

Case study: Monash University

Transforming research administration and award management



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Monash University: seeking a single source of truth with Pure's Award Management Module

When competition for millions of dollars in research funding is at stake, can a university afford to continue with its current in-house research information system amidst unprecedented campus growth? That's the ultimate challenge that became the catalyst for Monash University. As an institution recognized within the top 1% worldwide, do they leap into the future, or hold steady pursuing academic and research excellence. Monash University's exponential growth has reached four campuses, three teaching hospitals and continues to spread across Australia, Europe, South Africa and Southeast Asia.

With ten disciplines, approximately 78,000 students, and nearly 9,000 staff and faculty, Monash University has reached a total research income of AU\$500 million dollars annually and climbing. Monash University has also been ranked in the top 50 globally by the QS World University Rankings according to subject, number two in Pharmacy and Pharmacology. A substantial feat considering biomedical science and health sciences are in the top 10 percent of frequently cited publications globally.

“It’s really, really strengthened our research governance and the people that are supposed to be approving at the department and the faculty level have visibility of all the same documents with the entire application makes the process a whole lot quicker.”

Dr. Simon Barrett

Director, Research Ethics and Integrity, Monash University

The Monash University challenge: a tale of two research information systems

As the university’s influence and visibility spread worldwide, they began to consider a review of internal research management systems, approval funding workflows and business processes to keep pace with their success. Monash University needed a progressive awards management system to keep the momentum thriving. In support of the university’s vision for its academics and research, the next Research Information Management (RIM) system needed to secure their continued prominence on the global stage well into the future.

“As a whole, what we were looking for in a system is to provide us with a single source of truth.”~ Dr. Simon Barrett, Deputy Director, Research Office, Monash University

As Dr. Simon Barrett and his team delved deeper into various solutions, the realization that the challenges were multifaceted began to emerge. When implementing Research Information Management best practices, there are many obstacles to address and so much at stake. Overall, grant approval rates are drastically dropping, with success rates averaging less than 30 percent.

Can the university’s current research information management system support their international reputation and high academic standing well into the future? In a world where funding pools are shrinking, can their existing systems and processes address the possibility of a decline in obtaining future research funding, grants, and awards? As funding dwindles, can Monash University afford data compliance risks, slow-awarding processes, and multiple business workflows across faculty departments? After Monash’s Research Transformation review, they discovered similar challenges that other universities have faced and realized the road ahead was difficult but not impossible.

Problems Monash found:

- Users who needed information were unable to get to it.

The university’s current client-server system held data centrally. It was maintained and accessed by only 20 or 30 people because of a limited number of licenses available to enter research and reporting data.

- Paper-based communications and methods slowed information gathering and data capture.

Paper-based workflows slowed data capture from the four campuses and three teaching hospitals, resulting in a need for electronic forms of information gathering with seamless importing and exporting of data.

- Communication delays meant people responded to and made decisions based on obsolete information.

Data entry was done post event and proved irrelevant to tracking their business processes, funding approval and grant applications in real-time.

- Existing funding application approvals and workflows used inaccurate or obsolete data.

Data integrity questions, data loss and noncompliance were prevalent as the application evolved in their paper based system. Data with which the research office operated differed entirely from the data the faculty research office used; therefore, as the funding application developed, the users who initiated the application were not working with the most current information when providing feedback.

“Pure’s Award Management module gave us an opportunity to step back and look at what we were doing across the entire university and create one uniform business process for awards management, and it really challenged us. It allowed us to rationalize our business processes, which I think resulted in a far more efficient process. Ultimately that’s what we were looking for, to have an end-to-end business process for awards management within one system.”

Dr. Simon Barrett

Director, Research Ethics and Integrity, Monash University

- Multiple inter-departmental research workflows stalled funding approval.

Multiple spreadsheets used to track research activities caused the staff of Monash University many problems. These problems included chasing down signatures for approval or feedback, multiple emails between staff and researchers, or paper communications that often got lost, leading to a slower overall funding approval workflow and business process.

- Several in-house systems built for individual departments did not integrate with the university’s core database to run business processes end-to-end and lower operating costs.

Multiple in-house systems were built around a core database to meet different university departments’ needs across other geographic locations with no seamless integration. As a result, users requesting data and information from several various departments, which were housing data in their own systems, led to confusion and disparate data without a focused or discernible funding application workflow.

- Business and research reporting was unreliable across university departments.

Research data collected from various systems revealed data integrity and data loss questions, threatening financial reporting accuracy.

- The current awards management workflow did not support communications from external institutions, partners and vendors.

Communications outside of their current research information system required multiple email roles, personal accounts and phone calls.

- Duplication of business processes slowed reporting, hindered decision-making and increased operating costs.

Business and data collection processes across departments created needless duplication of effort.

