itSMF UK

Why the ITIL Maturity Model is important to the University of Birmingham

Interview with Andy Ferguson

ITIL Operations Manager,
University of Birmingham

The UK's University of Birmingham has an ambitious goal; to be recognised in the top 50 universities globally. To realise this goal, it's vital every function – including service management – operates to a top 50 standard.

The six-strong ITIL operations team sets the process and best practice for service management across the university. This includes everything from incident through release management.

We spoke to Andy Ferguson, ITIL Operations Manager, about his experience of taking the team through the ITIL Maturity Model process".

Why was the ITIL Maturity Model important to the university's service management team?

In the past two years, it's been our mission to raise the standards of ITIL operations. This entails improving the baseline and identifying a roadmap for change and improvement.

The ITIL Maturity Model is a great way to validate our approach and the steps taken to raise standards. Assessments objectively and comprehensively review service management capabilities and the maturity of the service value system.

How did you approach the process?

In May 2024, we secured a sponsor from the university to assist with buy-in and the budget, and we appointed itSMF UK to provide an assessor. We were very clear with the assessor about what we had been doing and therefore why we wanted to use the model. This set the direction for the assessment. To make it happen, we identified the 30 people for interview by the assessor, coming from across the organisation including those who do ITIL service management day to day, our team and those responsible for delivery.

We were careful to provide a balanced view, so we selected some people because they are big advocates for ITIL operations, while some were picked because they are more sceptical. The interviews happened throughout June, and we received our report in July.

What did your assessor's report cover?

It covered our individual practices, how things work, process documentation and how we capture outcomes. We use service management tool, ServiceNow, to capture technical aspects so that was also included in the scope.

What expectations did you have?

Given we were on a path to raise standards, we had realistic expectations. The model is very exact in its scope and how things should be evidenced, so it's hard for an organisation like ours to get high scores of 4s or 5s, simply because of the type of service management we do.

What did the report tell you?

The main outcome is that we are doing well in service management. The report and its recommendations helped to validate our roadmap and inform where we could make quick gains.

In the main we scored 2s and 3s, but it won't take much for us to convert several of the 2s into 3s. In fact, we have already made the leap using two-week sprints to work through a list of priorities. There's a real possibility we can attain 4s in some aspects of the model. Most importantly, we know we are building the right foundations.

What was the team's reaction?

The team was already motivated, but the report has given them confidence that what we are doing, is the right thing to do. They also understand that although our backlog includes some tasks that will be difficult to deliver, it's worthwhile investing time and effort in cracking them. It could have a material difference to scores.

Would you recommend the process and do you have any tips for organisations thinking of doing the ITIL Maturity Model?

Definitely.

We've encouraged service operations teams at other universities among the 24 research-intensive universities in the UK's Russell Group to do it, because we think it will empower their teams to be better.

We've told them not to wait until they are ready, because you never will be. It would be a waste of time to deliver your roadmap if you then discover you're not hitting standards. Instead, use the assessment to inform your strategy.

You also need to be realistic. We are one of the smaller organisations to do this, and it's therefore pointless to compare our scores to those of organisations like UK Government departments. It will never be in our reach to score 5s, because we are just not operating at a scale to warrant that. Instead, look at the context your organisation operates in and the how the model is applied.

Notes:

1) This article was originally published on the PeopleCert website **here**.
2) You can listen to the team from University of Birmingham talk more about their ITSM journey during our 2024 ITIL Case Study Day **here**.

Working together for better service management