Leiden University Builds Success with Continuous Accounting

“Our annual closing is three weeks faster. With Smart Close, we can work more efficiently by managing by exception.”

—Rob van den Wijngaard, Financial Shared Services and Programs Manager

As the oldest university in The Netherlands, founded in 1575, Leiden University has long held a reputation for excellence. Regularly rated by QS World University Rankings as one of the top 100 universities in the world, it prides itself on not only simply maintaining its legacy, but also continuing to build on it. This is one of the reasons it has a world-leading shared service center.

**The Challenge**

With over 6,500 staff members and one shared service center, the university’s shared service center struggled with a lot of paperwork, open line items, and manual controls. Labor-intensive processes resulted in a peak workload that was overwhelming and left employees working long nights and weekends. Barely able to keep up, much less deliver the financial insights that could help the university, the shared service center knew it could do better.

Leiden University started looking for a software solution that would first help streamline their financial close processes and then automate those tasks.

**INDUSTRY**
Education

**REGION**
Benelux

**ADOPTION DATE**
2013

**ERP**
SAP

**PRODUCTS**
Smart Close

**BUSINESS IMPACT**
Reduced close time by 3 weeks, experienced smooth adoption and improved administration quality, established clear processes, made audit process simpler
Looking for more than just a solution with automation opportunities, they knew that automation would only be beneficial if close processes were efficient.

Therefore, rather than focusing on adding a layer of technology on top of unclear processes, the university chose to find a solution that would help standardize its processes and deliver a transparent financial close.

**Why BlackLine**

Rob van den Wijngaard, SSC manager, shares why Leiden University chose BlackLine Smart Close.

“The Smart Close solution offers more than automation. It enables Finance Departments to standardize their financial close processes, delivers advanced robotic process automation (RPA), and offers opportunities for continuous improvement. Very few solutions can offer those benefits, so we knew Smart Close was a winner.”

“My vision for my shared service center is that tomorrow must be better than today. Smart Close offers opportunities for continuous improvement and helps us achieve that goal.”

—Rob van den Wijngaard, Financial Shared Services and Programs Manager

While standardization and automation were necessary elements in a software solution, continuous improvement was an added benefit. The culture in Leiden University’s shared service center emphasizes the ability to continuously improve, and a software that would help enable that was something Wijngaard found very appealing.

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One of the main ways that the solution enables continuous improvement is through Continuous Accounting. This modern approach evenly distributes month-end tasks over the accounting period, so that data and transactions are processed as they come in. It relies on automation to shorten the close and smooths out end-of-period spikes.
The Results

Leiden University was able to go live with Smart Close with a three-month implementation and a smooth adoption due to its user-friendly, embedded nature. With BlackLine’s solution, the shared service center has seen many improvements.

“The quality of our administration has improved dramatically,” Rob explains. “Now we have clear processes, including well-defined ownership of activities. As a manager, Smart Close also directly benefits my position. It automatically generates reports, and at any point in time I can see how we’re doing in the closing process.”

The ease of administrative use extends to audits, an important aspect of any financial close. Beyond making the audit process simpler, Rob says the solution has also drastically reduced its timeframe.

“With Smart Close, we have an easy internal audit; now it only takes one day.”

But the audit process isn’t the only thing that’s experiencing a shortened timeline. Rob discloses that the annual close has become significantly less painful as well.

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Despite these impressive improvements in their close, Leiden University is focusing on how it can continue to be better and is steadily moving toward complete digitization of the close.

“Think big, start small, and scale fast,” Rob shares, “then you can do anything.”