



# The OU has Improved Student Registration Efficiency by 400% with AutoFORM Document Imaging

## Overview

- **Industry**  
Education
- **Business Solution**  
Automation of student registration process with web access to documentation
- **Architecture**  
Windows NT  
Sun, Unix, DEC host systems & applications  
Ethernet TCP/IP  
15 x 32Gb RAID Server
- **Key Business Benefits**  
Automatic index and archive of incoming and outgoing documents, for online document viewing. The system released valuable office space and provided instant controlled access within the organisation to 7 million student registration documents for over 1200 registered users.



## Background

The Open University based at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, was established in 1971 and is Britain's largest single teaching institution. The University is an open learning institution with over 180,000 students from both the UK & overseas actively studying at any one time.

## Review of Administrative Processes

The Student Services Registration & Fees Centre conducted a review in 1996 of administrative processes with the aim of identifying problems, bottlenecks and deficiencies. One of the main findings highlighted the extent to which paper-based documents were causing operational delays. The review concluded that continuing to depend on paper based systems to support business processes was inefficient, and would inevitably result in the deterioration in customer service. The cost and logistics of allocating premium office space for document storage was also identified as a major concern. These two issues were key drivers in presenting a business case for implementing a document imaging pilot, later known as process improvement.



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**Paul Nesbitt,  
DIP Implementation Manager**

## Online Document Imaging Solutions to Resolve Real Business Issues

### A Pilot for Document Imaging

A document imaging pilot to support selected business processes within Registration & Fees Centre was implemented during 1997. The pilot demonstrated the effectiveness of document image processing (DIP) and quickly gained end user confidence. Following this success, approval was given for the implementation of a system that could effectively support all student services requirements at Walton Hall and 13 regional centres. "Our frontline personnel have found AutoFORM software very simple to use, and extremely fast to retrieve documents from the archive" says Paul Nesbitt, DIP Implementation Manager

### Finding the Right Product and Supplier

EFS had built up a long-standing relationship with the OU. Products from the AutoFORM range already supported applications in the Purchasing & Finance Departments. Acceptance testing of AutoFORM identified a requirement for some customisation and the need for specialist local support. As the product developers EFS were able to rapidly implement the changes to meet the OU's specific operational requirements. Nesbitt commented: "Flexible business policies enabled the University's specific requirements to be implemented quickly. EFS were able to offer a single supplier solution for data conversion, all hardware requirements, maintenance, disaster recovery and on-going support. These factors have contributed significantly to the success of the project."

### Staff Found AutoFORM Easy to Use:

At peak periods the department processes 30,000 documents per day. During these busy periods temporary staff are employed to augment the team. It was therefore essential that the software was easy to use and included audit trails to monitor operational performance.

Frontline support personnel have wholeheartedly embraced AutoFORM. The time to search and retrieve from 7 million documents held on the archive is typically measured in seconds. The technology has helped to significantly improve customer service levels, with 1200 registered users able to access controlled documents.

### Implementation and Upgrades

As the use of DIP has grown, 8 additional AutoFORM scanner workstations currently in operation. Installation has proved straight forward requiring no specialist technical skills and from start to finish takes less than 10 minutes.

### Key Benefits

- With AutoFORM temporary staff can be trained and up to speed in 30 minutes or less.
- By eliminating, photocopying, document bursting, and filing productivity has dramatically improved productivity, whilst enabling staff to concentrate on more productive tasks. The department can process 30,000 student applications per day.
- Automatic indexing and error checking removes the chance of human filing errors and lost documents.
- Instant archiving as documents go to print, means that documents are available to be viewed anywhere in the world (subject to user rights) within minutes of being generated, overcoming the delays and cost of microfiche or hard copy filing
- Provides a one second response for the retrieval of documents via a web browser.
- "Customer Service has been considerably improved."
- "Prime office space is no longer being used to store paper."
- "The simple operation and short training period allows the department to make flexible use of its staff."
- "Filing backlogs no longer occur."
- "Online documentation is always current."
- "Regional or departmental queries can be resolved without needing to contact the student administration department."
- "Overall the University has achieved a 400% improvement in the efficiency of the student administration process."



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