

CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY

# Birkbeck University sees invaluable improvements to student reporting

Birkbeck University of London is a world class organisation renowned for its research and teaching. It is one of London's only providers of evening class higher education. Recognised as an elite University, Birkbeck is ranked in the top 1% of Universities in the world for its contribution to research.

Established in 1823, its motto "*in nocte consilium*" means "Study by night". As a leading University with a unique USP, management of recruitment is vitally important. The Planning Team play a pivotal role in this by producing specific reports which help stakeholders make strategic business decisions.

Producing these reports was becoming time consuming and was adversely effecting staff productivity. Having identified inefficiencies with reporting, the College was able to look for a suitable solution with a clear set of requirements in mind. After a trial they selected Tableau, and since adoption they have seen considerable improvements in:

- Data interactivity
- Staff engagement
- Productivity
- Availability of information

*"Our previous tool put users off. With Tableau we have a solution that produces great results and is easy to use"*

Bob Bell  
Head of Management Information and Data Quality  
Birkbeck University



[www.bbk.ac.uk](http://www.bbk.ac.uk)

Enterprise Tableau Server License

350 registered users

75-100 active users per week

## A specialist University

Birkbeck currently has over 19,000 students enrolled in both part time and full time courses. The College has five schools at their London Campus - Arts, Business, Economics and Informatics, Law, Science and Social Sciences, History and Philosophy. Proud to *“enable adult students from diverse social and educational backgrounds to participate in our courses”*, Birkbeck places a large emphasis on correctly managing student recruitment and information at the University.

With the considerable rise in tuition fees over the past few years Birkbeck has reacted to a changing landscape and repositioned itself to take on more part time students. The responsibility of understanding this new student recruitment model falls on the Planning Department and Bob Bell, Head of Management Information and Data Quality at Birkbeck University.



Bob explains *“the College is unique in that we specialise in offering evening higher education, so the importance of clearly understanding student trends, requirements and needs is even greater compared to other Universities”*.

## A department tackling inefficiencies

The Planning Team collate and analyse data surrounding student recruitment and produce reports for senior stakeholders to make executive business decisions. *“A large part of our job is managing information, looking at data and investigating the best ways to make full use of what we have”,* explains Bob.

Responsible for providing their colleagues with data which is both insightful and actionable, the team has demanding requirements over the tools they use. Using a legacy product - in the form of Oracle Discoverer - to report on student recruitment wasn't achieving the results required. Rather than offer value, Bob and his team found the tool to be rather restrictive, *“it wasn't easy to use, the interface was clunky and end users were reluctant to engage with it”.*

The lack of engagement from end users created additional problems, *“as a result, many users started to rely solely on our weekly reports. This might not seem like a problem but we didn't want an over reliance on one particular report. It also became very time consuming to create this report in such a way as to keep everyone happy”.*

Bob knew something needed changing, *“it wasn't productive to continue as we were, you want people to be engaged and they just weren't”*

## A chance encounter

Although a problem had been highlighted there was no immediate project in place to find a new solution. *“As a department there was a definite need for a new tool, we had specific requirements in mind, but that's as far as it went”.* The Planning Team had no option but to continue using their existing tool.

It was a chance encounter that changed the Planning Team's direction. Bob recalls,

*"I attended a University Administrators conference in Birmingham". It was at that conference where Bob first came in contact with Tableau. "We were given a demonstration of Tableau by the Information Lab and shown what it could do, I immediately took an interest. I was intrigued and wanted to learn more, so on the train journey home I downloaded the trial version of Tableau Desktop and set to work".*

## An immediate improvement

The Planning Team got to grips with Tableau over the coming days and saw noticeable improvements, Bob recalls *"within the first few days we'd managed to recreate rich, user friendly versions of all our essential recruitment reports".*

Tableau had answered two of the teams most important requirements. *"We knew we wanted something that displayed our reports in a more visual way. Tableau did this brilliantly. But more importantly, we wanted a tool that would provide a better end user experience. Tableau did this as well".*



The success of Tableau within The Planning Department was noticed by other colleagues around the University. Bob explains *"the trial yielded such beneficial results that we bought 10 tableau licenses for ourselves and the Business Systems Department".* Interest continued to grow, *"our users were creating new dashboards almost daily, we had a stream of requests for additional Server licenses so we bought*

25 more". With acceptance from senior stakeholders and a number of different departments the next step was obvious, *"with the demand we have, the logical next step was to buy a site licence"*.

Bob is clear as to why Tableau has been so well accepted across the University, *"our previous tool put users off, they didn't want to engage with it and when they did the results were poor. With Tableau we now have a solution that produces great results and is easy to use"*.

## A number of benefits

Bob had a meeting with senior management to discuss progress with Tableau. The discussion quickly turned to the key benefits of Tableau, *"We were meeting with some of our senior colleagues at Birkbeck, and produced an infographic using Tableau which highlighted student trends and statistics. What we presented was streets ahead of anything we'd produced before and it was so easy to understand the data. The added value was without question and the response we had was invaluable"*.

Tableau has enabled the University to produce a real clarity to their reports. This clarity and the quality of visualisations has helped a range of stakeholders to make strategic business decisions with added confidence. *"When you have a solution which has been so well accepted, from all levels, it becomes a trusted source"*.

The user engagement and increasing adoption of Tableau has been evident to Bob from the start, *"our users genuinely love Tableau"*. It is helped the Planning Department with lines of enquiry from their colleagues, *"if the Marketing team come to us and need information surrounding geographical location of our students to drive a new campaign we know we can help significantly"*.

There's been a number of additional benefits for Birkbeck University and the

Planning Department since introducing Tableau:

- **Increased productivity.** Bob explains *"staff are no longer reliant on one department to source all the data, if a member of the team wants some new information they can get it without having to send a request or ask for it"*.
- **A proactive approach to data.** Tableau has freed the Planning Department to use Tableau for analytics and focus on producing even richer content. *"We can now spend more time creating deeper, more insightful dashboards to produce valuable reports"*.
- **Interactivity of reports.** Tableau has enabled staff at Birkbeck to self-serve their own data from the Planning Departments reports. *"Previously you'd look at a one dimensional piece of data that would tell you a, the interactive nature of Tableau enables us and our colleagues to view data and understand what a, b, c and d now means"*.