Imperial College London provides a seamless digital experience

+99% faster onboarding
95% faster laptop procurement
16 departments aligned on one solution

“With ServiceNow, we’ve created person-centered digital support across 16 departments that just works.”

Juan Villamil, Chief Information Officer, Imperial College London

Educating the world’s best and brightest

Imperial College London is a leading research institution based in the UK, and the only university in the country to focus exclusively on science, medicine, engineering, and business. According to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, it’s the tenth best university in the world and in third position in Europe.

Imperial attracts the world’s brightest minds to study or work in its research facilities, and the IT team is responsible for supporting the technology that underpins everything they do.
“Our main focus is giving staff and students a seamless digital journey. People want a person-centered experience and technology that just works, so they can focus on their work or studies,” says Juan Villamil, Chief Information Officer at Imperial College London. To become a digital leader and empower students and researchers to achieve their potential, Imperial College needed to revamp the architecture behind its support services to create a more consistent end-to-end experience for everyone.

**Simplifying and improving support services**

Imperial's vision is to provide support throughout the staff and student journey from a connected, multichannel platform. But its legacy IT service management solution was heavily customized, difficult to scale and update, and was causing spiraling maintenance costs.

**ServiceNow offers world-leading solutions. With ServiceNow Professional Services, we’re now using the right technology and the right implementation.**

Brendan Whitfield, Portfolio Manager, Imperial College London

To support 16 departments, the incumbent solution was mired with custom forms, multiple mailboxes, and manual touchpoints. The finance team alone used 20 of the university’s 42 support inboxes for responding to cases.

“ServiceNow offers world-leading solutions that are well supported. We had the right technology but the wrong implementation. We decided to retire our previous platform, which was held together by 90 customizations, and start again with Customer Service Management,” explains Brendan Whitfield, Portfolio Manager at Imperial College London.

The Information and Communications Technology (ICT) team engaged ServiceNow Professional Services to support the reimplementation. ServiceNow brought a wealth of technical experience and worked alongside Imperial to define a roadmap.

Over the next five months, the team established a minimum viable product (MVP) and set up a center of excellence with a small governance board of decision-makers. Super users representing 15 departments helped shape the implementation to support each team’s unique requirements.

“ServiceNow supports the library, contact center, ICT services, clinical trials, and even the university gym,” Brendan reveals. “Our ultimate goal is for staff or students to log onto a central portal and access any of those services in a few clicks.”

The library is integral to student outcomes, and super users from this team were particularly focused on making sure any changes delivered tangible benefits without causing disruption.
Shaping the solution with user feedback

The ICT team and ServiceNow launched a discovery project to identify the most common pain points. The team met with the community of super users every six weeks and rolled out surveys to monitor user sentiment. Working in sprints, the scrum team built and deployed new features every fortnight to maintain momentum.

Common challenges included manual touchpoints and complicated forms to submit a case with more than 140 drop-down options to choose from. Confused users were bypassing these categories and selecting ‘generic request’, which meant an agent had to email the user to find out what the issue was before it could be routed to the right person.

The process to provision a new device previously spanned multiple teams and required a chain of emails to be sent. By automating the process in ServiceNow, it’s 95% faster and the team is working on further improvements. Cases such as purchasing or accessing software once took three days and are now resolved in just 20 minutes, while onboarding and removing users used to take between one and five days compared to just 10 seconds today.

Another area accelerated with automation was the workflow for ordering a new laptop or monitor. “Hardware and licensing rules were complex, but with automated workflows users can get their device seven times faster,” comments Brendan.

“It saves agents’ time and gives us more bang for our buck – in fact we get 50 times more value from people’s time today than previously because there’s a snowball effect of incremental efficiency gains. By connecting ServiceNow with our business case we can demonstrate tangible benefits that will improve the user experience.”

Super user transforms her department

One super user, Anna Valentino, Senior Timetabling Officer at Imperial College London, shares her experience:

“My team provides support such as controlling permissions and access to the timetabling system. Previously, all cases were classified as incidents and users complained about how complicated the service catalog was. We had a third party supporting the system, but they didn’t really understand our requirements and we all felt very frustrated.”

Cases include requests for data to be imported into timetables, queries submitted on behalf of students, or room bookings. The impact of these issues not being resolved quickly ranged from a minor inconvenience to a student potentially missing their lectures.

Submitting a case relied on a customized form that was difficult to update – any changes could cause unforeseen issues with the technology or processes further down the line. Having seen a ServiceNow demo in 2021, Valentino wanted to take an active role in shaping the revamp to better support her team.

“Together, we designed templates to standardize forms and responses to incidents. Now, we can provide fast, consistent support and manage cases more efficiently,” Anna reveals.

“Using out-of-the-box functionality was key. It gives us the flexibility to adapt things. I’m excited to see what we can optimize next.”

Anna Valentino, Senior Timetabling Officer, Imperial College London
"The topic of each case is in the subject line, which helps us to prioritize cases. Better visibility of case volumes also means we can ask colleagues for support if we're not closing cases fast enough."

User feedback has been positive, and the team pulls reports to monitor KPIs such as the volume of requests to drive process improvements in the future. The number of cases raised at the start of term has reduced and users can rate their experience using a simple happy/sad emoji.

"Using out-of-the-box functionality was key. It gives us the flexibility to adapt things. We also love the automated workflows that have freed us up from spreadsheets. I'm excited to see what we can optimize next," comments Anna.

A model of continuous improvement

The university used surveys to capture a baseline customer satisfaction rating for the MVP, achieving a higher-than-expected 90%. "Our baseline score shows the impact of making small changes that have a real impact on the user experience. We now have more time to focus on continuous innovation and we're trying to increase that score by keeping people at the center of our transformation," says Brendan.

As the team optimizes more processes, it's building a comprehensive library of knowledge articles for tasks such as password resets. In the future, it plans to roll out Virtual Assistant to help users find information quickly without raising a ticket and IT Asset Management to streamline the procurement and disposal of devices.

Staff and students can currently access ServiceNow via an internal portal and find services that support their entire journey. But the university plans to onboard external users too. This will be particularly valuable for the finance team, who work with hundreds of suppliers who currently can't access the platform.

"We're going through a cultural shift. To drive engagement, it's important to involve users and make sure we're communicating our plans clearly. We want to give them the best possible experience, so their guidance on how to achieve that is invaluable," comments Juan.

To fuel its journey of continuous improvement, Imperial recruited from ServiceNow’s Next Generation program. Following an intensive, six-week training course, the new starter is bringing a wealth of digital skills and enthusiasm to help plug the knowledge gap and ensure the university has sustainable resources for the future.

"ServiceNow is our strategic customer service management platform. We're building on the success of our MVP. We're planning to open more channels, such as chat bots and social media, and expand self-service," said Juan. "Eventually, we'd like to get rid of email completely and have a clear, responsive pathway for support and digital services. If we can replace emails with automated workflows, it would be a game changer!"