Stu3

University of Bedfordshire

CASE STUDY

Full Admissions Solution

Online Application Form; Staff Admissions Hub; Applicant Portal; Agents and Partners Portal; Self-service Maintenance Tools

3x Faster

Application decisions reached more than 3x faster

2x Faster

Applicant offer responses captured 2x faster

Reduction

Significant reduction in applicant queries

11% More

Conditional offers accepted

Secure & Futureproof

WCAG-compliant processes with vastly improved data quality

9% More

Unconditional offers accepted

Book a free consultation **contactus@stu3.co.uk**

Contents

What we delivered

Online Application Form (OLAF)

Ultra-fast, readily configurable & futureproofed, finely tuned to suit each and every programme and applicant type at the institution. Stutalk Integration to university web pages for display of published programme details and 'Apply Now' links.

Applicant, Agent and Partner eVision Portals

User-friendly and secure interaction, allowing easy status review, task interaction, offer response and updates.

“The offer making experience and the quality of applicant data has been much improved thanks to the full Admissions solution. With the introduction of a new Online Application Form, Applicant Portal, Agent/Partner Portal and Staff Admissions Hub, the internal process is now clear and streamlined for staff, the applicant journey is more transparent and easy to engage with for applicants, agents and partners, and staff time previously lost to manual interventions is now freed up for the important business of helping applicants become students.”

Victoria Azubuine | Head of UG Admissions, University of Bedfordshire

Staff Admissions Hub

High-performance, clear and complete to enable streamlined and consistent assessment, decision-making and applicant support right through to ATR; supporting all stages of the entire admissions workflow by providing operational overviews across all applications from any angle, custom worklists that can be assigned to staff through highly responsive allocation capabilities, allowing the right staff to access the right applications with all required information, processes and tools they need at their fingertips.

Suite of easy-to-use eVision maintenance tasks

For futureproofed upkeep and self-service maintenance/publishing of admissions programmes, OLAF content, dashboard & worklist configurations and eVision functional access rights.

“Processing is now more streamlined and I have a much better idea of where we’re at with applications. Applicant assessment is much cleaner - we can engage better with our applicants by passing tasks to them through the Applicant Portal and receiving their responses back into the Staff Admissions Hub rather than through emails; referring applications to academics is more secure and easier to track; inviting applicants to interview and allowing them to choose their own date has been very well received; organising documentation for UKVI is now so simple to do; and our data is better which means we can have greater confidence in our preparedness for HESA returns.”

Sarah Bryans | Head of Admissions & Compliance, University of Bedfordshire

The Challenge

University of Bedfordshire (UoB) Admissions was made up of 5 separate teams, each handling their own set of applications according to fee status or course type, but with the intention that all teams should follow the same process and use the system in the same way to take applications from assessment through to Applicant Transfer.

However, analysis revealed significant deviations driven by course requirements, applicant characteristics and gaps in staff system knowledge, resulting in varying levels of engagement with the Tribal SITS client and eVision tools and numerous labour-intensive manual workarounds. Poor information gathering in the direct application form further compounded this, creating significant rework to request missing information via email and leaving staff to dig through overloaded inboxes to access responses and manually upload documentation.

The overall picture was one of inconsistency and delay to key stages in the admissions process which drove high decision processing times and an inconsistent applicant experience, with the inevitable outcome of low applicant confidence as demonstrated in low response times and low offer acceptance rates.

With the decline in university application numbers seen across the sector in recent years, and in particular the falling number of (high fee-paying) overseas applications, the need to process applications smoothly and efficiently has never been more pronounced, so in early 2023 the University of Bedfordshire contracted Stu3, as independent experts in the Tribal SITS Student Record System system, to design and implement optimal Admissions solutions using the core eVision system functionality to address these issues.

Main Objectives

Move Admissions staff activity to be within eVision

To allow standardised, consistent, efficient practices to be established - with staff given access to the specific functionality that is relevant to their role.

Improve the applicant user experience

So that appropriate information, questions and actions could be presented to applicants through a secure channel, with clarity at the appropriate stages of the application process, driven by the specific programme and applicant attributes.

Overhaul the underlying SITS Admissions reference data sets and structures

To allow best-practice, standardised, streamlined (and in some cases automated) business process solutions to be adopted.

Build a secure Agent & Partner portal

To enable Agents and Partners to better support their applicants through assisting in application form entry, improved process visibility, cleaner applicant tracking and access to assist with outstanding tasks.

