



# Student Casework Case Study

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PACKAGED SOLUTION



STUDENT COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS



STU3 COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

► An online solution for handling student complaints effectively

“ Each case now takes about **a quarter the time** to manage from initiation to case closure. Based on last year’s figures, the solution would release **over 2500 hours**. That is a very significant benefit realisation. Automated notifications play a key role here. Staff and students are informed when a case has been opened or closed, a meeting arranged, a decision made or an outcome determined. In Academic Misconduct cases, it is even possible to have a student’s Assessment automatically put on hold under the right conditions. ”

## The Challenge

The ability to process all manner of complaints and appeals effectively within a university has never been more essential, with allegations of mishandled cases of **trolling, sexual harassment** and **stalking** making newspaper headlines recently.

Together with an organisational restructure of Professional Services which resulted in a reduction of resources, the University of Westminster had an urgent requirement to develop more efficient and streamlined processes.

The Student Casework management processes, which were executed manually, were identified as particularly resource heavy, with no centralised system to manage case documentation, communications, meetings and decisions. Operational management and performance measurement required the laborious tasks of duplicating data in spreadsheets and standalone databases.



Sonia Doal

In addition, Academic misconduct allegations and Student academic appeals around marks and grades are often handled by the same team(s) within a university and also need to be handled consistently in line with university governance and regulations.

Sonia Doal and Sharan Bhambra, Academic Standards Officers from the University of Westminster, were involved with the design of the new processes.



Sharan Bhambra

Sharan detailed the steps her team had to undertake in the manual processes:

- ▶ Students and staff copying key information already on e:Vision (SRS web) and pasting it into forms in Microsoft Word;
- ▶ Academic Standards Team likewise copying and pasting information received from students and staff into spreadsheets for casework tracking, and then into a standalone database for performance measurement.
- ▶ Received documents were also being converted into non-editable PDFs for audit purposes and uploaded to SharePoint.

*„A key issue was the duplication of data and effort.“*

Sonia added that Academic staff had also raised concerns that filling in paper forms and sending evidence via email was very time consuming. Additionally, the high volume of emails the Academic Standards Team were receiving from staff and students about their cases was becoming difficult to manage in a timely and efficient manner.

## The Solution

Stu3 developed a new online Student Casework solution for the University of Westminster, with the previously manual processes for Academic Misconduct, Academic Appeals and Student Complaints being streamlined and replaced by SITS e:Vision workflows linked to individual student case files as the single source of truth.

The Stu3 technical solution in e:Vision is safe, clear and secure, and provides an improved student and staff experience whilst adhering to the University's regulations and data protection, privacy and data retention policies.

This Student Casework solution minimises the risk of complaint, misconduct and appeal cases being mismanaged - by ensuring each case is governed by workflows that are completely in line with the institution's own regulations. Crucially, it leaves more time for support staff to focus on the important business of investigating and assessing each case rather than wasting time on administrative overheads.

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The Student Casework solution integrates with the student information system to provide;



- ▶ Logistical casework dashboards enabling staff and students to access and track the progress of their cases
  - ▶ Ability to make decisions against a case, record outcomes, add notes and comments, upload evidence, send notifications and arrange meetings
  - ▶ Ability to generate reports at a click of a button
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## The Benefits

Sonia Doal and Sharan Bhambra, Academic Standards Officers from the University of Westminster, explained how their teams have not only saved significant time and effort by digitising their processes, but have transformed the way in which they do their student casework.

*“As you can imagine, getting staff to buy-in to an online solution was easy, because the benefits were evident to all, and would not only benefit the Academic Standards Team.”* **Sonia Doal**

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Asked about specific benefits of the new solution, Sharon and Sonia shared the following:

*„Each case now takes about a quarter the time to manage from initiation to case closure. That is a very significant benefit realisation. Automated notifications play a key role here. Staff and students are informed when a case has been opened or closed, a meeting arranged, a decision made or an outcome determined. In Academic Misconduct cases, it is even possible to have a student’s Assessment automatically put on hold under the right conditions.*

*Based on previous year’s figures, the solution would release over 2500 staff hours.“*



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In addition, the system provides:

- ▶ **Single source of truth:** It is not just the time saved but accessibility by all invested parties to a single source of truth. It means that academic staff, students and colleagues can log in to track and view their cases directly, and interact with them at any time without any additional input from the Academic Standards Team. As a result, case-related queries particularly from staff and registry colleagues, have notably reduced.

- ▶ **Improved data quality/accuracy:** Now that staff and students are filling in online forms, there are fewer issues with regard to the submission of incorrect information such as the wrong Student ID, or module code.
- ▶ **Improved performance measurement:** With the data already in the system, reports are available at a click of a button should the team wish to know, for example, how many cases are open or closed, how many meetings have been arranged or how many mitigating circumstances claims have been the subject of an appeal.

Finally, Sharan credits the design of the system for ensuring a good level of user engagement.

*“It looks and feels like other e:Vision tools that students and staff already interact with, so it’s easy for people to find what they need and to upload statements and evidence to a case”*

## Working on the project

Sharan and Sonia explain that due to the staffing issue, it was sometimes difficult to fit in the project work and their business as usual tasks. However, when the Stu3 technical consultant suggested weekly meetings, they found that this really helped to keep them focused and on track with their project workload. They found the time was used very productively to resolve queries on both sides and in keeping each other up to date with development and user acceptance testing. Sharan and Sonia found the Stu3 Consultant to be great at communicating the technical side of things, helping them to understand the limits and possibilities of the system.

### Working with Stu3

Asked if they would work with Stu3 on future projects, Sharan replied:

*“Now we have seen how well Academic Misconduct, Appeals and Complaints work as online processes, we would love to see Disciplinary Casework follow suit. It would be a quick win should the budget become available, and we would work with Stu3 again without hesitation.”*

**Ongoing collaboration**

Stu3 are currently working with the University of Westminster on Curriculum Management and Postgraduate Admissions project solutions after winning highly competitive tender bids in these areas. Stu3 hopes to work with the university on further projects in the future - maintaining our collaborative success, and helping to deliver service improvements in other student system areas.

## Background on the University



Pioneers since 1838, the University of Westminster started out 180 years ago as the first polytechnic in London and one of the first in the UK, established to educate the working people of London.

Today it continues to build on this reputation, helping students from a variety of backgrounds to realise their full potential. Supporting more than 19,000 students on their undergraduate, postgraduate and professional courses and 169 different nationalities, they welcome students from all walks of life from all over the world.

The University of Westminster is equally committed to ensuring their students have a fair and supportive experience of any academic misconduct allegations, student appeals and complaints.

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Let's chat.

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