



Cloud based applications portal halves workload for selective academies

How ECLEVA helped Queensland Academies put their application process online, saving time, reducing workloads and maximising transparency.

Overview

In 2017, education specialist ECLEVA helped Queensland Academies place their entire applications process online. With a secure payments system, automated mailing and an easy-to-use parent portal, the application process takes half the administrative time compared to the previous manual process. Now, all assessment staff and stakeholders have transparency on every step of the application process. Applicant files are updated in real time so there are no version-control issues. And with the portal hosted in the Azure cloud, Microsoft cloud standards keep children's personal details safe and secure.

The Need

In Australia, most schools have digitised student records. For schools with high intakes this represents a major administrative challenge. But how much time could schools save if they automated the administrative aspects of their application process?

CASE STUDY

In 2017, Queensland Academies found an ultra-efficient way to do just this. Based in South East Queensland, Queensland Academies is a brand of three schools offering the unique International Baccalaureate program. The Queensland Academy for Science Mathematics and Technology is located in Toowong; the Queensland Academies Creative Industries campus is located in Kelvin Grove, and the Queensland Academies Health Sciences Campus is located at Southport.

Over 1,300 students attend these academies, but student numbers are rising fast – and so are applications. By the end of 2016, however, the academies' central admissions office was having to devote more and more staff time just to cope with the growing number of applications.

Manager at Queensland Academies, Kathy Mackey explains: "With spreadsheets and student files passing between different campuses – and the need for constant updates and contact with parents – the process was very labour intensive."

Kathy and her team wanted to digitise the entire process with an online application portal for parents, a centralised applicants' database for the academies and automated communications. With strict compliance regulations, however, the challenges were immense.

"Maintaining student confidentiality is paramount, which meant the system had to be ultra-secure and still accessible to multiple stakeholders," says Kathy. "Above all we didn't want to be burdened with having to manage new technology. We wanted someone else to come and build it – quickly – and then look after it, while we focussed on our own jobs."

The Solution

In early 2017 Queensland Academies put the project out to tender. One of the companies to respond was Sydney-based ECLEVA. The company's approach to IT made an instant impression. "ECLEVA was willing to guide us through the design process and help us create an application based on Microsoft Dynamics 365/CRM," says Kathy.

ECLEVA brought three key skills to the challenge. The company's Agile development methodology accelerated the delivery of new capabilities and allowed Queensland Academies to add new features in successive updates. An Agile approach also helped ECLEVA to accommodate new requests as the project progressed.

Second, ECLEVA demonstrated a superb grasp of Microsoft technologies.

"The ECLEVA tool delivered a 50 percent saving in terms of time and human resources."

**- Kathy Mackey, Manager,
Queensland Academies**



CASE STUDY

As a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner in Education, ECLEVA is expert at integrating Microsoft technologies in the cloud. This means, for example, being able to attach email functionality to a CRM system, and then provide the entire, cloud-hosted solution as a service.

Third, ECLEVA has wide experience of working with schools, universities and TAFE institutions. ECLEVA has created multiple education solutions, from student recruitment, student retention, student services, alumni management and commercial management.

"ECLEVA was very responsive to our needs," says Kathy. "By keeping the entire system in the cloud, they freed us from having to think about technical infrastructure or support. Our expertise is in education services, not in coding systems and then maintaining them: the ECLEVA team understood this from the start."

Beginning in May 2017, ECLEVA created an online portal to manage all student applications. For Queensland Academies, the critical factor is that the entire solution is provided as a service. ECLEVA manages the technology licences and charges Queensland Academies a monthly fee. No onsite infrastructure. No in-house IT involvement.

The applications system combines multiple Microsoft technologies: Dynamics 365, with its CRM functionality; Office 365, to manage email communication and calendaring; SharePoint to manage student files; and the Azure cloud, which hosts the online portal. From the user perspective, however, the entire system works as one, seamless portal.

ECLEVA also integrated two capability-specific technologies. ClickDimensions – an automated marketing tool – carries templates for all formal communications and manages despatch. This enables administrative staff to format and automate emails to parents. Second, the Commonwealth Bank-supported BPOINT enables secure, compliant processing of the application fee.

Today, parents wishing to make an application click a button on the school's existing website, and a portal encourages them to open an account. Next, parents complete online forms with student details, and upload supporting documents. Applicant files are able to be evaluated across all three campuses under very tight security and communication back to parents is fully automated.

Result

The new online portal has transformed the parent experience.

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CASE STUDY

Parents can open an application on the spur of the moment, save it while part-complete, and progressively add to it as they collect the required documents. This means that administrative staff receive fewer calls from parents struggling to complete applications.

The biggest difference, though, is time saved. As the volume of applications increased in 2017, the new ECLEVA system halved the number of hours that staff had to devote to the process.

"We have commenced a new Year 7 intake at one of our campuses and we experienced a very high volume of applications," says Kathy. "Despite the increased demand, the new system coped perfectly, and in retrospect there is no way we could have handled the workload with our existing staff. The ECLEVA solution delivered around 50 percent saving in terms of time and human resources."

New features also make the application process more transparent – for administrators and stakeholders. All interactions, such as phone calls from parents, are logged and appended to applicant files in real time. This means campuses don't have to be continually updated whenever a fresh interaction occurs with a parent.

"I can't emphasise enough how valuable it is to have permanently up-to-date files," says Kathy. "Also, ClickDimensions formats all our emails giving our communications a professional look and feel, while online payment functionality is a massive time-saver for us."

According to Kathy, one of the long-term benefits of the solution is scalability. This is critically important to Queensland Academies as campuses expand and introduce new cohorts. Because it hosted in the cloud, ECLEVA can readily expand the service to cope with the ever-rising number of applications, without only minimal additional costs.

Queensland Academies can also rely on enhanced security – a critical requirement when handling and storing students' performance data. "We have an increased level of satisfaction because we know we are working with a very secure system," says Kathy. "This is a top priority, because we are processing information about school children. Security has to be our top concern, and that's just what we have."

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Learn more about how ECLEVA helps higher and further education institutions save costs and operate more efficiently. Contact us at info@ecleva.com or call us on 02 9467 9300.