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UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY FUND CASE STUDY

The University of Salford launches its Education Technology Fund to reduce digital exclusion during coronavirus lockdowns.

BACKGROUND

The University of Salford Education Technology Fund (SET Fund) was established to support students who are unable to access or cannot afford a laptop to assist with their studies. Successful applicants can select a laptop from a restricted range available through the University of Salford's nominated hardware supplier.

New and existing students studying for a foundation degree, undergraduate degree, or postgraduate degree can apply, including part-time students.

THE PROBLEM

During the coronavirus pandemic, university campuses - including libraries - were closed which created barriers for those students without readily available digital access. Increasing digital inclusion has always been important for the University, but it suddenly became a high priority.



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The SET Fund aimed to solve this problem by providing laptops to eligible students, but in anticipation of an influx of applications, the University of Salford required a portal to manage this together with digitally enabled back-office processes to support end to end delivery.

The portal would link each application to the student record, and needed to be rolled out in a short time scale to reduce the impact the coronavirus pandemic would have on students' education. The aim was to reduce digital exclusion, designing a solution that delivered a positive experience for our students and colleagues.

THE SOLUTION

Crimson enabled students to apply via a Microsoft Power Platform portal, which linked to their university email address for verification. As the student record is held within Dynamics 365, relevant information on the student's course, demographics and more could be integrated by entering their course and other relevant data based on their University of Salford Roll Number.

Once the student had applied, the details were then exported from the University of Salford system and sent to the nominated supplier. The supplier then sent

the data back to the University of Salford, which could be imported back into Dynamics 365 for analysis and reporting. Data on budget, spend, and session dates is available through management information reporting, and the opening and closing of sessions is controlled by the University of Salford administrative staff.

Despite a tight timescale to implement the Technology Fund, Crimson built a solution on Microsoft's Power Platform in under eight weeks, alongside a supporting application process in Dynamics 365. This reduced the impact on those students without the required technology at home while learning remotely due to the COVID-19 lockdown. By offering these students support, both academic performance and student satisfaction were benefitted.

Crimson and the University of Salford utilised a 'test and learn' approach using agile methods, helping the speed of delivery. This approach was well received by all involved and maintained a rapid deployment speed for all changes.

THE OUTCOME

1186 awards were made to students between October 2020 and July 2021. The fund is now set up in anticipation of the 2021/2022

intake of students, following a review of student feedback and improvements to the student experience and back-end processes based on lessons learnt. University of Salford employees have been trained on the system, and both the University and the student body are happy with the results thanks to the rapid development and overall success of the project.



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"The collaboration between the University and Crimson has been excellent. Thanks to the technology fund and our partnership, the University has been able to increase digital inclusion for our students and remove barriers to education. "

Nasrin Fazal,
University of Salford.

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