

## Welcome

One of the first areas to be targeted by the widely publicised government spending cuts was higher education. Universities face their most radical changes for 50 years as reduction in public funding forces a fundamental reshaping of the sector.

As Dr. Wendy Platt, Director General of the Russell Group, stated: "We are concerned that the cuts will mean it will be tough to maintain the high quality teaching, learning and research environment our universities currently offer."

At the same time there has been a dramatic increase in the number of university applications, with further increases of between 10% and 20% anticipated this year. And, from 2013, the undergraduate admissions process is turning paperless; a dramatic change to the manual process currently used by many institutions.

In this newsletter, we focus on the challenges facing the universities sector. We hear how the University of Warwick and Glasgow Caledonian University are turning these challenges into opportunities to drive through process improvements and embed Operational Excellence.

In our first article, read how the University of Warwick is turning its undergraduate admissions process paperless by radically redesigning and simplifying it, enabling them to deal with the increase in applications, more efficiently and more systematically.

Our second article turns the spotlight onto Glasgow Caledonian University, which is aiming to achieve essential efficiency savings while ensuring continued growth and the provision of an excellent service to students and stakeholders.

As always, we hope you enjoy reading these shared experiences of process improvement and that they inspire you to improve the way you work.

## Streamlining undergraduate admissions at the University of Warwick

Following a successful review of the postgraduate admissions process, Darren Wallis, Director of Admissions and Recruitment at the University of Warwick, asked Processfix back to facilitate the rapid improvement of their undergraduate admissions process.

"With the undergraduate admissions process," Darren explained, "we faced similar challenges to our previous review, but with a slightly different emphasis. We were taking too long to make decisions on applications. For example, in

simply layer an IT solution on top of an inefficient process."

Lynsey Hopkins, Assistant Registrar, continued: "With such a rigid timetable dictated by UCAS, it would have been quite easy to adopt practices that had

our process for assessing the fee status of applicants had become very long winded. Forms were passing through hands several times and going back and forth. Now, in most cases, a form is only handled once.

We have introduced a new process, devolving the work across our office rather than having it log-jammed in a particular area. We broke up the process and identified where larger teams could undertake basic tasks and more infrequent, complex tasks could be done by just two people. This is now really bearing fruit as we start to get the bulk of our applications."



some cases, individuals who had submitted applications in October were waiting right up until May for a final decision. In addition, from 2013, the admissions process needs to become completely paperless, as the paper forms are no longer going to be sent from UCAS. So, we decided we needed to look at the entire undergraduate admissions process to make sure it was as streamlined as possible, prior to looking at an IT solution that would enable us to move to a paperless process. What we didn't want to do was to

worked historically without really questioning them. Instead, we decided to use this opportunity to look at the process afresh, and see if we could identify and embed best practice and work

more efficiently, regardless of whether we were working on a paperless process or within our current structures.

One of the main wastes we identified

during our Rapid Improvement Workshop was the handling of applications in several places, several times each. For example,

## "what you get with Processfix, is a much more systematic insight"

One of the key lessons Warwick learned when it reviewed the postgraduate admissions process, was that you needed some quick wins to sustain interest and keep things on track to achieve longer term goals and major process breakthroughs.

Continued on page 2...

## NEWSFLASH!

London, United Kingdom – October 2010:

Processfix scope first workshop for the Bank of England



...continued from page 1

To prepare for the undergraduate workshop, the team purchased a set of data on average turnaround times for a basket of comparable institutions from UCAS, which highlighted some slow decision making, even against equally selective universities. The team therefore needed to assess the types of wastes that were leading to higher than average lead times. During the workshop, the process was broken down into separate stages and wastes were identified and tackled in each of the areas."

"Working with Processfix," Darren added, "enables you to unpack the process and put it back together in a systematic way. We can all intuitively map out our process and try and understand how it works in broad terms. But, what you get with Processfix, is a much more systematic insight. You can assess the current position, identify and reduce wastes, and really get a firm handle on what to improve and how to achieve it."

"Again," Lynsey continued, "you are very much invited to challenge your assumptions on, for example, the timetable you are working to and the notion that the solution to going paperless is completely technical. While there is a technical element, obviously, it is about the core processes too."

## "it is absolutely essential to get the process right before thinking about IT"

I think one of the key lessons for other institutions facing similar challenges, is that it is absolutely essential to get the process right before thinking about IT and systems. Don't put an IT solution on top of a poor process."

