proteus consulting

Case Study

TRANSFORMING PROFESSIONAL SERVICES IN A UK UNIVERSITY

Background

The need for transformational change in a Russell Group university was identified and initiated by the Registrar and Chief Operating Officer. Proteus Consulting, through one of its Directors, co-created and led the subsequent programme of change.
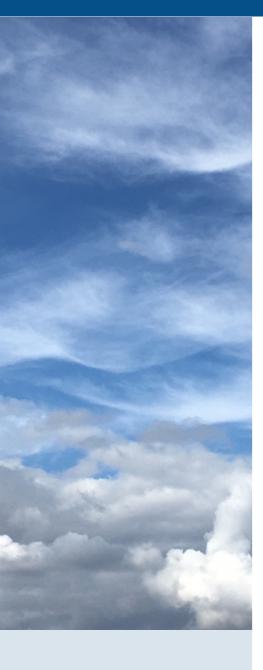
The programme was set up to significantly improve efficiency by reducing complexity in processes and structure through the use of proven approaches, tools and techniques. The ambition was to harness the innate creativity and expertise of the university community to deliver better student and staff experiences.

What was the situation?

The university had been very successful and had achieved rapid growth over a number of years, resulting in operating models that had developed organically rather than in a structured way. Processes were not standardised and often inefficient due to silo working, leading to over-complexity. There was limited focus on performance measurement so data was often difficult to find and interpret. There was also a plethora of systems in place.

KEY WORDS:

Higher Education
Transformation Change
Simplification
Professional Services
Culture Change
Cost reduction
Lean

What were the principles?

There was a clear instruction in the programme that jobs would not be put at risk and that outsourcing of services would not be an option that would be considered. It was imperative that the programme include knowledge transfer to the staff of continuous improvement approaches.

What methodology/approach was used?

The programme adopted a proven lean-based improvement methodology, adapted to higher education. The approach was centred around mapping and analysing key touchpoints in the student journey and the processes that support those services.

Core to the approach was close engagement with staff, students and the Students' Union, with those involved empowered to deliver significant and measurable change. Expert facilitation, bespoke training and strong support from the Executive ensure the improvements are sustainable.

Critical success factors in the programme included accurate scoping of projects; data-driven benefits cases; teams empowered to make change; strong process champions; implementation of Rapid Improvement Events (RIEs) and the regular review of progress with teams. All projects and identified benefits were captured and tracked though the University Benefits Tracker, co-designed with the Finance Office.

What were the results?

Significant operational improvements and efficiencies have been realised since the start of the programme in 2014. As of June 2020, the Tracker shows **224 projects completed or in progress**.

Although the aim of this programme was not necessarily cost reduction (more around simplification, process redesign and student experience), **£20 million of savings have been identified with £14 million realised**. In addition, staff capacity savings with a notional value of **£3.4 million** have been delivered through process improvements. As of June 2020 **the ROI from the programme stands at 7:1** with the number of identified **experiential benefits at 154,** including improvements in student satisfaction.

All benefits have been achieved without job losses except through normal natural attrition, and with no outsourcing of services. A core outcome of the programme has been a change of culture in those teams involved, moving to one of continuous improvement.

"The programme has delivered real results for us with significant delivery improvements and efficiencies across a wide range of services..." Registrar and Chief Operating Officer - March 2016.

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