

Sheffield University and Primavera:

- a higher education in project collaboration



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Project management highlights:

- Primavera used to plan, organise and report on project progress
- Web-based system gives departments real-time access to information
- Substantial time-savings achieved, with internal communication greatly improved



Sheffield University College campus

Located in the UK's fourth largest city, Sheffield is one of the top twenty universities in Europe, and has 70 academic departments, 54 research units, and almost 1,300 members of academic staff. In the past few years, the University has made a substantial investment in new buildings and refurbishment, while a number of internal processes have also been restructured in light of budget pressures and regulatory demands.

Like many universities across the UK, Sheffield faces the continued challenge of trying to increase student numbers, while balancing finances and maintaining a high standard in both teaching and research. In addition, regulations on reporting, data collection, auditing and inspection are always a concern, diverting time away from core activities.

With a campus stretching over one mile, internal communication and project delivery had long been a tricky business, and when the University proposed a new procurement system, project managers at Sheffield saw trouble ahead. Departments would now be required to justify the strategic merit and viability of proposed projects before proceeding with them, and it was felt that a new project management system would be needed to meet the challenge.

Teams had previously been using Microsoft Project to manage projects, however the software did not have sufficient scope to monitor multiple projects. The University evaluated a number of solutions that could better indicate project cost overruns or delays – and their effect on the programme as a whole – and opted for Primavera.

Educating users and customising reports

To gain acceptance of the new system, Milestone Ltd (a Primavera Authorised Representative – PAR) organised a series of workshops designed to educate staff on how the new system would integrate with the existing University processes. The 20 'regular' users of the software, primarily project managers, would then be able to feed information from the system back to the teams carrying out the work.

Milestone helped Sheffield setup the portfolio of projects, and trained users in the respective Primavera modules, while also developing customised reports to closely mirror the department's existing ones.

“The new system meant that staff would be working in a completely different way, so it was important to ensure they were happy with the proposed changes and felt comfortable working with the Primavera software,” explained Morrison, Continuous Improvement Manager for Sheffield University.

“By conducting workshops in advance, we were able to get staff to support the system from the outset, meaning that the rollout itself was relatively problem free.”

Real-time information and online reporting

The University is now using the Primavera system to plan, organise and report on the progress of ongoing projects. As the system is web-based, it allows different academic departments to gain real-time access to information, ensuring that all staff are up-to-date regarding project status.

The system is also used for tracking project changes, helping users provide senior management with a snapshot view of the overall programme. This dashboard can be drilled down to examine budget distribution, with comparative graphs allowing management to optimise allocation according to the projects with the most strategic worth and viability.

“The Primavera solution has enabled us to ensure that all staff are kept in the loop and given relevant information on current project activity,” explained Morrison. “It has also helped improve communication between departments and stakeholders, and between the project teams and departments themselves.”

The new system also allows staff involved in management meetings to produce online reports, making substantial time savings and allowing for a more collaborative approach. The meetings themselves are also conducted using Primavera, and any schedules determined are then emailed out to academic departments via the software.

“Thanks to the Primavera system, collaboration and information sharing at the University has been greatly improved,” added Morrison. “Staff are now able to spend more time on their core activities and less time reporting, and the solution is flexible enough to accommodate future regulatory or internal changes.”

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