"This is a very difficult time for the sector with restructuring and the very tight financial environment we are about to enter," observed Darren. "I think Processfix enables you to make these adjustments in a smoother way while retaining a focus on customer and student needs, rather than just carrying out a cost cutting exercise."

## In the spotlight: Jan Hulme, University Secretary and Vice-Principal Governance at Glasgow Caledonian University, reflects on their Operational Excellence programme



Like most in our sector, Glasgow Caledonian University is facing significant financial pressures. But we also believe the University's future success and competitiveness lie in growth, while maintaining quality and doing more with less.

The challenge is to ensure we can continue to develop as a successful international university, which is committed to the common good, at the same time as reducing our cost base. Our people have a strong professional pride and want to do things as well as they can, so this is a good starting point.

## "what Processfix does is tap into the skills, insights and good sense that people on the ground have already"

We are at the start of a university-wide Operational Excellence programme and I feel it is important that the process moves swiftly from insights and theorising to implementation of what has emerged from the workshops,

reviews and discussions. Senior leaders need to make sure improvement happens across a range of services and academic schools, and to recognise that effective processes are not discrete but run across academic and professional boundaries.

A range of mutually supportive activities is running alongside the Operational Excellence agenda,

## "The processes we are examining are key to our strategic objectives"

including a major restructuring and re-profiling of our academic areas. We are moving from six academic schools to three, to remove duplication and achieve maximum efficiency while maintaining quality within the academic portfolio.

IT systems are just one of the beneficiaries of using the Processfix Operational Excellence programme to maximise the value of investment. When systems and processes have grown over many years, increasing complexity and local variation make it difficult to benefit fully from the investment we make. We also do not want to put new IT systems over inefficient

## "a lot of talent and insight has been unlocked"

processes and need to make sure that fundamental and rigorous business process engineering is undertaken before new systems are introduced.

The Processfix methodology drives this type of analysis, although it is by no means confined to IT systems. One of the first things we did was to get senior managers together to identify and focus on the systems and processes that were priorities for review. This was done systematically, to ensure maximum return on our effort.

The processes we are examining are key to our strategic objectives. For example, we have been looking at our student recruitment and admissions processes. Increasing postgraduate level recruitment is a key target and we know that speed of response maximises the likelihood of an offer of a place being accepted, so optimal processes are clearly important to make sure this happens.



Other important areas are in research grants and knowledge transfer, where we already have a reputation for accessibility and

responsiveness. But we have to scale this up and recognise we are addressing not just UK markets, but a global market too. As part of our internationalisation strategy, we want these qualities of responsiveness and accessibility to be hallmarks by which we are recognised amongst our international partners.

While we are early in the Operational Excellence programme, one of the things that struck me was that rather than using the clinical terminology of business process re-engineering, which can often feel like something that is done to people, what Processfix does is

tap into the skills, insights and good sense that people on the ground have already.

Once people are engaged in a Processfix workshop they become really enthusiastic and it unlocks a type of thinking that is not usually possible in day-to-day activities. It has not been a purely mechanical business process re-engineering exercise: a lot of talent and insight

## "Instead of making people the objects of change, we are making them the agents of change"

has been unlocked and people are viewing their work through a different prism.

It also has an infectious quality. People who have participated in some of the Rapid Improvement Workshops are really keen to see how they can use the techniques in the immediate areas of their responsibilities. It has a domino effect, which speaks of cultural change and changing the way people think.

In fact, we are already seeing the benefits of going through the improvement workshops. Instead of making people the objects of change, we are making them the agents of change. This generates increased enthusiasm and passion that is hugely valuable to any organisation.

One of the challenges is sustaining this passion, and leadership must play an important role in this. At the same time, I think the process

encourages individuals to take responsibility at all levels for working better and bringing a more critically appraising eye to what they do. It also encourages people to work across professional boundaries. Operational Excellence is starting to privilege the processes and systems that can easily be disadvantaged by organisational structure.

It is vitally important that the university community does not see Processfix as a one-off exercise, but that its legacy is an improved way of thinking about institutional processes.

## "its legacy is an improved way of thinking about institutional processes"

I expect colleagues to build this vigilance and passion for improvement into their working lives. I don't think we will have the perfect system at the end of each workshop. I think we have an improved system, but that there will be scope for further improvement. As environments change, systems and processes will inevitably have to change and adapt.

