

BI/DWH Health Check – Birmingham City Uni Case Study



Birmingham City University (BCU) is a complex, diverse HE organisation created from mergers of diverse universities and colleges (both academic and vocational).

It now teaches over 24,000 students from 80 countries across multiple campuses in the city of Birmingham. As a large knowledge-based organisation; it requires accurate, well managed information to run all aspects of the University; from the recruitment of students, monitoring of academic quality, through to research funding and the identification of new markets.



The problem

Over time, the pace of producing accurate, meaningful, and intuitive performance data about the university fell below the expectations of academic staff and management. This led to several faculties and departments adopting different strategies, approaches and technologies to provide the operational reporting they needed.

Mark Cunningham, the Business Analytics Development Manager says: *“BCU operates in markets that are increasingly competitive and fast moving. Good Business Intelligence (BI) should provide essential support to those responsible for making strategic decisions so we had to quickly develop a clear, coherent BI strategy”.*

During a significant organisational restructure the Planning Department at BCU created a BI Strategy, a Data Repository and a range of tactical, ‘live’ reports covering many areas of the student journey and capable of supporting strategic and key operational decision making. Altis were selected to review this emerging strategy, provide an independent architectural Health Check of the Data Repository, visualisations and make specific recommendations for improvement where appropriate.

Mark Cunningham *“To ensure our BI strategy would be able to support the University’s requirements in an efficient, effective and responsive manner, we believed it was necessary to commission an independent external review of our BI Strategy and seek best practice, frank advice on scaling up the BI functionality.”*

Altis were selected due to our extensive experience in Higher Education in the UK, Australia and New Zealand. BCU also wanted an impartial view of their technology options from an organisation that was independent of software vendors, and as Altis does not re-sell software were able to provide that technology agnostic view.

The Solution

The Health Check was carried out with 6 days effort over a period of 2 months.

Altis spoke to key stakeholders from various parts of the organisation (Vice Chancellors Office, Planning, Academic Registry and IT) to understand the current state of analytics within BCU. This was followed by a health check of the existing BI data repository. We provided data warehouse training to members of the Planning team and a list of recommendations and initiatives aimed at effectively scaling up the BI function.

- Data
- Information
- Analytics
- Outcomes

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“In a short period of time Altis impressively enabled us to develop our emerging BI strategy, shared key insights from the UK and Australian HE Sectors and provided us with the clarity and impetus necessary to progress further on our Business Analytics journey.”

Tangible Outcomes

Mark Cunningham “This process made us acutely aware of the need to work collaboratively and highlighted the need for cultural change that is required for such work to ultimately be successful.”

This analysis identified areas where there were gaps and helped BCU to better understand where they needed to focus their ongoing efforts. Altis made comments and observations on BCU’s BI and data/information maturity level compared to the other Universities and made recommendations on different ways of working between, and within teams to better utilise the combination of skills at the University. These recommendations will allow the University to be more effective in scaling up the range of data and reports - whilst improving usability. Our recommendations were presented to the BI Project Board to inform future developments.

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