Smart, connected finance improves education outcomes

Birmingham Metropolitan College

BMet
Inspiring futures, realising dreams.

Challenged to close the cost-funding gap and create a modern, agile education institution, Birmingham Metropolitan College (BMet) has standardized on a smart, connected Unit4 finance platform.

Finance transformation is automating this further and higher education college's processing and education insights, releasing administrative resources for strategic analysis and planning, and accelerating informed decision-making across the campus.

Key benefits include:

• Enabled timely, accurate management of £1.9 million capital funding program
• Saved equivalent of one day per month in management accounting time
• Reduced staff expenses management time by 20 minutes per claim
• Shifted from quarterly to monthly financial forecasting

College supports 18,000 students

Birmingham Metropolitan College is a further and higher education college supporting almost 18,000 students across 10 campuses. The College offers a wide range of courses, ranging from pre-entry up to Level 5, including A Levels, BTECs, apprenticeships, and HND/foundation degrees.

BMet was formed in 2009 from the merger of Matthew Boulton College and Sutton Coldfield College. Over time, as colleges and campuses were acquired, growing geographical sprawl made it more difficult for the College's finance team to manage a unified finance ledger.

"As a service provider to BMet, we wanted finance to work smarter, putting data at the center of management reporting and decision-making," explains Fiona Yardley, Finance Director. "Our on-premise Unit4 Dream Financials deployment was nearing end-of-life, and we needed a modern, adaptive, and cost-efficient ERP platform."

The College's procurement process was indicative of the change that needed to take place. When a faculty or college needed to make a purchase, the purchase order (PO) would be signed, scanned, and circulated for authorization, often through the internal post. It was tricky to keep track of the frequently slow approval process, and even more difficult to manage budget spend. Likewise, the staff expenses process was manual and labor intensive.

Industry
Higher Education

Location
Birmingham, UK

Size
18,000 students across 10 campuses

Product
Unit4 Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)

Challenges

Replace existing on-premise Unit4 Dream system, streamline and automate manual financial processes, and create a more adaptive finance system

Key metrics

20 minutes
Time saved on each expense claim

12 days
Annual time saved on management accounting

In partnership with:

Agilyx
Change Ready

UNIT4
In business for people

"Thanks to Unit4, we have complete visibility and control over each capital project — the schedule, resources invoiced, and cost versus budget. Armed with this insight, BMet can maximize the return on investment and build a college which is fit for the future."

Fiona Yardley
Finance Director, Birmingham Metropolitan College

The College had enjoyed a highly successful relationship with Unit4, and despite other vendors being considered, Unit4 shone through to lead the finance transformation program. IT Manager Palvinder Phandal picks up the story. "Unit4 stands apart and rises above, offering us strong services-centric ERP featuring flexible configuration and deeper project-based capabilities. The company also has a great future product roadmap. I would add that the Unit4 people we engage with are exceptionally professional and really understand our education objectives."

BMet has deployed Unit4 ERP Financials in collaboration with the Unit4 partner Myriad *[now, Agilyx].* to create a connected, automated finance system across the entire College campus. "Our team was honored to have been selected to provide a time-to-value implementation of Unit4 ERP SaaS for the prestigious Birmingham Met College. BMET trusted us to deliver an ERP solution that met their challenges to an agreed time/budget whilst also sharing knowledge and inspiring their team." Says Harpal Mattu, Practice Manager, Myriad *[Agilyx].* Timely, accurate financial data has led to transparent, informed, and faster decision-making. For example, financial management is now conducted by college, not by faculty discipline. And the College is now also able to demonstrate its accountability and compliance to stakeholders and education regulators more easily.

Unit4 is playing a vital role in supporting the College as it moves through financial recovery, following a challenging historical fiscal position.

The system ensures checks and controls are in place to manage the cost-funding gap and create an efficient, prosperous institution. "We can now forecast monthly with a small, tight-knit team, as opposed to quarterly, and deliver a more sustainable financial position," says Fiona.

The move to a cloud-based ERP model is also driving transformation, according to Palvinder. "We are more agile and adaptive in the cloud," he says. "Alongside the classic cloud advantages of lower cost and reduced risk, we can integrate new systems more quickly, change processes on the fly, and develop a robust, flexible disaster recovery strategy."

Transforming finance and data

By intelligently automating finance processes, BMet's finance function is able to focus more time on strategy and less on routine transactions processing. These are some of the benefits the College is experiencing:

- **More informed financial decisions:** The College uses the 'single version of the truth' to accelerate and streamline decisions. BMet estimates, for example, that the shared, unified finance data saves one day per month in management accounting time. The finance function meets the management accounts submission deadline every time. And everyone is on the same page and talks the same finance language.

- **Transformed reporting:** Reporting is now significantly faster and

more efficient. Individuals can create and share timely, accurate, and highly granular finance reports in seconds, for example, with complete data integrity.

- **Increased agility:** This modern, cloud-based ERP system is self-driving, enabling the College staff to administer many processes themselves, quickly and in a more satisfying interface. Using the Expenses module, for example, the staff now simply allocates their expenses digitally through mobile devices, saving an average of 20 minutes on every expense claim, with automated workflow managing approval and payment.

- **Rapid, transparent procurement:** The College has the flexibility to link directly to approved suppliers for lower overheads, and the clearer analysis of spending patterns is used to negotiate better terms and pricing. Whereas before the PO requisition system was manual, for instance, self-service functionality and automated workflow now take care of all authorizations and approvals.

Commenting on the smart approach to procurement, Fiona explains, "The College was recently awarded £1.9 million in capital funding to improve the estate. Thanks to Unit4, we have complete visibility and control over each capital project: the schedule, resources invoiced, and cost versus budget. Armed with this insight, BMet can maximize the return on investment, build a college which is fit for the future, and ultimately improve education outcomes."

UNIT4
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