The early signs are good and I believe our people have enthusiastically embraced this opportunity to play an active part in realising the University's ambitious vision of delivering excellence alongside access, whilst using its knowledge and skills for the social and economic benefit of communities at home and around the world.

## The facilitator's perspective

After 35 years in university administration, Jenny Hocking, Processfix Facilitator, now designs and runs Rapid Improvement Workshops and programmes across the sector. She is currently helping Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) achieve cost efficiencies and embed Operational Excellence.

Working closely with the Executive Board and senior management at GCU, Jenny is using hands-on Processfix Rapid Improvement Workshops to teach GCU staff the methodology, concepts and tools of process improvement, helping them to work smarter, so that they can release capacity and reduce costs.

She has developed an Operational Excellence roadmap for GCU to guide and

support the university through the process of developing their improvement programme, engaging staff and gradually embedding a culture of continuous process improvement.

Under the leadership of Jan Hulme, University Secretary and Vice Principal of Governance, GCU has set up an Operational Excellence Steering Group and has begun scoping core business processes. Once this is complete, these will be aligned with the

objectives and targets set out in their strategic plan. These will then be prioritised to create a strategic Rapid Improvement Workshop programme for 2011 and subsequent years.

GCU and Processfix have already successfully completed five workshops, attended by 47 staff. Jenny feels that the hands on approach at the Rapid Improvement Workshops, the neutral and structured environment, and the tools and methodology people learn, deliver results in an effective way.

As Jenny observes: "The relationships that are built by the workshops cut through departmental silos and survive beyond the improvement programme, helping to ensure organisations run better for the long term."



## About us

Processfix are professional facilitators of rapid improvement workshops.

Working with your team, on your burning issues, we will engineer fast solutions that will achieve lasting change and create powerful, sustainable results.

In a risk-free workshop environment we will uncover missed opportunities and chart new possibilities.

As your team experience real process improvement – first hand and at great speed – they will gain a clear understanding of what works, and why.

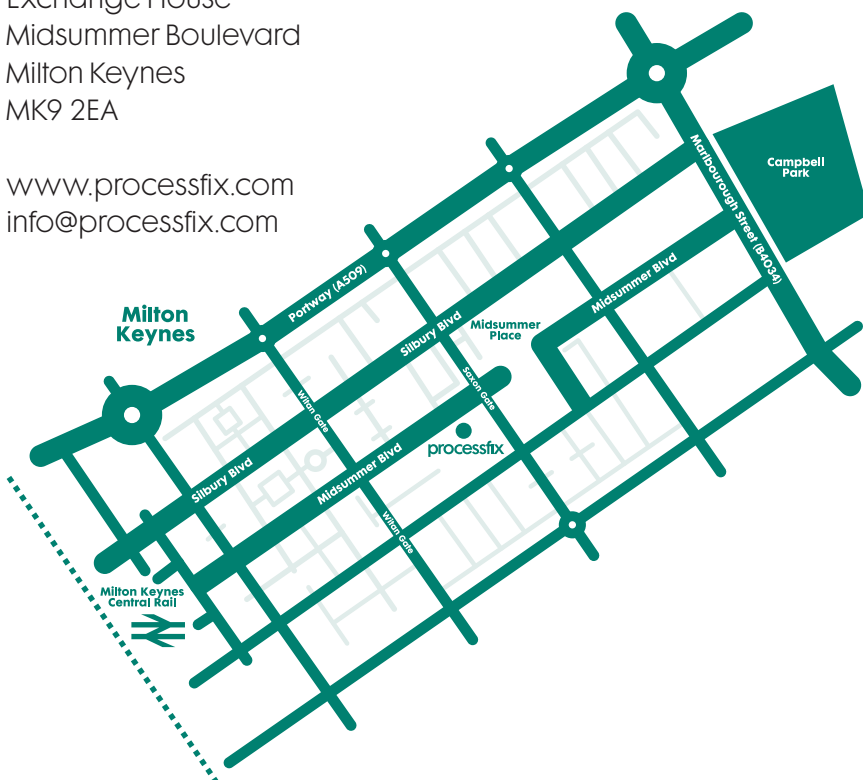
Your teams will leave each workshop able to apply their skills and knowledge, immediately, anywhere in your business.

Processfix will enable you to unleash the full potential of your organisation.

## If you would like to find out how Processfix can benefit your organisation, please contact us at:

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## And Finally...

Leicester City Football Club starts the new season with Processfix. Read all about their champion workshop in the next quarterly newsletter.



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