Case Study

Company Snapshot

Number of users

6 in accounts, 250 remote users

Previous System

Exchequer® and two other systems (Examination payments and Document Storage)

Go Live

August 2020

> "There was one feature that was a completely new concept to us but actually became a key differentiator when choosing systems; that was the ability to create customisable workflows."

Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing embraces a true-cloud solution

Keith Stephenson, Director of Finance and Operations at ISTD, discusses the journey from their previous systems to iplicit.

Tell me about Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing

The Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing is one of the world's leading dance examination boards with the widest range of dance genres available. We are a registered educational charity, supporting and training our members through a wide variety of courses, teaching syllabi and techniques.

We are known for our quality of teaching, our diversity of dance forms, and a passion for raising standards. We put our members - teachers of dance - at the heart of everything we do. Supporting their career development and progression by providing a range of resources, events, training and continuous professional development.

The Society is a registered educational charity, regulated examinations board and membership association. With 5,000 members in 59 countries worldwide, we conduct over 120,000 examinations and 20,000 hours Continuing Professional Development in a normal year.

What are the day-to-day demands that are typically placed upon your finance system?

I think we have a pretty standard set of requirements in day-to-day transaction processing and reporting. However, where we may be a little different from other organisations, of our size, is the sheer volume of transactions. In a normal year, our income will be around £7m, though this is made up of 'penny packets' given that each exam fee is less than £100 and that is the main source of our income.

Add to this the fact that we operate across a dozen or so different dance genres, in 59 countries delivering those 120,000 examinations, the income analysis that we require and comprehensive reporting by region, genre, age group etc mean that we place demands on our finance system that might typically be expected from an organisation many times our size.

Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing

iplicit

What led to your decision to change systems?

There were a number of factors that motivated us to change from our previous system: With approximately 250 examiners working around the globe, it was important for us to have an expense management and timesheet system that could enable them to take more control of their affairs and submit the details accurately and efficiently. We used to have a separate system for examiner payments, but it wasn't ideal.

In a similar vein, we also had another 'bolt-on' system to support Exchequer, for document storage. The end result was that we had three systems that needed three sets of relationships and three sets of maintenance costs in order to keep everything running. The idea of having one integrated system, that could do it all, was very compelling.

What was your key criteria for a new system and why did you choose iplicit over the other systems being considered?

It was actually a former colleague who led the way on the assessment of alternative systems. She looked at Sage, Exact online and a couple of other alternatives, in addition to considering an upgrade to the existing Exchequer system that we had. We both concluded that **iplicit** represented a very good fit for our requirements.

Other than connecting with the examiners and amalgamating the disparate systems into one, that we've already discussed, an underlying driver for change was also the need to move to a true-cloud solution. When we started looking, it wasn't as high up on our agenda as it ended up becoming! At the start, it seemed like a natural progression whereas now, it's an essential requirement to being able to operate within home-working and lockdown restrictions.

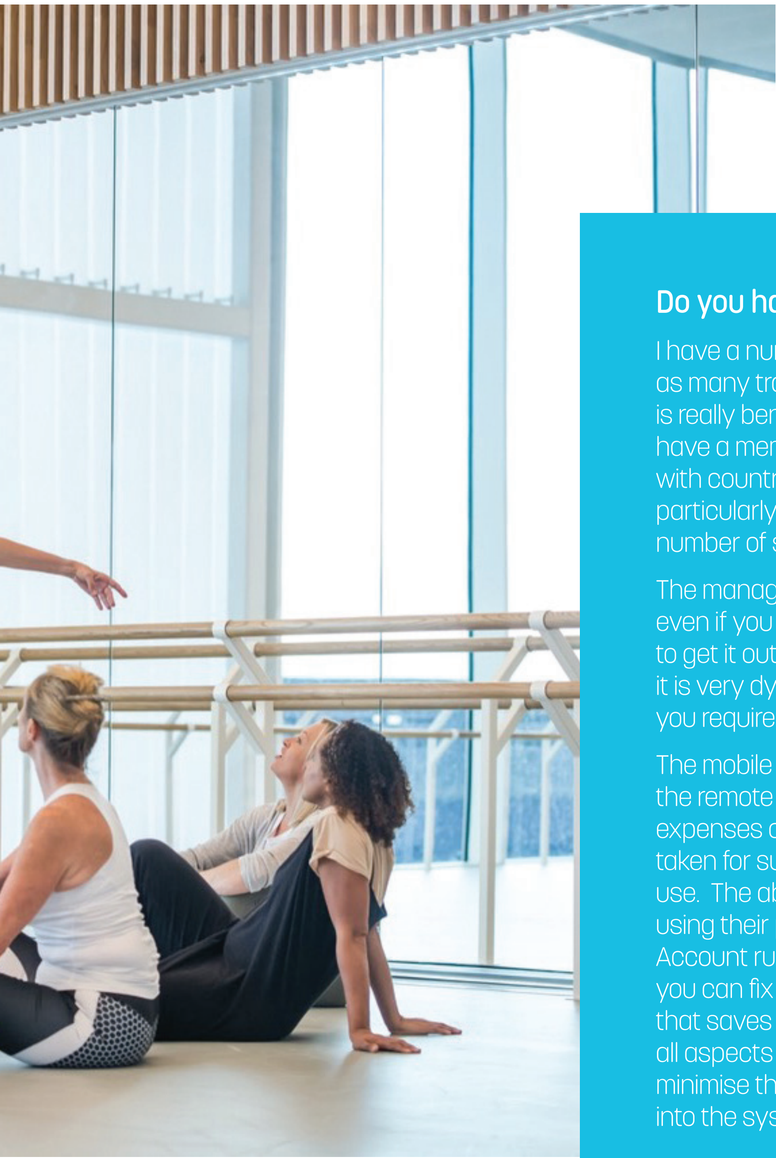
Lastly, there was one feature that was a completely new concept to us but actually became a key differentiator when choosing systems; that was the ability to create customisable workflows. Upon initial introduction it seemed quite intimidating as to just how flexible it could be and how many steps could be configured! However, we realised quite quickly just how powerful this aspect of the system could be for our organisation and want to use it more.

