

# Western Sydney University case study

## The situation

Western Sydney University (Western) serves over 40,000 students across eight distinct campuses. Like much of the university sector, Western has significantly increased their employment of casual academic staff in recent years. According to Chris Youness, Associate Director HR Partnerships at Western, the University employs over 5,000 staff a year, equating to an annual payroll of \$44 million, which has been a growing administration burden.

## The challenge

Across the university, the end-to-end onboarding process was highly manual and cumbersome, involving a number of staff across Human Resources, Faculties, Information Technology, and Payroll.

Arvinder Singh, Manager HR Information Systems at Western explains. "It was someone's role to download a form and complete it manually including all position details, contract terms, and costs. They were then required to shepherd it through various approval processes via email and fax. Once the approvals were gained, the Payroll Office needed to manually load that information into a system before emails could be sent out to the new starters."

Not only was onboarding adding strain to Human Resources, but also to the Faculties. "Manual workflows were required to determine the overall budget and detailed teaching requirements for each course. Paperwork was constantly flowing from the Faculties into HR and back again, before reaching the casual academics. As to be expected, there were always delays and bottlenecks."

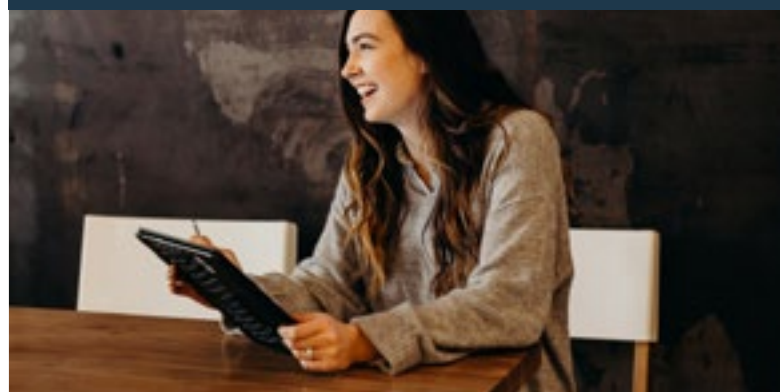
According to Youness, improving the academic staff experience is a priority for any university. "Our academic staff are a valuable commodity, especially those in disciplines that are in high demand. We need to treat them with care and respect."

Concerned that this inefficiency was placing an unnecessary burden on Faculties and academic staff who should otherwise be concentrating on teaching and research, Susan Hudson, Executive Director Human Resources began to focus on a move to becoming paperless and the opportunities that were there.



"We noticed this process was causing issues for academic staff downstream, such as issues with gaining library, email and shared drive access, and time sheet reconciliation."

**Arvinder Singh**  
Manager HR Information Systems



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## The process

When considering how to re-engineer the process, they quickly realised that electronic onboarding could both improve the experience of the casual academics and also reduce the level of administration required within the faculties.

Having used Acendrec Recruitment for several years for recruitment automation, it was a logical step to continue to work with Acendrec on this next phase.

The Western team applied for strategic initiative funding for the project but were initially unsuccessful. The university has not experienced an agile automated project of this scale before, so their IT and Finance divisions initially found it difficult to estimate the return on investment the project might deliver. Singh explains, "There isn't any other university doing this quite like we have. When you're first there can be hesitation, but we knew the value behind this, so we kept pushing."

"Susan engaged with each of the Deans and we were surprised how willing they were to support the project. They were highly aware of how much time and resource was being spent on administrative tasks, and how much the inefficiency was impacting their academics' experience." Ultimately the bid for funding was successful with the added support of stakeholders from each of the various Faculties.

Singh notes that this support became invaluable as they began designing the end solution. "Our vision was end-to-end. We didn't want to present a piecemeal approach."

Post-approval, the project started with an initial scoping phase, during which a business analyst worked with each of the nine Faculties to gather and map their business requirements and workflows. This identified many commonalities between the Faculties, but also a surprising number of nuances that needed to be factored into the end solution.

Having identified that integration was going to be a big part of this solution, the next step was to engage with Acendrec's technical resources and the University's IT department. This involved a series of workshops to identify the required systems changes and develop the design documentation. This provided a clear understanding of the systems integration requirements, allowing Acendrec to leverage their interoperability capabilities successfully during the build phase.

As a result, the onboarding solution is fully integrated with the University's systems across Recruitment, Payroll, Student Management, and IT, and covers the complete life cycle of casual academics, from the moment they first apply to when they cease teaching.



"We were able to give them a prototype which helped them understand what the project would deliver, and the ability to comment on this before we began the build. This step was invaluable, as it allowed us to co-design a unifying process that all of the faculties were able to agree upon."

**Arvinder Singh**  
Manager HR Information Systems



## The solution

### Acendre Onboarding:

- Faster hiring and onboarding of casuals
- Completely paperless system
- Reduced administrative staff
- Staff time savings
- Improved goodwill with casuals
- Improved retention and engagement of casual academic staff
- More accurate financial forecasting



“One Faculty was able to reduce the number of staff involved in administering the contracting and onboarding process from 5 staff to 0.6 FTE. That’s almost 400% less effort than before.”

## Final thoughts

“A web portal now gives academics visibility over their contract and the ability to quickly apply for open positions. And from an executive point of view, there are a range of reports available online which can be run to provide real-time information about the cost of existing teaching contracts and the pipeline ahead.”

Western has also created a casual eligibility list, which allows for searching by disciplines, skills and eligibility, improving access to talent. “The University sector as a whole experiences difficulties with casual administration management,” noted Younes “We’ve eliminated almost all of that at Western Sydney.”

## The results

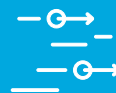
The implementation of the Acendre solution has been instrumental in enabling Western to get academic staff engaged and fully onboarded quickly – with no printing, scanning, faxing, spreadsheets, wet signatures, manual emails, or manual follow-ups.

“We’re finding that our academic staff engagement is through the roof. Their feedback is that the process is exceptional – in particular the ease of accepting a contract online with a single click. That’s a real highlight that’s generated a lot of goodwill.”

“Not only has the feedback from users been incredibly positive,” says Youness, “but importantly we can also quantify it in real terms.”

According to Singh, this is because Acendre has removed the redundancy. “Now each applicant is responsible for supplying their own information – from contact details to banking, which goes immediately into the payroll system with no need for anyone else to have to touch it.”

This point is echoed by Youness. “We’ve managed to streamline that into a fully online process. Now, a new contact can be generated, offered, and onboarded within 15 minutes with only three touchpoints. For us that’s really exciting.”



Singh explains the exciting outcome of having all onboarding information digitised is the instant access to insights that it provides.