# Transforming University finance with cloud Unit4 ERP

## University of Salford

Unit4 Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) in the cloud is helping the University of Salford improve technology access for its 4,000 staff and 400 regular ERP users. A Unit4 customer since 1998, the University chose to continue its journey with Unit4 as part of their cloud strategy to create a more agile and flexible institution for research, teaching, and administrative staff alike. So far, the University has been able to:

- Reduce the impact on IT teams by removing maintenance requirements through the SaaS platform approach.
- Ensure that the ERP system is always up to date through automatic upgrades without downtime.
- Provide a platform for easy extendability via extension kit.
- Expedite and improve report building and sharing across the stakeholder ecosystem.

### Supporting the Fourth Industrial Revolution

The University of Salford is a global, industry-focused research and teaching university with more than 23,000 students and 170,000 alumni worldwide. Headquartered in Manchester, UK, the institution focuses on the challenges and opportunities presented by the technologies of the "fourth industrial revolution."

The university's digital strategy is focused on making technology more inclusive and creating an ecosystem which allows all staff and students to utilize digital tools. It also prioritizes availability — ensuring that these tools are always available to users. Because of this, the institution has made cloud a core part of its approach to digital transformation, so that the whole institution becomes agile for staff and students alike.

"In particular, following the pandemic, we wanted to be much more agile for our staff so that they could continue working from home. Our IT team had the desire for us to move to cloud-based services to facilitate that," says Michelle Williams, Finance Systems Manager, University of Salford.

These ambitions and challenges all came together in what Michelle describes as a "perfect storm" that informed the decision to migrate to a new cloud ERP solution.

Unit4 was the natural choice of a partner. Michelle says, "We chose to stay with Unit4 ERP for our cloud journey because we've been with them since 1998. We're very comfortable with Unit4 ERP and find the solution very versatile."

**Industry**
Higher Education

**Location**
Manchester, UK

**Size**
Approx. 23,000 students; 4,000 staff; 400 regular ERP users

**Product**
Unit4 Cloud Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)

### Challenges

A digital strategy based on a principle of inclusivity and ensuring everyone in the University can utilize technology optimally made a move to the cloud essential.

### Metrics

**10**
MONTHS
To implement new cloud solution from contract signed to go-live

**0**
DOWN TIME
Always on, with automated upgrades, enabling a better user experience and greater ease of customization

# "We didn't look at any other suppliers for moving to cloud. Unit4 seemed a very sensible solution for the move. Working with the cloud team and our Customer Success Manager especially has been excellent. Getting an accountant away from an Excel spreadsheet is quite difficult but it's starting to happen — the revolution is here!"

**Michelle Williams**
Finance Systems Manager, University of Salford

It works well for our processes, gives us the ability to do things how we want, and create the efficiencies we need. There was no need to look at any other suppliers for moving to cloud — it didn't make sense to do so."

## A full cloud migration in under a year

The University's ERP migration was complete in around 10 months, from signing the contract in August 2021 to go-live in mid-June 2022. Michelle ascribes the speed and smoothness of the migration — which was most difficult at the outset in securing full organizational alignment — to the collaborative abilities of Unit4's cloud team and Customer Success Manager.

She says, "That service has been really good — it's become a very good partnership. Going full SaaS with Unit4 is worth it for the comfort of knowing they're looking after our system, helping and supporting us through the process of moving to the cloud."

One of the most obvious benefits for the whole organization — and the IT team in particular — has been that the system is always up to date, ensuring that the University always has the full power of the latest release available. "Being on the cloud has really reduced impact on a lot of our staff. In the past, when we've had to do work on on-premises databases for upgrades and maintenance we've had to suspend usage. With cloud, we never have to withdraw service for updates, which is brilliant," Michelle says.

## Benefits from day one

The benefits of a new cloud ERP solution are already apparent across the University. There is less need for internal IT teams to manage customizations, changes, and maintenance, so they have more time to focus on other projects like developing technology for students and implementing accessible tools for all.

Michelle again: "In particular, we've reduced the impact of the ERP system on our Applications team, enabling them to concentrate on creating new tools for our students. That is where their focus really needs to be, not in the back office. And once we've finished moving over to Azure, we'll see an even greater reduction in impact for the whole IT department."

But the principal impact in terms of benefits has been on the finance team. "It's strange now to talk about this in terms of benefits, because before we moved to cloud, our finance team's biggest worry was that they'd lose access to desktop tools. It was quite a big change for them! 'How will we get information when we're not on desktop?' But we've since built new information browsers, which provide much greater functionality than old-style desktop browsers ," says Michelle.

## 'You wouldn't believe the difference it makes'

With information now more easily accessible and in the correct format, it is easier for staff to work with. Functionality is available to more users. Decision makers are in a better position to review information, direct funding to the relevant area, and, ultimately  empower the university to create a better environment for staff and students.

Michelle explains, "The reports we can now build using the Unit4 Analyzer have been excellent, and we're now starting to roll this functionality out to some of the budget holders themselves, so they can build their own detailed reports, rather than have the Finance staff do it for them. It's really nice to see — you wouldn't believe the difference it makes! Getting an accountant away from Excel sheets is quite difficult, but it's starting to happen."

The University of Salford has big plans for their new solution over the coming months as teams become more and more comfortable with the cloud-based ERP. "Our plan over the next two or three years is to explore the AI side, the eExtension Kit, and Wanda [Unit4's virtual assistant]. But we're also looking to progress with things like E-Procurement and Financial Planning & Analysis so we can deliver truly great service to our users," Michelle says.

UNIT4
In business for people