



COMPANY DETAILS:

City Lit is the largest educational college within the UK, offering over 5,000 courses ranging from languages to arts and music. City Lit also specialises in courses helping those affected by learning difficulties and is one of the few colleges that has courses designed especially for those with hearing difficulties.

Challenge:

- Antiquated finance system with 'three part' ordering book
- Manual processing of invoices
- Difficult to reconcile and get reporting for management reports

Approach:

- Phased project with core financial system being stage 1
- Stage 2 included integration with the student record system

Results:

- Saved £50k a year on outsourcing costs
- Budget holders have autonomy to see financial details, opening up information to the wider organisation
- Finance team more focussed on helping to drive efficiencies and improvements throughout the organisation

Implementing Access software has helped City Lit save £50k a year on outsourcing costs

“ All the guess work and keeping our fingers crossed at the end of the financial year has now gone away thanks to the integration between the Access software and our student records. And this is why I have chosen to work with the Access group for the 3rd time when searching for a new software provider. ”

Paul Evans, CFO at City Lit

When Paul Evans joined City Lit as the Chief Financial Officer, he faced challenges with their financial system. 'The system was about 15 years old and had been constantly upgraded but it was coming to the end of its life – we could just about run a trial balance from it,' Paul said. 'For those within the finance team, it was an extremely tricky and difficult system to use. You couldn't produce any of our required reports from it easily – with the management accounts taking several months to produce. In fact, the year end from the previous financial year hadn't even been closed down before we implemented Access.'

Another issue that City Lit was facing was that the budget holders didn't know what their income, revenue or expenditures were. This meant that they weren't able to make the correct decisions when it came to the business.

'There was a real need to try and bring the systems into the modern era. I mean, City Lit were still using the old 'three part' ordering books when I joined the company which I thought had been got rid of. We were still sending out remittance advice to suppliers by mail when we paid them,' Paul reminisced.

The Access solution has provided autonomy to other departments within City Lit

'A key strength of the Access solution was that it allowed people outside of the core finance function to be able to readily access the information that is pertinent to them.'

Paul has enabled the different users to go in and run their own reports. 'I have set this up to allow them to run their own management accounts where they can drill down into the actual transactions, pull up images of the invoices which relates to the supplier. It has really allowed them to manage their own budgets without having the need to come to the finance team, freeing up my team's time to do other things.'



‘Prior to this, it was all done in an Excel spreadsheet which meant that it took time out of a member of the finance team who had to manually produce all the lists of transactions for the budget holders, which took a lot of time – a real time drain for the finance team but also it didn’t really meet the need of the requester.’

Access helped to tighten the purchasing function

At City Lit, there was no real control over purchasing. They used a paper based system, which meant even more manual processing and no real ability to reconcile. ‘For us, a good example of this was during the implementation phase, our consultant asked if we matched the invoices to the purchase order when it comes in. This was something that we hadn’t done but more importantly, the finance team hadn’t realised that this was the last link in the chain in terms of taking control of our processes.’

‘The Access solution is great for closing this loop hole – you go on to the system, raise a purchase order, it goes through an electronic approval process where all the sign off limits are already imbedded in to the system. It has really given me a lot of comfort in the terms of audit and control, but it all happens seamlessly in the background rather than the out of date, antiquated paper system that didn’t work at all.’

Seamless integration enabled City Lit to really understand their financial position

‘The biggest chunk of our revenue comes from student fees. What we used to have to do each month was get a report from EBS, manually key in all the details from this report into the old system, which would then give us what revenue we generated in the last month. Most of the time, we didn’t know how much income we had generated in that month, which then became a bigger challenge at year end where we were juggling the year end and not really understanding our financial position when it came to student fee income.’

‘Now, we have the EBS system interfacing with the Access software. Every day a journal automatically comes from EBS and with a few clicks of a button within the dashboard, the fees are automatically entered into the finance system. However, the biggest strength of it is, in terms of income recognition, it would forward post the income to future periods.’

The Access solution has allowed us to gain control of our finances

‘Since implementing Access, we have gained more control and accountability – a few years ago, the organisation made a significant loss and part of that was due to us not being able to account for our expenditure as the budget holders didn’t have the information that they required for approval.’

‘Another thing that the organisation has benefitted from having Access is that it has really allowed the finance function to do more – an example



is before Access, the finance team would just process invoices, produce a set of accounts for year end to produce out-of-date management accounts. But now, the finance team is actively focussed more on business partnerships and helping to drive efficiencies and improvements within the business. We have gone from a 'passive' department, sitting in the background processing invoices to one that's out there in the business, helping to support budget holders and business managers get the best out of their budgets,' Paul said.

Choosing the right partner is vital when implementing a new solution

'If you are thinking about implementing a new software solution, you are going to have to make sure that you put sufficient time aside. The processes are always time intensive but the benefits in the long run really outweigh the time you invest upfront.'

'I have always been satisfied with both the solution and the Access team as a whole. This is why I didn't hesitate to ask them to put in a tender for City Lit. It's a really flexible and easy to use system, especially for those outside the core finance team – giving them the ability to drill into what is important to them.'

'Choosing the right supplier is really important. I have worked with other suppliers in the past and I have found it to be rather painful and off-putting. However, with Access, the Consultants that I have worked with during the implementation have always been first class. They come up with innovative solutions, which might take a little time to build, but what you get as the end result really benefits the organisation.'


About The Access Group:

The Access Group is a leading provider of integrated business management software. Our portfolio spans ERP, finance, HR, Payroll, Recruitment, warehousing, business intelligence, professional service automation and manufacturing.

More than 10,000 UK businesses and not-for-profit organisations use products and services provided by Access to improve their performance, profitability and drive growth.

The Access Group is one of the fastest growing UK software developers. Our on-going commitment to excellence, customers and employees, has also placed us among the UK's top employers.

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