

Crimson leverages Microsoft solutions to transform student attraction, recruitment and admissions for The University of Salford



crimson®

THE UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD

The University of Salford was founded in 1896 and gained its University title in 1967. Based in Salford, Greater Manchester, the University placed 91st in The Guardian's University league 2021. With over 30,000 students, the University has increased its undergraduate intake by 26% in five years against a sector increase of circa 7% as a result of the digital transformation provided by Crimson and Microsoft.

Not only have the processes been accelerated, but the quality of applications has also increased. Through the web portal provided by Crimson and Microsoft, applications have **increased by 26% since 2015 against an industry average of 7%**. Furthermore, the conversion rate has **increased by 8% over this time**. With improved visibility and control over the process, the University is now better able to manage application windows to improve forecasting and pipeline management.

BACKGROUND

The University of Salford had attempted to implement a CRM system several times within seven years to provide a hyper-personalised applicant journey that integrated with previous systems and data.

With seven different systems in operation, both on and off-premises, it was vital to introduce effective integration to establish a complete view of the student journey.



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

BACKGROUND

The University wanted to drive efficiency across its attraction, recruitment and admissions processes. However, it was battling a number of siloed internal systems preventing it from delivering the hyper-personalised, user-centric experience it desired. The University felt the impact of this, with its retention rates negatively affected, as well as the efficiency of its internal systems.

As the University was going through a digital transformation initiative, it was vital that its chosen CRM would help deliver both the technical capability and associated business processes to improve the management of relationships with

students as well as support more efficient ways of working.

Another critical requirement was to introduce a single way of working for all applications, including degree apprenticeships and international students. The University had a number of challenges when dealing with international agents and the onboarding of international students, making it a key area to improve.

The University of Salford needed an agile platform that would support growth and change and could be easily updated or altered as requirements shifted.

By joining up disconnected data across the organisation, the University of Salford improved staff efficiency, supported students throughout their higher education journey and increased its annual intake.

Self-sufficiency was key, so the University was keen to work with a partner who would be able to support them collaboratively while offering technical and business expertise. By treating Crimson as part of the University of Salford team, it offered a degree of transparency that allowed for improved project efficiency and collaboration.

THE SOLUTION

Microsoft's Dynamics 365 and Power Platform products were implemented to support digital experiences outside of the student lifecycle and assist the University in becoming more self-sufficient. Crimson's sprint team provided tech knowledge while collaboratively shaping and delivering the solution in conjunction with internal IT teams. Additionally, the Evergreen Management service from Crimson ensured the latest updates and capabilities of Microsoft products were understood and could add value to both existing and future processes.

FIRST STEPS

Implementation began with the attraction, recruitment and admissions processes, as these were the areas with the largest potential return on investment. By attracting the right student and by providing the right experience, it was determined that overall retention rates could be improved.

The Crimson team built outward-facing portals using Microsoft Dynamics 365 and Power Platform technologies, enabling applications to be submitted from around the globe while also catering for agents applying on behalf of international students.

These portals can collect evidence documents such as qualifications or personal information such as passports and other evidence required to process the application. Other services such as interview bookings, the application journey, decisions made and offer letters are also accessed through the system, providing a single, applicant-friendly experience.

Microsoft platforms also enable the University to integrate student information systems such as Banner, marketing software such as Adobe Campaign, and other third-party software systems such as Gecko. The portals are micro applications that are targeted at different users, such as students, agents and academics.

All solutions provided by Crimson used Microsoft technologies and enabled most of the project to be low-code/no-code to unlock flexibility and empower internal teams to be more self-sufficient.



THE OUTCOME

The first release in November 2019 included an applicant portal for degree apprenticeships, international foundation year and a pre-sessional English Language programme. This was followed by an Alpha release in January 2020, where the portal underwent significant refinement to its look and feel, as well as improved functionality. This enabled a period of designing, building, and refining, as well as feedback from colleagues.

Alongside this, some other key deployments have been:

June 2021

International deadlines, mass emails, BPF developments.

September 2021

The Partner Portal went live, supporting partners making applications to the University with different levels of service and features based upon contractual agreements with UoS.

October 2021

The 'Tech Fund' was established to support students who are unable to access or cannot afford a laptop to assist with their studies. Successful applicants can select a laptop from a restricted range available through the University of Salford's nominated hardware supplier.

July 2022

Huge focus on Clearing developments where a self-serve application was incorporated and involved call back registration forms and a traditional call handler process which resulted in a **74% increase on people who have attached via Clearing.**

December 2022

'Ask Us', the CRM Student Email and Face to Face Case Management Solution with SLAs and ARC including Canvas Apps and Flows to support quick enquiries went live.

The University of Salford has already derived value from the new solution. By streamlining recruitment and admissions processes, it has seen significant efficiency gains when processing applications, especially the transition from paper - to cloud-based data. A further benefit was the ability for employees to work remotely during the pandemic, which would have otherwise been difficult due to local data storage.

PROGRESSION

The attraction, recruitment and admissions implementations have been a huge success and have improved confidence within the University of Salford's teams.

The solution is now set to be rolled out across the rest of the student lifecycle and throughout the University.

"Crimson and Microsoft have brought a combination of practical advice that has supported the successful implementation of the Dynamics solution as well as a broader perspective that is supporting our goal of offering a sector-leading experience. We now have a really tight team approach with focus on user journeys and stories. These are then translated into specific project deliverables. The agile development and implementation methodology has allowed the team to maintain momentum and focus. It has also kept motivation and focus high."

John McCarthy, Executive Director, Marketing, Recruitment & External Relations at the University of Salford.