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.
“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.

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.

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.