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Carlow College drives digital transformation with Ellucian

Radically embracing technological innovation to support institutional functionality and student retention.

Carlow College, St. Patrick's, is Ireland's second oldest university-level institution and currently serves a student body of 700 students. Founded in 1782, Carlow has distinguished itself as a premiere institution for students seeking an education in the humanities.

As a smaller institution, Carlow College was proficient in manually managing student administration using paper files and excel spreadsheets. To improve the student experience and aid faculty efforts, the college needed to acquire a reliable student information management system. More importantly, Carlow needed a solution that would scale into the future and seamlessly adapt alongside the institution.

Carlow College chose to implement Ellucian Quercus—a SaaS solution that would provide deeper insight into the student experience, from enrolment through graduation, in addition to generating vital metrics necessary to make strategic decisions.

CARLOW COLLEGE
ST. PATRICK'S

Enrolment

700 students

Solution

Ellucian Quercus

Results

- Saved €240,000 from admissions processing, data entry reduction, reporting, and curriculum management

- 2% decrease in student attrition

- Entire solution investment regained in roughly one year

Understanding the challenge

Until 2018, Carlow didn't have standard processes in place for managing student information. Each department followed different data procedures, manually inputting student information into spreadsheets and paper files. This meant the risk of data duplication was high, accessing information off-campus was laborious, and simple reporting tasks posed many challenges.

To fully understand how to succeed, Carlow prioritised an internal discovery process with the intention of identifying key elements of their infrastructure that needed improvement. The result—a digital transformation of the entire institution; one that was cloud-based, scalable, and accessible.

IT and Student Systems Manager Carolyn Glynn explains, "We needed a system that would change with us and help us carry out our processes, not one that dictated those processes. Having a system that is easy to use and simplifies processes, rather than adding further steps, was crucial in order for it to be adopted by our teaching staff."

After integrating Quercus, Carlow now enjoys a simple user interface and intuitive user experience as students apply, register for courses, progress through the curriculum, receive examination results, graduate, and become members of the alumni community. Data is leveraged at every stage of the student lifecycle, which enables Carlow to nurture relationships and improve academic success.

Streamlining student intake

Without a comprehensive solution to manage student information, it was difficult for the college to understand how the student experience needed to evolve.

With Quercus ready to provide a clear picture of all students, the college was able to integrate their Central Admissions Office (CAO) which significantly expanded their ability to track student progress due to the system being remotely accessible.

"Quercus immediately gave us a much clearer picture of how we were intaking our students. We can now begin planning courses and timetables as soon as a student accepts their place," says Glynn.

Shining a light on the student experience

Quercus enables student, staff, and faculty to easily find and understand the information they need. With student registration and enrolment now conducted online, staff have early visibility of student engagement, numbers, and reports.

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CAROLYN GLYNN
IT and Student Systems Manager, Carlow College

"We are now well positioned to monitor student retention and gaps in engagement, allowing for strategic decision making," says Glynn. "A new learning retention officer has been recruited to help deliver student success, as the reporting capability in Quercus enables us to identify students who need additional support."

In addition to gaining better insight into student engagement, Quercus also enables Carlow to improve the student experience, providing a central place for students to view their records, grades, and financial information. Students can also pay any fees or bills on the platform. The cloud-based system is accessible on personal devices such as phones, tablets, and laptops.

"With the need for more remote learning, we actually wouldn't be able to operate without Quercus. We're able to easily monitor attendance and assignments for both lecturers and professional support staff within the college because we have a central point of information for everybody," says Glynn.

Simple integration

Integration and scalability were two key components of how Carlow selected a solution. With a small IT department, the solution had to be intuitive with minimal maintenance and upkeep.

Glynn adds, "Budgets are hugely important, so being able to make further tweaks as we grow as an institution, without investing in additional systems, was a key benefit of the Ellucian solution."

Due to Quercus' cloud-based environment, Carlow can freely experiment with processes and procedures, giving the institution more freedom to grow and expand in new ways.

