

University of Melbourne Uses RPA to Expedite Emergency Financial Aid to Thousands of Students



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE



ORGANIZATION PROFILE

The University of Melbourne is one of Australia's oldest and most reputable tertiary institutions. Located in the heart of Melbourne, the university's main campus enrolls close to 50,000 students in law, business, arts, media, economics, and engineering. The school partners with leading institutes and research centers and has been recognized as one of the world's top 50 universities.

CHALLENGE

The global pandemic brought on different challenges for everyone. The University of Melbourne recognized its students were experiencing unexpected financial difficulty and introduced a new needs-based COVID-19 Emergency Support Fund.

This unplanned work of processing and approving thousands of grant applications and issuing payments was not possible with current resourcing capacity. The Scholarship and Bursaries team turned to Robotic Process Automation (RPA) to automate processes and provide help to students faster once their application was assessed.

SOLUTION

After a quick scoping meeting on Zoom and a few e-mail exchanges with colleagues in Scholarships & Bursaries and Finance, the RPA team came up with a process that would release payments to students at a quicker rate than the traditional method.

The bots at the University are developed in a modular way as single features. As 90% of features were already built from previous automation requests, it only took 2 days to combine them and build any new elements required to complete the task.

BENEFITS

4,500

Hours saved in processing time

4,000+

Grants approved to date

3x

Weekly payments compared to every 2 weeks prior

Processes Automated

- Emergency financial aid processing and payments

Industry

Public Sector

"What we proved during this time was we didn't need to be in the office to implement any RPA solution. Developers could stay home and develop."

— Shiv Chandra,

Robotic Process Automation Manager

STORY DETAILS

Tools such as Microsoft SQL are used to feed information to different bots, linking them together to create a workflow. Based on machine capacity and availability, work is automatically allocated to different machines to process the records. To enable existing bots for the emergency student funding use case, only some minor changes were required.

Prior to the COVID-19 emergency, financial aid payments for students were issued every two weeks. Automation enabled a much faster processing time, with payments issued three times a week. Another advantage of using a bot was that it had the ability to validate a student's banking details prior to payments. This resulted in a reduction of re-work.

If invalid banking details were provided, students were notified. Once the correct information was updated the bot would release the funds.

With the help of RPA, more than 4,000 grants have been awarded to date, with 4,500 hours saved in processing time.

THE FUTURE

The University is currently investigating other use cases where RPA can be implemented to help during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The bot has been a godsend for the scholarships office, drastically reducing our workload and ensuring students get paid their COVID-19 grants in a much quicker time frame than we would otherwise be able to do."

— Senior Scholarships
Coordinator, Scholarship &
Bursaries

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