The overall aim was to improve the admissions experience for all applicants, agents and partners, building the applicant's trust in the University and ultimately helping to improve recruitment numbers.

Key Features Delivered

Online application form

Stu3 delivered a new high performance direct online application form which is easily configurable for multiple course types and admissions points, to address the issue of applicants starting but not submitting their application and to ensure as much key applicant information and documentation as possible is provided to Admissions at application submission.

This solution incorporates:

- A WCAG 2.2 AA-compliant, user-friendly and intuitive application form
- Improved performance - ultra-fast application form web page load times
- eVision front end for content set up and maintenance:
  - Page-level conditionality: allowing set up of pages for specific applicants only
  - Question-level conditionality: ability to conditionally display questions dependent on course selected and other applicant attributes
- Update content year-on-year as needed in a futureproofed and readily customisable fashion, without the need for complex coding
- Standard SITS eVision toolkit, programmes and operations to deliver all new functionality - configured by Stu3 as independent experts in the Tribal SITS Student Record System
- A smooth and rationalised data transfer process, storing applicant data in best-practice data fields/locations
- Duplicate Matching reconfiguration and fine-tuning for improved student record data quality
- Improved questions, better data capture and functionality for document uploads
- Applicant email address validation for improved email address data quality

> "Thanks to the OLAF we've seen a significant reduction in manual data entry, much better quality data and a noticeable drop in emails because applicants can now supply accurate responses that are validated against clean data tables, and can upload documents direct to their application."

Victoria Azubuine
Head of UG Admissions
University of Bedfordshire

Applicant Portal

Stu3 provided an Applicant Portal solution to provide better interaction between UoB and their applicants through tailored workflows and self-service functions, to drive down enquiries and improve applicant confidence by presenting key information upfront.

This includes functionality for applicants to:

- Check for decisions on their application
- Review correspondence history, including downloading a PDF Offer letter
- Respond to offers (direct applicants only)
- Drill down into each of their UoB applications, regardless of application method, to:
  - Track the progress of their application through a responsive application progress bar
  - Track the progress of their CAS (where relevant)
  - View their submitted application form (direct applicants only)
  - Interact with a list of 'Outstanding Tasks' linked to clearance checks, including:
    - Uploading further information
    - Completing relevant forms and questionnaires (e.g. fee status questionnaires, visa questionnaires, under 18 parental consent forms, reviewing draft CAS content)
    - Booking Interviews - responding to invitations or self-selecting date and time, cancelling and rebooking new dates
    - Paying deposits
    - Responding to offers - accepting, declining, requesting deferral, change of course request, or withdrawing (direct applicants only)
    - Uploading conditional offer evidence
- View previously uploaded documents and upload additional documents
- Contact the Admissions team
- Update personal information
- Search for course information

> "Previously there was a lot of inconsistency in processing and a lot of data errors. Lots of pulling spreadsheets to manage our work, lots of manual data entry and a lot of emails queuing up in overflowing inboxes because we didn't have any way for applicants to upload documents or respond to their offers."

Sarah Bryans | Head of Admissions & Compliance, University of Bedfordshire

Staff Admissions Hub

Creation of an all-encompassing Staff Admissions Hub for all Admissions staff to use throughout the full applicant journey, moving all key Admissions processes out of the SITS Client and into eVision functionality, and removing all manual off-system workarounds.

This solution incorporates:

- Flexible, targeted application intrays/worklists, displayed within team dashboards and defined by application status; assigned to staff roles so staff only see applications they are responsible for, with role-specific functionality for supervisors and standard users
- A visible top-level overview of application counts in each list with capability to drill down
- Advanced attribute filters that staff can apply to further refine applicant lists in real time, and option to store filter combinations as filter profiles for future use
- Workflows with associated eVision tools and dashboards for key Admissions processes including:
  - Decision processing, including adding Pre-Sessional English offers
  - Academic Reviews, scoring and ranking; with associated Academic Staff tools
  - Interview scheduling and self-selection
  - UCAS Confirmation processing
  - Under 18 Parental Consent gathering
  - Fee Status Questionnaires and Assessment
  - Visa questionnaires for UCAS applicants
  - CAS allocation, including draft review option
  - Third Party questionnaires/forms
  - Documentation requests
- Full functionality to open, review and process individual applications (UCAS, DfE and Direct), with applicant information and entry criteria laid out in a user-friendly and organised format; enabling users to access everything needed to process a decision, to request further information from the applicant via their Applicant Portal, and to trigger additional workflows
- Standardised eVision-based admissions processing to ensure all staff follow a standard process, driving improvements in data quality and applicant experience, which required:
  - **A rationalised set of reference data:** e.g. fee status, clearance checks, qualifications, document types, alerts, offer library codes
  - **A rationalised set of underlying processes:** e.g. notification emails, automated clearance check creation/updates, Applicant Portal action activation, standardised flow for decision processing

