



The JS Group method and service has revolutionised our payments process

A step-change in student achievement and a more efficient organisation are the two fundamental roles that the JS Group is supporting for the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), according to members of its leadership team.

UCLan – with over 24,000 students and a high proportion of commuter students (who are dipping in and out of the campus) – regards the JS Group as a highly committed partner in its journey to strengthen student engagement, increase its culture of student belonging, and enable even better student progression over the course of the higher education experience.

The JS Group addresses this in three main ways through technological and service innovations: the provision of a highly effective and rapid system for delivering cash to students who are in receipt of hardship funds, scholarships, and bursaries; the creation of a UCLan Achieve platform by which students can identify and purchase exactly what they need to support their studies and student lifestyle; and delivering supportive tools and online guidance from experts (via the same platform) that can enable students to make their higher education experience the best that they can.

All this is supported by a stream of ongoing data that helps the University to understand precise student patterns on their spending and on the types of ever-changing resources that students are turning to support their studies and changing circumstances.

“Everything we do is geared to improving the student experience and student outcomes,” says **Professor Andrew Ireland, UCLan’s Pro Vice-Chancellor for Students and Teaching**. *“So, we have designed a lot of things around the concept of ‘achievement’. We’ve just designed a whole suite of interconnected student-facing support services called Student Achievement Services – and this*

includes the UCLan Achieve platform. We do a lot to support the achievement of our students who deserve the very best, particularly because so many come from non-traditional backgrounds often with low family incomes and are first in their family to attend University. It’s our duty, and right at the heart of our University’s mission, to remove barriers – and our Achieve approach helps us to remove barriers to support their success.”

The JS Group was first introduced to UCLan by the **University’s Vice-Chancellor, Professor Graham Baldwin**. *“There are two main reasons why we engaged with the JS Group in the first place,”* he says. *“One is that we have had a challenge, as a lot of universities with a strong widening participation mission do, in terms of student progression and we had been introducing some new ways to support early identification of problems. The other is that the pandemic created quite significant growth in students facing financial problems and we were aware that there were probably more effective ways of distributing funds than simply them queuing up and then for us to make payments into their bank accounts. We have since benefitted from the JS Group in addressing both of these.”*

“It was about taking the opportunity to provide a much better service to our students,” adds **Nicholas Brierley, UCLan’s Head of Financial Processes**. *“Getting all of the payments to our students to go through one platform, rather than a multitude of different or many different types of payments. Most students’ payments now go through the Achieve platform. It’s a significant opportunity and success for us. The JS Group*

TO FIND OUT MORE

Please visit www.jsgroup.co.uk or contact **David Marshall** – david.marshall@jsgroup.co.uk

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method and service has revolutionised our payments process – both in the speed of the transactions and the take-up of funds by students.”

The associated flow of student trends data emerging from the Achieve platform is also a significant benefit, according to **Graham Baldwin**. *“We’ve got a dashboard with lots of really helpful information – and if you combine this with the other information that we have to hand then we can gather early information about student engagement and other factors that can identify students who are potentially at risk. We’ve got a wealth of data which is going to help us to make decisions with regard to better student support. It’s also a valuable recruitment message as it gives reassurance to a student’s family or carers that we are very much supporting our students to manage their money effectively.”*

As a forward-thinking institution, UCLan has been continuously exploring other ways to bring about transformational change in its services and operations. **Stacy Hayhurst, Project Manager in Corporate Operations**, says that the JS Group (with its sector-wide experience and insight) has worked well alongside this change mission of UCLan. *“From a project perspective, they’ve*

been extremely supportive and very willing to share ideas of things that work at other universities that would perhaps benefit us. It feels like a real partnership. It feels like they care about our students as much as we do.”

Andrew Ireland adds: *“We have managed to really simplify the process of students being able to access funds – which they can use as cash for their household bills and also to spend in the online Achieve store. Another development – which we are now working on – is identifying certain costs that are associated with studying on our very practical courses (such as artists’ specialist creative equipment) and using the platform as a cost-effective way to identify and source these.”*

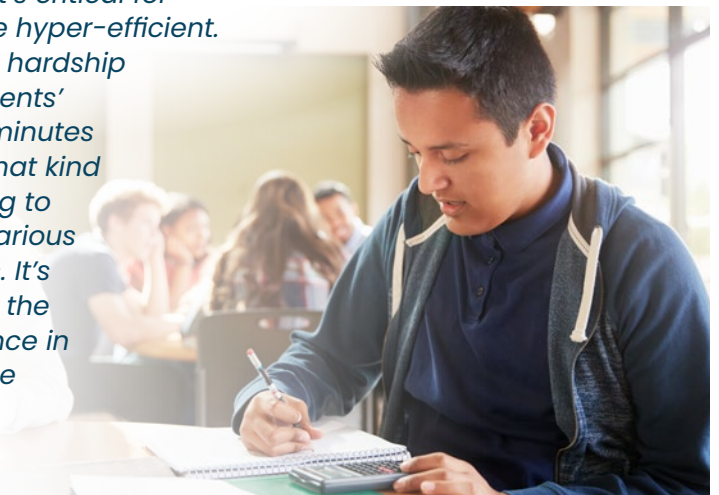
“It’s helping us to be much more efficient as an organisation at a time when it’s critical for universities to be hyper-efficient. We can now get hardship money into students’ hands in a few minutes as opposed to that kind of request having to travel through various internal systems. It’s really enhanced the student experience in that regard, while also simplifying our processes.



The relationship with us and the JS Group was built up immediately – really highly responsive, lots of discussion, lots of ideas and great attention to detail. Whatever we’ve asked for, they have been able to provide us with a solution for. They have provided an outstanding service. They’ve simply made a huge difference. I am really keen to see where they can take us next.

– Nicholas Brierley

It is huge. We are really saving the time of our back-office student finance functions, which frees them up to provide added value to students. We’re all big fans of it.”



“The JS Group is open, collaborative, supportive and on the same wavelength. I think they demonstrate a commitment to the student experience as well – which is important. They understand the sector. They understand the challenges. They are good to work with,” adds **Andrew Ireland**.

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