## Business challenge

The Australian higher education sector is changing fast, and to compete universities must find new cost-efficiencies and strategies for attracting students. How could The University of Adelaide up its game?

## Transformation

By enabling data-driven decision-making based on greater insight into financials and student enrolment, the university can optimize funding to improve the quality of education it delivers.

**Adam Gardner**
**Manager of Business Intelligence**
**The University of Adelaide**

## Business benefits:

**Offers**
insight into predicted revenue, enabling better decision-making

**Boosts**
competitiveness by revealing ways to improve student retention

**Enhances**
services at a lower cost with a bottom-up approach to budgeting

# The University of Adelaide

## Delivering high-quality education while making every cent count

The University of Adelaide is a world-class tertiary education and research institution committed to delivering high quality and distinct learning, teaching and research experiences. It has 25,000 students and over 3,500 members of staff across three main campuses.

*"IBM Analytics solutions help us make every cent count towards making the university better."*

Adam Gardner
Manager of Business Intelligence
The University of Adelaide

**TRIDANT**
data driving decision making

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## Taking a smarter approach

In the Australian higher education sector, the pressure on universities to think – and operate – more like businesses is increasing. Universities are realizing that reducing operational spend does not have to come at the cost of the quality of education, research and community engagement they deliver – and that improving efficiency can help them to obtain better value for students, educators and researchers alike.

For universities in Australia, retaining students is a priority due to the impact that a poor rate can have on attracting new students and the potential loss of income.

When student numbers at The University of Adelaide plateaued after a period of year-on-year increases, the organization wanted to adjust its strategy. But with limited insight into student enrolment and financials, it was difficult to know where to make changes.



Adam Gardner, Manager of Business Intelligence at The University of Adelaide, explains: "Before, annual budgets were created over a period of six months. Because the final budget was reverse-engineered from a figure that each budget owner had agreed upfront, it was difficult to identify and act on potential savings."

In line with Australian law, The University of Adelaide negotiates an enterprise agreement with its employees, which includes terms about salary increases. Adam Gardner says: "As a people business, salaries are our highest cost. Without visibility of how salaries would change over time according to our enterprise agreement, we could not map the cost to the organization, preventing us from creating effective long-term forecasts."

## Getting a handle on performance

To solve the challenge, the organization decided to replace its manual approach to reporting with an IBM Analytics solution based on IBM Cognos® Business Intelligence and IBM Cognos TM1® software.

The University of Adelaide embarked on a multi-stage, incremental deployment of the analytics solutions, supported by IBM Business Partner Tridant Pty Ltd.

Adam Gardner comments: "We standardized on IBM Cognos Business Intelligence software for self-service and canned reporting, integrated with IBM Cognos TM1 for performance management.

"Tridant understood that we wanted to 'own' the solution once it was deployed, and transferred the expertise we needed to support the platform in house."

Working with Tridant, the university introduced fortnightly payroll reporting for the entire organization, meeting a key operational need. Next, it migrated 150 users of self-service reporting from legacy query tools to the Cognos environment, inspiring the user community to start accessing reports again and offering them greater functionality without the need for extra training.

By replacing multiple spreadsheets with a single, centralized solution, the university has transformed its approach to budgeting and forecasting—dramatically cutting the time and effort involved, and providing unprecedented visibility for its managers.

"With IBM Cognos solutions, we can take a flexible, bottom-up approach to budgeting that enables budget holders to determine if they are obtaining the expected value for their spend," says Adam Gardner.



"Managers will be able to recognize the most efficient departments and replicate effective measures elsewhere. And using Cognos TM1, we can model fluctuating salary budgets to see our true operational costs for the first time."

The university is now in the early stages of using IBM Cognos Disclosure Management solutions to enhance its annual reporting processes, providing a framework for discussions between the corporate level and individual faculties around performance and how it can be improved.

## Putting insights into action

By shrinking its planning cycles, the IBM solution is helping employees at The University of Adelaide work more productively.

Adam Gardner comments: "As a result of the project, we are on our way to reducing the time it takes our departments to create annual budgets from six to three months, an improvement of 50 percent, and monthly forecasting is now also on the table. Instead of focusing on pulling numbers together, our budget owners have more time to think proactively about where we can be more efficient."

By providing access to real-time, dynamic reporting, the university is fostering evidence-based decision-making among its employees. Equipped with deeper insight into the student body and financials, staff can investigate important areas such as student retention, and build strategies that will help the university succeed in the competitive education market.

"We are using our new analytics capabilities to uncover common factors among students most likely to drop out," Adam Gardner elaborates.

"For example, students from a particular educational background might need more support. This will help us develop a strategy for keeping student admissions and retention healthy."

He concludes: "IBM Analytics solutions are helping us to think more like a business, which enables us to deliver high-quality services in a cost-efficient, sustainable way. Ultimately, IBM Analytics solutions help us make every cent count towards making the university a better place to study and work."

## Take the next step

Tridant is one of Australia's largest specialist consulting firms focused on implementing performance management and information management solutions using IBM software, and other market-leading software companies, for both public and private sector organizations. Tridant's expertise spans numerous market sectors including financial services, mining, retail, education, oil and gas and government, and it operates nationally from offices in Australia and Singapore.

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