“When Human Resources conduct their yearly academic promotions, researchers get a generated report which looks at their activities, output and grants because they’re using Pure as their one source of data.”

Dr. Simon Barrett

Director, Research Ethics and Integrity, Monash University

When the challenges of inefficiency meets Pure’s Award Management module

Monash University, weighed down by paper-based communications and multiple data collections systems, continued to straddle the ever-evolving landscape of research information management. In this environment, it’s common to find universities and institutions grappling with independent system sources where access to critical data is in the hands of a few. Internally-built systems may not be as robust in disseminating research information and data for those who need it most. For Monash University, this situation led to two very distinct challenges:

- Over time, users struggled with data loss, data integrity, validation and compliance.
- Their current systems collected and siphoned data into a centralized location that allowed for limited access by support staff, researchers and only a few internal stakeholders.

Monash built in-house systems to alleviate the logjam in the flow of information and retrieve much-needed data. As a result, each faculty department had its own unique set of procedures and approvals, adding both time and extreme effort to reach the same desired outcome that all faculty departments strived for within the university.

The awards application process was held in several separate vacuums, meaning that each user saw an application, document or communication that may be obsolete. Further, they had no access to related content, application history, citations, media coverage or notes by other research staff or faculty. Ultimately Pure’s Award Management module saved Monash University enormous effort by eliminating constant emails and phone calls checking application status updates and approvals. With electronic approvals and signatures, research support staff could focus on adding value in support of ongoing research rather than conducting manual transactional activities and paper processes resulting in replicating the same data from across different departments.

“Originally, the awards workflow for Monash University, from award announcements to fund creation, took two weeks, and data entry for detailed reporting took four weeks. Under Pure’s Award Management module (AMM), the business awards process now takes Monash University no more than three days with 2000 applications on average per year and growing. With Pure’s AMM, award records are created within 24 hours, funding acceptance packages are released to researchers and staff in 48 to 72 hours, and faculty reporting for promotion and performance development meetings is available within hours.”

Dr. Simon Barrett

Director, Research Ethics and Integrity, Monash University

The benefits of business process improvement with Pure’s Award Management module

With Pure AMM, Monash University understood they had found a RIM system that uniformly aggregates, curates and utilizes research information to support the whole funding lifecycle, from business processes to approval funding workflows. In turn, the award application success rate consistently increased.

Pure’s Award Management module supports the dual-sided model comprising academic environments: finance and research.

- Through a web-enabled dashboard, Monash University research administrators have the luxury of not only creating awards for successful applications but can manage funds and release milestones, enhancing research and funding strategies. With funding a critical aspect of faculty business, finance departments can create, update and release invoices based on a researcher’s action reports. Within 24 to 48 hours, accurate financial reporting is created for thorough and more accurate business decision-making.

- Through data intelligence, researchers are directly positioned to discover insights and readily detect only the most attainable funding opportunities for every project across any discipline generating more research income. Since the inception of Pure’s Award Management module, total research income for Monash University is now AU\$413.8 million dollars, up from AU\$342 million in 2017, leaving the university with an operating surplus of AU\$162.8 million. In 2018, Australian competitive grants increased by AU\$12 million, and industry research and other funding increased by AU\$51.3 million.
- From one single point of access, communications are simplified. Users now have access to supporting documentation accessible in one area complete with comprehensive dashboards for researchers and administrators.
- The grant and research application process generates a tremendous amount of documentation from inside and outside the institution. Unburden staff, faculty and researchers with the Pure’s Award Management module and unravel the complexities of inter-departmental and external communications.



- Researchers can easily share and collaborate about opportunities with peers, partners and other university entities seamlessly, regardless of geographic locations increasing Monash University's visibility.
- Pure AMM allows for internal tracking, approval and reporting throughout the funding application lifecycle so that researchers know the status of their application and receive automated email notifications of pending and recorded milestones. Researchers also have access to pertinent contracts, grants and outputs on their profile and CV including, their achievements, prizes and distinctions. Likewise, Monash University's HR department can review and finalize research contracts for the following year.
- Using Pure AMM encourages stronger relationships with funders by ensuring compliance is accurate and timelines are consistently met.
- With Pure AMM, researchers save effort and time using its defined workflows that allow for the creation, tracking and submission of grant applications from a single point of access.

Communication between departments is completed in one area, with visibility to comments and notes made by others. It also includes a formal history of what was said and by whom, and the application on record. If an employee leaves, an accurate data trail is left behind so that no research trial will ever go missing. With Pure's Core module, administrators have the flexibility to provide users the information that applies to their role within the university system. Since the data is live, every user is looking at the same data without the fear of double-entry, thus maintaining a higher level of data integrity. Once, convoluted processes held Monash University in a grip. Now their awards research process has become a concise and efficient interconnected workflow that benefits both sides of research information management and the university as a whole.



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