> "The Admissions Hub means we've got a really good snapshot of what work needs to be done and where to prioritise our staff."

Sarah Bryans | Head of Admissions & Compliance, University of Bedfordshire

Agent & Partner Portal

An Agent and Partner was built to provide Agents and Partners with an overview of applications linked to their students, to enable them to keep track of their progress in real time.

This solution incorporates:

- A dashboard of completed and in-progress applications from their students
- A view of the related applicant's Applicant Portal, with access to perform specified tasks on the Applicant's behalf
- A message board to enable quick notifications from UoB to Agents and Partners
- Functionality to give access to new contacts from their own agency/partnership

Delivering on time and on budget

Stu3 supplied a full project team, overseeing key areas

Project delivery management

Project plans, schedules and sizing estimates; RAID log maintenance; UoB and Stu3 resource scheduling and engagement planning; board attendance and reporting; escalation point for risks and issues.

Business requirements analysis, solution design, build and technical support

Close collaboration with the UoB Admissions Team for requirement capture and practical solution design; regular workshops and show-and-tell sessions; detailed user guides and support documentation; knowledge transfer and handover sessions; IT change requests and board proposals; implementation and deployment planning and assistance.

Testing, training and user support

Unit testing; user acceptance test planning, test scripts and management; user support, knowledge transfer and training (demos, videos and documents).

Early Life Support

Direct access to our team of experts after go-live for ongoing service success, with encouragement towards self-service support in the longer term.

With careful ordering of priority areas, Stu3 incrementally replaced the entire admissions solution through a series of 3 implementations, while also factoring in housekeeping with the removal of old solutions and associated reference datasets to keep things tidy and supportable.

Each stage was timed to coincide with the beginning of an applicant cycle. This approach helped minimise both risk and cost, allowing staff to adapt to changes in functionality in a controlled and considered fashion, and allowing deliverables to be added in a complimentary manner.

“I really enjoyed working with Stu3. We felt we could always ask you anything, no question was too small or too silly! We could always come to you, and you were always so supportive. And genuinely I’m very grateful for that. The whole experience of working with you has been very positive.”

Sarah Bryans | Head of Admissions & Compliance, University of Bedfordshire

Futureproofed and built for change

University admissions is a constantly changing environment. The flexibility in each of the solutions provided by Stu3 will enable UoB to adapt to future changes in the roadmap

- Published programme maintenance tools in eVision linked to Stutalk services that directly update the university's course web page content / apply now buttons
- Tools to flexibly reconfigure and fine-tune questions and help text in the Online Application Form in this ever-changing world of applicant data requirements
- The ability to adjust dashboards and worklists in the Staff Admissions Hub to keep pace with changes in the Admissions team structure
- All solutions have been configured by Stu3, as independent experts in the Tribal SITS Student Record System system, using the standard SITS eVision toolkit, processes and operations - meaning that all constituent elements are fully supported and readily adaptable to any future additional system requirements
- Data housekeeping and legacy-solutions cleanup were factored into the project plans to not only keep things tidy but also improve data quality, system efficiency and long-term supportability

Background on our client

The University of Bedfordshire (UoB) is an internationally recognised institution, established in August 2006 following a merger between the University of Luton and De Montfort University's Bedford campus.

The student population is made up of around 15,000 students from around 115 countries - 99% of home students come from state schools, 58% have parents who didn't attend university, 72% are mature returners to education and 48% are from ethnically diverse backgrounds, under-represented in higher education.

With two main campuses in Luton and Bedford, there is also a large health-teaching provision in Aylesbury at the world-renowned Stoke Mandeville Hospital. UoB is also active globally, with a growing portfolio of international partnerships as far afield as Hong Kong, Trinidad, Vietnam, Oman, Sri Lanka and Guyana.

Stu3

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