Benefits: savings of £80,000 each year and a platform for better financial decisions

Since adopting Unit4, the Essex Shared Services organisation has achieved a number of important organisational and financial benefits.

"What we've done is look at how to centralise a function across two organisations so that IT can be run more cost effectively," says Peter Moore, Head of Shared Services & Deputy Director of Finance, Essex Shared Services Ltd. "One of the key ways we've been able to achieve this is by sharing and consolidating the finance management onto Unit4. This is far more affordable for both colleges. It has also helped us to review processes generally and make them more efficient across both

organisations, which enables us to operate effectively with fewer staff at both leadership and more junior levels."

The new organisation has already achieved savings of £80,000 per year through more efficient deployment of resources. This money is now being made available to improve learner experiences.

Essex Shared Services has also improved efficiency in ways that boost productivity. For example, it has replaced a manual process where 'purchase invoice packs' were printed and then delivered by hand to individuals across various campuses. Now this information is delivered electronically to the right people, at the right time through workflows which gives an audit trail of activity. Budget holders and key personnel can access data through a self-service portal when they need it and make more informed decisions.

In addition, the new partnership is helping to facilitate the cross-fertilisation of ideas for mutual benefit.

"A great example of this is a cost-contribution model that was being introduced by one college," says Moore. "Once the other college saw how this was going to work, they saw immediate benefit for themselves. This simply wouldn't have happened without the culture of collaborating and information sharing that Unit4 enables and the shared service partnership promotes."

Andrea Williams, Managing Director of Williams Woodward adds, *"This has been an incredibly successful project that really showcases the benefits of the Unit4 Business World platform and how better collaborative working can help multiple colleges to achieve their objectives more effectively. With its highly intuitive interface, workflow and accurate view of financial indicators, Unit4 has helped the shared services team and colleges establish a more 'commercially aware' culture. The insight it delivers has also meant staff are more mindful of the crucial impact their budgets have in delivering great student experiences. It's been really gratifying to help achieve this and see the results in action."*

About Williams Woodward

Williams Woodward offer unrivalled knowledge and expertise in helping clients implement new business systems and manage change effectively. That expertise is based on in-depth knowledge and lessons learned from years of direct experience implementing business systems and managing change across organisations of all sizes.

The Williams Woodward approach is based on a thorough understanding of the people and organisational dynamics involved in project and systems change management. Williams Woodward was established in 2006 by Andrea Williams and Clive Woodward, and has almost 150 customers throughout the UK. For further information contact:



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