

CASE STUDY | STUDENTS' UNION

# The Students' Union at UWE



Sector  
Students' Union



Previous Finance System  
Exchequer



Number of iplicit users  
4 full users



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August 2023

## iplicit saved the finance team 30 hours a week and was 'head and shoulders above any other system' for The Students' Union at UWE

"If you come at it with an open mind, iplicit is head and shoulders above any other system I've had proposed or have dealt with previously," says Michael Blades of The Students' Union at UWE.

He estimates his organisation has saved 30 hours a week of labour by installing iplicit's software – even while in the system's bedding-in phase.

The union supports the social life, sporting activities and welfare needs of tens of thousands of students at the University of the West of England – making for a complicated finance operation. It has to deal with a high volume of transactions, accounting for two legal entities and the complications of partial VAT.



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Head of Finance



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## The scale of the task

“We have 32,000 students on our campuses to deal with and support,” says Michael, the union’s Head of Finance.

“Our finance function is critical in making sure we give the best service, from welfare support to ensuring students can take part in all their sports and club activities – and we’ve got a nursery and a commercial operation, so it’s quite a diverse sector to deal with.

“In a normal year, we do about 40,000 transactions. There are a lot of demands on the finance system because we have a commercial team, a nursery which needs to do a lot of invoicing and we deal with community and charitable activities, with a lot of grant funding to distribute to budgets.”

## Why the union changed systems

The demand on the union’s finance team far outstripped the capabilities of its Exchequer accounting software.

“With 40,000 transactions annually to be processed by three people, that’s too many transactions to enter manually,” says Michael.

“The same goes for invoicing for the nursery. I have to generate around 60-70 invoices a month, plus any credits or additions.

“Everyone everywhere is under the cosh at the moment, so anything you can do for efficiency is absolutely top of the agenda.

“We’re a very agile, quick organisation. It’s our unique selling point in our sector because if we as a student union can’t react quicker than the university itself, why would they give us money for a lot of our activities?

“Our previous solution couldn’t offer the capabilities that I knew were out there with other systems – and the customer service was not up to scratch.”



**iplicit’s** bank reconciliation features have saved “a good day or two a month. Previously it was all very manual, but **iplicit’s** automation can pick up about 90% of our transactions.

**Michael Blades**  
Head of Finance

## Why choose iplicit?

The recommendations of other students’ union finance heads – including Jane Williams of Reading Students’ Union – helped lead Michael to iplicit.

“A couple of my opposite numbers in other students’ unions use iplicit and rave about it, so I decided to take a look at it,” says Michael.

The fact that iplicit was a rapidly growing challenger to the big software brands was also a factor.

“A growing business is always a better, more reactive, responsive and responsible company, I find,” he says.

“With a big corporation, there’s a risk that the customer service suffers and the system itself doesn’t get developed in a way that fits the customer’s requirements.”

He adds: “In our old system, I was proposed a solution to fix an issue with one of our bank recs – but we’d have to unreconcile 12 years’ worth of payments and then manually reconcile them again! I said, ‘Did you really just recommend that to me?’

“That sold me on saying goodbye. And with iplicit, I haven’t encountered that level of disdain again.”

**iplicit** is easily saving the union’s finance team **30 hours a week**

## The experience with iplicit

“Irfan Chaudhary, the iplicit Senior Implementation Consultant who was assigned to us, is an absolute star,” says Michael.

“I’ve had some of the most positive interactions I’ve ever had with any form of software business. He was extremely knowledgeable and if he didn’t know something, he wouldn’t make it up or guess. “The same goes for Adam Clark, Product Specialist.

“In a lot of software companies, you have the IT side and then separately you have the ‘system purpose’ side – in this case, the accountants. But with iplicit, the knowledge of both was very much integrated and that helped me to shape our system.

“I had to deal with having one less member of staff at the busiest time of year – with audit, Freshers Week and the accounting system change all happening at once – but not a single deadline was missed and there wasn’t a single hiccup with iplicit to hold up getting it running.

“Everyone’s got used to it – and that’s from the end users’ side as well, where we have budget managers getting used to actually signing off the invoices via the system.”

## ‘We’ve saved 30 hours a week already’

iplicit is easily saving the union’s finance team 30 hours a week, says Michael.

“We installed the system just as I’d had to lose half a full-time post from the team,” he says.

“We absorbed the 20 hours that person had been doing and on top of that, I could quite comfortably say we’ve saved another 10 hours a week. And we’re still in the bedding-in period.”

He has a host of favourite features in iplicit.

“I’m trying to make use of its importing function in every way I can,” he says.

“Possibly the best feature about the importer is that you can do a preview and undo things before you commit anything to the final system.

“In other systems, you can create a lot of confusion if you import something you didn’t really want to, or some other error creeps in, but with iplicit it’s never final until you commit. A lot of other systems don’t account for the human factor.

“There are still complete audit trails and the auditors will be very happy with the way I can present my numbers but iplicit has thought about the human entering the information.”

iplicit’s bank reconciliation features have saved “a good day or two a month”, says Michael.

“Previously it was all very manual, but iplicit’s automation can pick up about 90% of our transactions,” he adds.

“We have a purchasing consortium, so we get one statement a month to cover about 400 invoices. Now, I can import that in one quick click on iplicit, rather than type in each item and verify it individually. The same goes for a lot of the invoice generation for the nursery.

“I’ve also got to deal with payment reconciliation so I can import all my payments in one go.”





Michael is starting to make further time savings by using iplicit's budgeting system and fixed asset module.

With so much work done by automation, the finance team have been able to concentrate their time and energy on the bigger picture.

"iplicit deals with mass information and the transactional side, enabling us to deal with more of the strategic side," says Michael.

"It's really helping us to make use of the data, rather than be caught up with data entry."

## Advice on upgrading

Switching finance systems can be daunting. Michael urges other organisations to review their existing processes and be open-minded about taking the opportunity to change them.

"In our sector, some unions drive up the number of users because they insist on including all their club and society presidents as team users, but those people don't need to access the finance system every day," he says.

"My biggest advice to anyone – in our sector in particular – is to take the politics and the old, dogmatic policies out of it.

"If you do that, I guarantee the company and the students will benefit from cost savings."

## Accounting software for student unions

The power and flexibility of iplicit's cloud accounting software has made it the choice of a growing number of the UK's best students' unions – including those of Oxford Brookes, Reading, Kent, and Hull.

We understand how complex students' union finances can get, with their multiple legal entities, fund management and differing VAT requirements. iplicit simplifies matters, making light work of administrative tasks and providing accurate, real-time information on which to base decisions.

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