



London South Bank University

London South Bank University deploys a progression analysis tool using IBM Cognos Business Intelligence and Simpson Associates reporting.

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Company Overview

London South Bank University (LSBU), is one of the capital's oldest universities, having taken pride in providing students with relevant and practical employment skills and supplying employers with a skilled workforce since 1892.

With over 23,500 students, LSBU is also one of the largest universities in London, with students being drawn from across the globe, throughout the UK and from just around the corner.

Key Benefits

- LSBU now have a clear vision for the long term delivery of Management Information within the university.
- A consistent data set incorporating all Faculties is now held in a data warehouse.
- LSBU can now benefit from a dedicated reporting tool.
- LSBU are now able to drill down on reports to view student details and have the ability to perform some 'cohort' analyses.

Background

The University is keen to maximise its performance in the University league tables. The league tables represent a barometer to the public of a University and can have an impact on:

- Encouraging Students to enrol;
- Employers views of graduates;
- Funding;
- Staff morale.

It is believed that LSBU's position can be improved, in part, by the better collection and integration of the data that is reported. The IT strategy identified that a data warehouse was essential to complete this integration from the key corporate systems of: Student Records, Human Resources and Finance.

To supplement this work, LSBU also purchased IBM Cognos Data Manager and the IBM Cognos Business Intelligence (BI) suite, to provide a platform for Management Information (MI) reporting.

The Problem

LSBU began with an ambitious data warehouse project, however, a series of stumbling blocks meant that this project stalled. The main reasons for this were:

- A lack of clarity regarding requirements/priorities;
- A lack of sponsorship from the University.

Simpson Associates was subsequently asked to complete a 'health check' of the IBM Cognos development work and to recommend short and medium term requirements and a longer term vision for the delivery of MI within the University. The major shortcomings were that:

1. There was limited resource and skills and experience available in IBM Cognos and BI in general;
2. Data management and reporting was decentralised, which resulted in inconsistencies in what was reported and a duplication of effort University wide;
3. Student record reporting was achieved using Crystal reports over a live QLS system and the performance of the QLS system could be impacted;
4. There was a limited number of Crystal reports being used to manage Student Progression and these had to be created by hand.

The Solution

The response was that Simpson Associates worked with LSBU's internal developers to resurrect the data warehouse and deliver a 'Progression Analysis Tool' as a stepping stone to further work.

"We got a great deal of benefit from Simpson's Solution Architects. There is high value in a role that combines high technical competency and project process knowledge. All work was delivered to a very high standard and I felt confident with the project in their hands."

Mike Cobham, Head of MIS.

Student Progression is a key measure of a University's performance and a critical input to league tables. At LSBU, this data was predominantly sourced from within QLS and compiled in a similar form; this was considered an ideal candidate for phase one of this project. Capitalising on LSBU's previous investment, the technologies utilised were as follows:

- IBM Cognos Data Manager;
- IBM Cognos Framework Manager;
- IBM Cognos Report Studio.

A set of four reports was delivered in readiness for the annual progression reporting process at the end of October. Simpson Associates managed the whole process, from gathering the requirements, to providing a demonstration of the completed product by the critical deadline.

The reports produced show five or more year's worth of progression figures and allow users to drill-down to student details; conditional formatting is incorporated for progression and award targets.

"Having this information available on demand, at my fingertips is invaluable. I can now see what courses are our strongest or where our students are struggling at any time of the year and this allows me to make better informed decisions regarding my actions."

Suzy Kerr Pertič, Pro Dean (Arts and Human Sciences).

Benefits

Some of the deliverables and benefits realised were as follows:

1. A consistent data set incorporating all Faculties, held in a data warehouse, the quality of which is improving as problems with the source data are identified and corrected.
2. A dedicated reporting tool, which has abolished the amount of manual intervention required to collate these reports, ensures that the reports are produced and in a consistent fashion and has reduced costs.
3. A consistent set of reports incorporating all Faculties for showing progression over a five year period. This allows for better analysis of progression by Course, Department, Faculty and the University as a whole.
4. Being able to drill down on these reports to view student details, enables the ability to perform some 'cohort' analyses;
5. A showcase to promote what IBM Cognos can do and which provides a standard for all other projects. Previously these might have gone unnoticed or taken weeks to correct.

"This Progression Analysis Tool marks a first step in producing accessible and 'user friendly' data for the analysis of student progression and retention across the University. We are now looking to build on this important starting point."

Dr Phil Cardew, Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic).

"Simpson Associates are very responsive, deliver value not just in terms of project outputs and inspire confidence too. I am keen to develop a partnership with Simpson Associates and would be pleased to recommend the high quality of service we have received to my peers in other Higher Education Institutions."

Mike Cobham
Head of MIS

Support from Simpson Associates

Simpson Associates are specialists in defining, building and implementing information management solutions, which provide better business understanding and improved business management performance.

Our considerable skills and experience enable long-standing relationships with our clients and we have established long standing partner relationships with IBM, Microsoft and BOARD.

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