What's also very compelling, around the workflow functionality, is the ability to have a 'sandbox' to preconfigure everything and test the logic before making anything live. Being able to rehearse workflows and play with configurations, without risk, has been invaluable to us and also serves to make us much more confident with customisation.

Since going live with the system, how has your general experience been with both the software and **iplicit** staff?

Very good. Sam Curtis was our lead Implementation Consultant and it was clear that she had a lot of experience with system implementation and training. I was very impressed by the number of options and ideas that she presented to us, while listening to what we needed to achieve. Sam was also very encouraging in the way that the system should be able to do whatever we needed it to do; it was really a question of us, making the decisions as to what we wanted it to be.

Both the online help and the actual staffed support desk have been excellent; we've had very quick responses and resolutions whenever we have called.



Do you have a favourite feature within iplicit?

I have a number of favourite features! Being able to have as many transactional fields as we like on each posting line is really beneficial to the way we work; for instance, we can have a membership number assigned to a transaction, along with country codes, currencies, funds, projects etc. This is particularly important when considering that we still use a number of systems that aren't integrated currently.

The management reporting is good. With our old system, even if you could get the data into the system it was a struggle to get it out in a clear and flexible reporting format. With **iplicit**, it is very dynamic, with the ability to select any columns that you require and basically run it like a pivot table.

The mobile application is also a big favourite. Empowering the remote workers to be able to submit timesheets and expenses can make a significant impact by reducing time taken for submission, along with accountability and ease of use. The ability to attach digital receipts to each submission, using their phone, is great. Also coupling this with Chart of Account rules that says it's a certain type of product where you can fix a department or a cost into a funding project to it; that saves the possibility of error on input. Obviously within all aspects of financial accounting it's extremely important to minimise the opportunities for error when people are inputting into the system.

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Keith Stephenson
Director of Finance and Operations

Changing Finance systems can be quite a daunting prospect; having been through the process, what advice would you give other Heads of Finance who are contemplating upgrading their system?

This might not seem helpful, but the first place I'd start is to say that however long you think it's going to take, plan for it to be double that! And that's not saying anything negative about the system, it's just the time it takes to get space in people's diaries - to think about change and new ways of working. No matter how slick the technology is and no matter how focused you are on making this implementation happen, it requires adoption and changes in habit and for other people to embrace it. At the end of the day any system is only as good as the people who are running it.

For our organisation, one of the biggest challenges was also one of the areas from which we really benefit, once the change has occurred; that being the 250 remote users and bringing them with us when it comes to technology improvements.

From a technical standpoint, we also had to contend with a considerable number of loose ends within our existing set up - dangling debits and cringing credits among many other items that had found their way onto a very long backlog of to-do's! Many of these loose ends were exposed when we started the process of closing one system down in order to be ready for the new way of working. I suppose, the advice here would be to allow time to get your existing house in good order, before migrating from an old system to new.

And, put together an implementation team. Make sure they have sufficient bandwidth to do the job properly.

> **"The idea of having one integrated system that could do it all was very compelling."**

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