Investments, insights, and success

Following the Quercus integration, Carlow earned their investment back in just over a year. Through the initiative, the college saved €240k worth of business benefits stemming from admissions processing, a 2% decrease in student attrition, data entry reduction, reporting, and curriculum management.

Combined with the CAO integration, Quercus has been a key part of Carlow's digital transformation, offering accurate figures and enabling course, module, and timetable planning. Ellucian continuously provides backend maintenance which mitigates security risks and increases functionality. Having an accessible, cloud-based solution has been critical, particularly in the "new normal" of remote working and study.

"Put simply, we would not be able to operate without Ellucian Quercus today. It is our central point for student information...data is now available in one location at the click of a button," says Glynn.
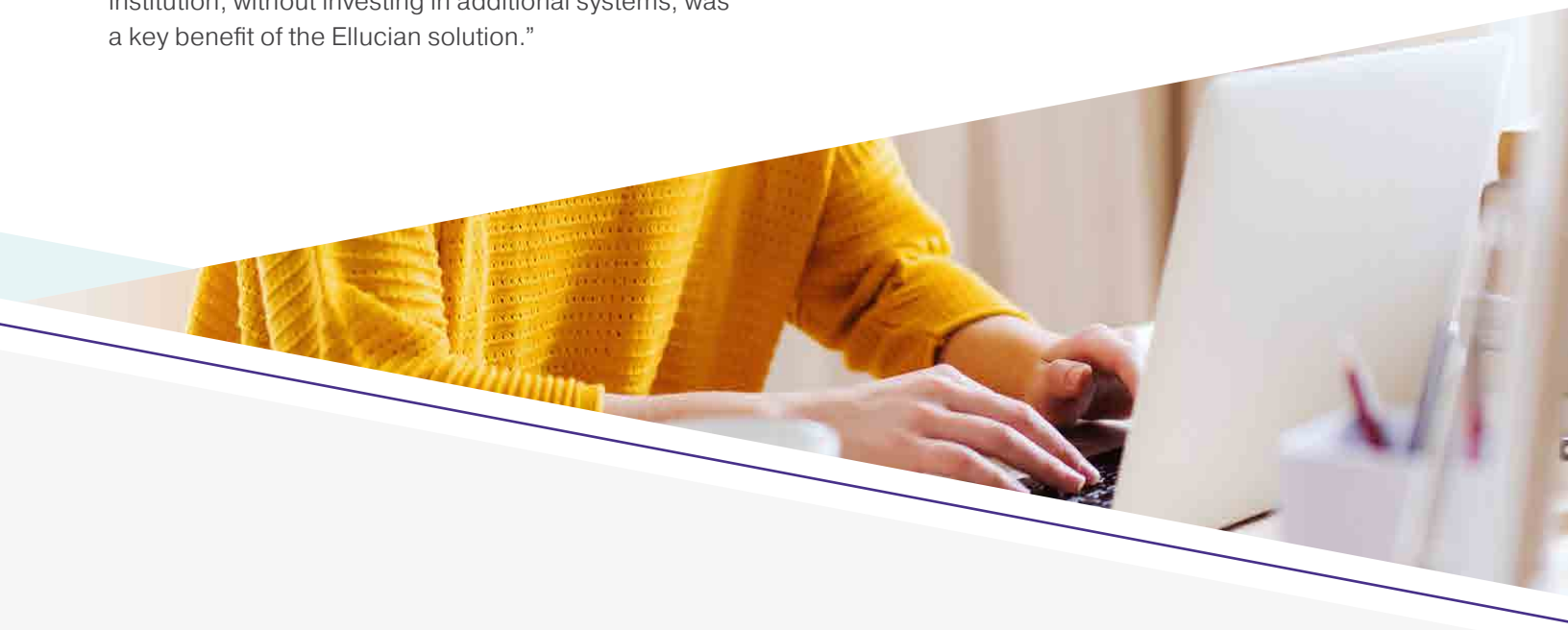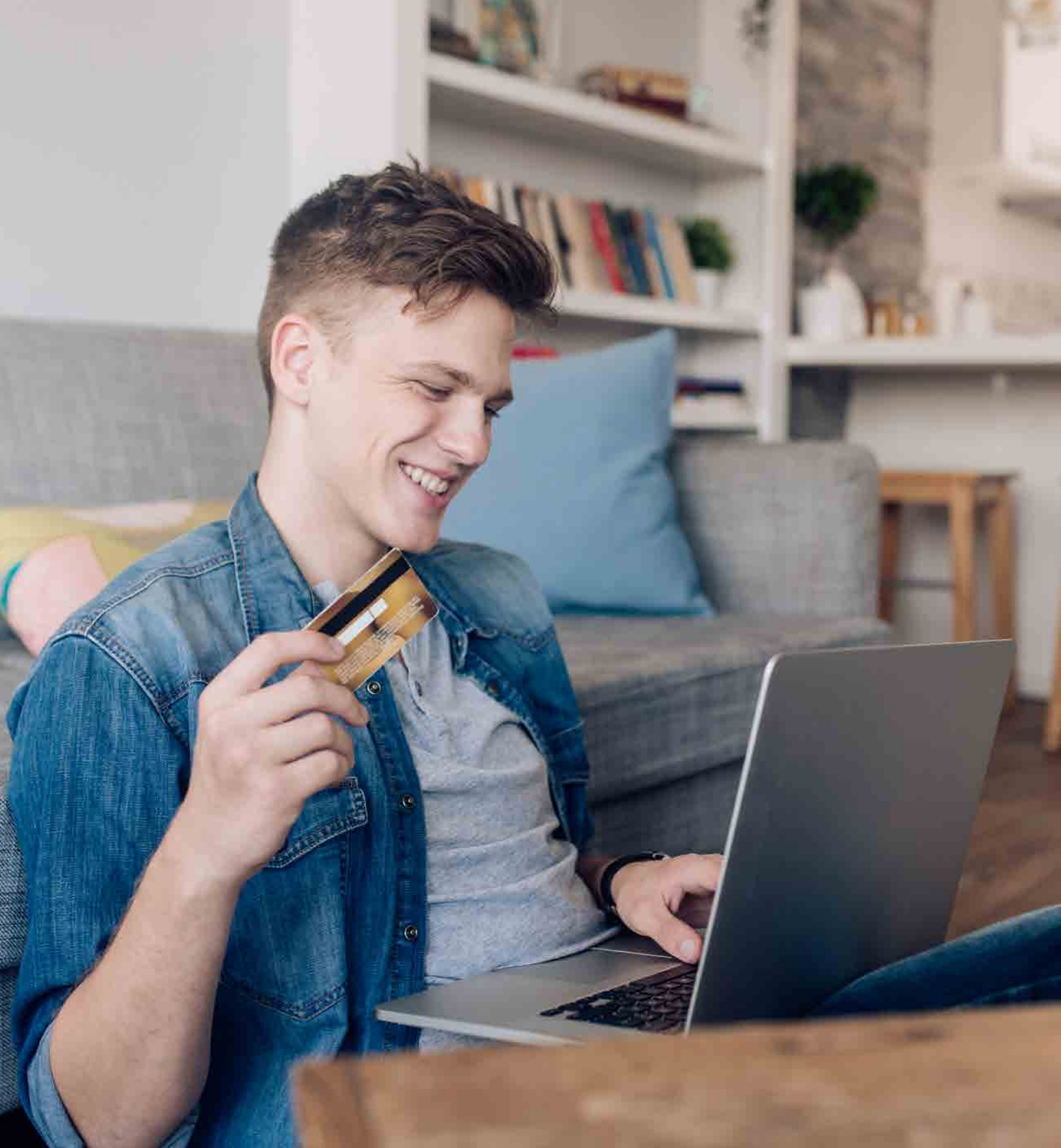
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