



CASE STUDY:

Cloud system sets the gear for growth

Royal Holloway moves Ellucian Banner in to the cloud to support future plans

At Royal Holloway, University of London, a top 25 UK institution, cloud-based systems are helping the university evolve and adapt to meet the expectations of modern higher education students.

As institutions welcome more digitally savvy, mobile-first students onto campus, the onus is on learning providers—not students—to change. With ambitions of growth and the added burdens that will place on the IT infrastructure, the only logical solution for Royal Holloway was to take its key systems to the cloud.

Having used Ellucian Banner on-premise since 2004, and having seen its student population almost double over the same period, Royal Holloway needed a solution that would continue to grow with the institution and adapt with the changing behaviours of its learners.

Compared to the previous generation of students, now most of Royal Holloway's student population live within a two-hour journey time of the institution, and so students will commute in rather than live on campus. At the same time, many students need to work part-time to supplement their finances, want to engage in extracurricular activities and of course wish to perform well in their degree programmes.



Royal Holloway

is a top 25 UK university based in Egham, Surrey.

Enrolment

10,500 students

Challenge

Futureproof university systems and enhance student wellbeing

Solution

Banner™ by Ellucian

Result

A scalable, cloud-first solution that supports the university's digital futures ambitions, and provides the solid foundation to make further enhancements to deliver a student centred experience.

Robert Westcott, Director of Information Technology at Royal Holloway, comments, "Everything we do, we have got to try and do it in a way that maximises an individual student's time on campus, to really leverage this, and at the same time enable students to take the campus with them and access all the services they need when off-site."

A journey of firsts

Being the first UK institution to take Ellucian Banner from an on-premise solution to the cloud was a big step forward for Royal Holloway. With assurances and support from Ellucian, the institution felt ready to step out beyond their comfort zone. The journey, which began in March 2018, was completed in seven months and went live in October 2018.

"Moving to the cloud was a lot less intimidating than what the market portrayed it to be 12 to 24 months ago," says Westcott, who credits the success of the project to joint efforts and teamwork from Ellucian and Royal Holloway project teams.

The approach undertaken by the team was to match members of the Ellucian team with corresponding members of staff at Royal Holloway, pairing them based on skill level and resource to create a true working partnership.

The team at Ellucian went the extra mile by constantly giving new perspectives, ideas and proposing solutions to queries

which arose during the project. Westcott explains, "It is this kind of 'can-do', collaborative spirit that is appreciated and should be kept alive. Migrating a key system to cloud, especially for the first time, is a daunting experience. The fact that we could rely on the Ellucian team and trust them was really important to us."

Feeling on cloud nine

Moving Ellucian Banner on-premise to cloud has given Royal Holloway access to a wealth of support and options in addition to computing power through Ellucian's partner, Amazon Web Services (AWS).

Royal Holloway was impressed by the ease with which the project was executed. Royal Holloway's Strategic Projects Director, Mike Johnson, described his experience with the upgrade process: "The upgrade to Banner 9 - following the move to cloud, was infinitely easier - from our perspective. Without the availability of global resource, we would have been looking at significant downtime for the platform to get those upgrades in place."

To have completed the same upgrade on-premise, Royal Holloway would have been looking at a lot of point release updates that would have necessitated an enormous amount of additional testing. By being on cloud, Royal Holloway was able to take a pre-production environment to its end versions and test, make sure they were happy with it and then get the production environment up to that standard with minimal disruption.

Johnson continues: "The only way we could have done this was through working with the team at Ellucian. We had a four-day migration run with work being done on the platform 24 hours a day. We could not have resourced that here. Even if we threw significant financial resource at something similar, we simply would not have had the expertise and the key IT stakeholders available 24/7 to support us when there was an issue. It was a world apart from we are used to doing here upgrade wise."

As well as minimal disruption, the effect of the 'go live' at the university was almost invisible. Commenting on the seamless transition, Westcott added: "No one seemed to even know we had gone live, which is kind of what you want in a way, apart from the people who saw the new interface. To experience no disruption during a project of this scale and size is impressive. It is one of the most successful projects I have been associated with."

A learning curve

Over the period of the project that Royal Holloway spent working with Ellucian, the team certainly learnt a lot and gained new perspectives. Reflecting back on their journey, Mike Johnson shares some of the key lessons learnt.

"Know your environment," says Johnson. "Four months of my life last year was spent documenting what our environment looked like." Only by documenting all the current integrations, configurations and connectivity can an institution know what they need to migrate. It might also be that by moving to cloud the list can be simplified. In Royal Holloway's case, they went from having around

1,400 in house developments supporting integrations and specific functionality down to around 600. Having fewer customisations means that institutions spend less to maintain them whilst also enabling an easier migration.

Johnson also encourages institutions to "Test, test and test some more. Don't just test the system, test your processes, your user journeys and understand the functional usage. Check the interactions with external vendors, and third-party integrations like UCAS and HESA. Keep testing until you're really satisfied and the platform works in the way you expect."

Johnson fully endorses the support received from Ellucian "There was a great deal of collaborative problem solving with Ellucian and ourselves and this worked both ways."

"The fact that Ellucian was so supportive was really important to us. The team should be proud of the fact that they did an excellent job. I would say this is one of the best vendor partnerships I have seen to deliver a project of this scale and ambition—on time and on budget."

ROBERT WESTCOTT, Director of Information Technology, Royal Holloway



Ahead in the Cloud

For Royal Holloway, migrating to the cloud provides the firm foundation they need to make further enhancements, which include more self service functionality to enhance the student experience, and also support them in fulfilling their digital transformation ambitions.

Royal Holloway has invested in a cloud first solution that can grow with the university, but more importantly will grow proportionally to its size without being hugely dependent on on-premise resource, whilst also leveraging scalability and flexibility. With less labour intensive processes, this means that as the university grows the costs remain relatively constant, placing the university in a much better position going forwards.

With this solid platform built by experts in higher education, Royal Holloway is able to stay ahead - whether this is meeting changing regulatory requirements, or changing students' needs - work in more agile ways and achieve much more. Furthermore, as Royal Holloway grows the wellbeing of their student population remains at the centre, enhancing the student experience today and in the years to come.



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