

# Case Study

University of Cambridge

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Simpson  
Associates

*University of Cambridge deploys an information delivery framework using Cognos 8BI and Simpson Associates  
A structured approach to enterprise wide deployment of Business Intelligence*

## Background

The University of Cambridge is one of the oldest universities in the world and one of the largest in the United Kingdom. Its worldwide reputation for outstanding academic achievement reflects the intellectual calibre of its students, as well as the world-class original research carried out by its staff.

The University of Cambridge is a confederation of Colleges, Faculties and other institutions. It is administered centrally by a range of central bodies consisting of, and mainly elected by, the current academic personnel of the Faculties and Colleges. Each of the Colleges and the University is a separate legal entity.

The mission of the University of Cambridge is to contribute to society through the pursuit of outstanding education, learning, and research.

## The Initial Problem

Originally, the University purchased Cognos Business Intelligence software in order to satisfy the reporting and analysis needs of the University as a whole – as well as of the Colleges individually. The aim, ultimately, was to build an all-encompassing information delivery framework.

The approach adopted was to combine in-house development with the purchase of 'best of breed' adaptive solutions where available. The University already had a number of Oracle-based applications and was looking, over time, to build a data warehouse through the development of subject-specific data marts. John Milner, MIS Director, summarised the approach as "if we build it they will come".

In order to build the components of the application, John engaged a Cognos partner to address one specific area of development. He also sought advice on how to develop a coherent application comprising common standards and methodology – so that MISD staff members could then go on to develop other subject areas. In addition, two 'adaptive' solutions were purchased to provide reporting against two of the incumbent applications.

After pursuing this strategy over a number of months, John found himself with a number of concerns. The strategy envisaged a high degree of 'self service' reporting, which meant that the architecture had to be designed and structured to the very highest standards. John, however, was not confident that the platform being built would be solid enough for these future reporting needs. He also had doubts as to whether the Cognos software was robust or flexible enough for the task.

As a result, John asked Cognos to recommend an alternative partner with whom he could review the progress of the venture. Cognos recommended Simpson Associates, not only because of their sales status as a long established Platinum Partner, but also because they are the UK's only Cognos Accredited Services Partner – a certification which formally recognises their ability to deliver effective solutions and projects. In addition, Simpson Associates use the Prince 2 Structured Project Management process, as does the University.

Following an initial meeting, John Milner engaged Simpson Associates to conduct a 'Situation Assessment': a clear description of the current position and a proposed way forward.



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## What We Did

Simpson Associates completed the Situation Assessment in 9 working days over a five-week period in November 2006. When asked how he rated the work, John Milner said:

"We were delighted by the audit report which was completed quickly, pulled no punches and offered sound guidance on the way forward".

The report made recommendations for the short, medium and long-term, supporting them with a clear rationale. The University implemented the majority of these recommendations, going even further by asking Simpson Associates to provide a Solutions Architect who could guide and develop members of MISD staff.

The resulting engagement addressed the areas of Project Governance, Development Standards, Security, Infrastructure and Mentoring – and attracted extremely positive feedback from the University. For instance, Dave Sandham, MISD Deputy Director, said:

"The quality of Simpson Associates' staff and work was and is excellent. They have delivered on every aspect that they said they would and they had the strategic awareness to recognise where we needed to change direction. They also have the practical and technical expertise to implement changes on our behalf and provide skills transfer to our staff. They even delivered a series of standard documents and procedures to really kick-start the engagement. After our earlier false start, we are delighted with the service that Simpson Associates has given to us."

## The Benefits

The University is now certain that the Cognos technical platform is the correct choice for their objectives. All their concerns with the infrastructure have been allayed and they have confidence that their investment is sound.

The application design has been verified across the project areas and there are now standards in place for extract transform and load (ETL) process designs, star schema designs, requirements analysis, report designs and project governance. In addition, the thorny issue of how to apply

cross-application security has been resolved. By working with Simpson Associates' personnel, the technical team at MISD has been able to fully 'own' their software and hardware architecture. At the same time, the development teams have adopted common standards that have allowed them to push on with development without creating design divergence. There are no longer any barriers to realising the objective of allowing Business Intelligence to deliver reporting and analysis across the University's departments, and subsequently its colleges.

At a review meeting, John Milner said:

"I wish that we had met Simpson Associates six months earlier – it would have saved us a lot of time."

## What We Can Do For You

It is clear from this case study that not all Cognos software implementers are equal. If you would like to take advantage of Simpson Associates' proven project methodology and technical consulting expertise, please contact Simpson Associates on 01937 586880.

## About Simpson Associates

Simpson Associates are a Cognos Platinum solutions partner specialising in the delivery of Cognos-based performance management solutions. With more than 250 UK and global clients, the Company specialises in all aspects of performance management solution delivery, including business reporting, metrics, financial/business planning and consolidation. The disciplines we cover include requirements analysis, application and process design, system specification, project governance, and education and support.

Our solutions provide better business understanding and improved business management performance, while our considerable skills and experience have won the trust of clients both in the UK and internationally. For more information visit [www.simpson-associates.co.uk](http://www.simpson-associates.co.uk).

