

# RMIT Goes Green with Blue for Course Evaluations and Surveys

by Anne Coyle, eXplorance

**Client:** RMIT University

**Challenge:** Over 50,000 students around the world enrolled in over 8,000 courses made moving course evaluation and survey processes online a huge undertaking

**Solution:** Blue Enterprise Feedback Management system for the automation of course evaluations and surveys

**Benefits:**

- Obtained localized forms to meet Australian survey standards
- Made a phased approach possible by integrating with Cardiff TeleForm, making both paper and online options available
- Raised online response rates by 17% with best practices from eXplorance professional services
- WCAG-compliant solution to comply with Disability Discrimination Act
- Looking forward to over \$40,000 per semester in cost savings

**Quote:** “I can’t speak highly enough of the support we’ve received from eXplorance,” says Laurie. “We’ve never had any emergency issues, and for those issues we did need help with, we always received a response within 24 hours. We had some excellent on-site training, and they are very quick to follow up on questions. It’s just been first-rate.”

— **Laurie Armstrong, Manager of the Survey Services Centre at RMIT Policy and Planning**

Founded in 1887, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) is one of Australia’s largest and best-known universities. More than 50,000 students take courses at 24 different schools on five campuses (three around Melbourne and two in Vietnam) and online.

While its impressive size and global span add to the university’s renown, this level of scale also makes surveying students a major challenge for the University’s Survey Services Centre.

“We have over 8,000 courses for students to evaluate, in addition to the general surveys of faculty, staff, students, and other members of the academic community,” says Laurie Armstrong, Manager of the Survey Services Centre at RMIT Policy and Planning.



Architect's image of future Swanston Academic Building

## **Paper-based processes expensive and slow**

Previously, RMIT relied on paper forms to conduct course evaluations and university-wide surveys. Forms were distributed, collected, and scanned using Cardiff TeleForm. After spending several months collecting and tabulating data, results were then distributed to the appropriate faculty and staff by email.

RMIT decided it was time to automate these processes, and a task team was put together to conduct a thorough appraisal.

The team looked at several options, including building their own, before choosing Blue/Evaluation and Blue/Surveys from eXplorance.

“We had several key criteria to fulfill, especially around integration with our TeleForm system and with our other in-house systems,” says Laurie. “We also needed to meet certain Australian standards for our forms.”



**Students at RMIT**

## **eXplorance meets specific and local needs**

To ensure course evaluation forms and reports met local standards, eXplorance worked extensively with RMIT.

“A lot of what’s in Blue today was influenced by feedback we received from RMIT,” says Samer Saab, CEO of eXplorance. “Our commitment to listening and localizing the application makes Blue an online course evaluation system top universities around the globe can and are using today.”

To better accommodate the specific requirements of the different schools, as well as the University’s sheer size and breadth, the Survey Services Centre decided to move online in phases.

They offered each school the option to provide both a paper and online course evaluation form to students.

To realize this, eXplorance developed a module on RMIT’s request that could integrate data from TeleForm into Blue. “The integration of Blue with our TeleForm application was critical to moving this project forward,” says Laurie. “eXplorance was very responsive to our needs.”

## **Going green with Blue**

Blue is now integrated with their PeopleSoft system, which houses their student data, and their Novell system for security.

This integration allows survey and course evaluation forms to be pre-populated with data such as name, instructor, and course number, and provides analysis that incorporates key demographic data.

“With the paper forms, we’re only able to look at aggregated data. Once we’ve got enough data coming in through the online forms, we’ll be able to segregate results from local and international students, or first-year from graduating year, for example,” Laurie says.

They’re also looking forward to extensive cost and resource savings, once all evaluation forms are fully online. “We’re looking to eliminate the \$40,000 costs allocated for paper and temporary staffing every semester,” says Laurie. “It will be a huge savings in cost and effort.”

eXplorance also developed a voting application based on Blue/Surveys that lets RMIT run elections online, further eliminating more paper and resource costs for the institution.

## Getting best practices in online course evaluation

In addition to the software and expertise, eXplorance has also provided key best practices in online course evaluation, helping them boost response rates.

“eXplorance has given us some very helpful best practices for raising response rates,” says Laurie. “When we implemented them, we saw a big bump—a 17% increase.”

In fact, eXplorance received the “Best New Presenter Award” at the Australasian Association for Institutional Research (AAIR) Forum for their presentation on online course evaluation best practices. The software itself also provides features the team appreciates.



**City campus building 1** (Photography: Margund Sallowsky)

“The level of customization and personalization is important,” says Laurie. “Our emails address the respondent by name and cite the specific course the student is being asked to evaluate. It also makes a big difference to response rates when the emails come from someone holding a senior position.”

## Outstanding support across timezones

A large project such as this one has taken a great deal of effort on the part of many to get off the ground, and Laurie was especially appreciative of the support eXplorance provided throughout.

“I can’t speak highly enough of the support we’ve received from eXplorance,” says Laurie. “We’ve never had any emergency issues, and for those issues we did need help with, we always received a response within 24 hours.”

We had some excellent on-site training, and they are very quick to follow up on questions. It’s just been first-rate.”

## Meeting accessibility standards

RMIT is looking forward to a number of other innovations from eXplorance—especially the compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) featured in the newest release.

“Australia has a Disability Discrimination Act that makes it illegal to discriminate against persons with a disability,” says Laurie. “We’re very pleased we’ll be able to provide an online operation that is WCAG compliant.”

Overall, RMIT is moving steadily toward its goal of moving its paper-based processes online.

“I’m confident the university will achieve its long-held goal of collecting student feedback in a much more sophisticated and inexpensive way,” he concludes. “I expect it will take another two or three years, but we are marching steadily in the right direction—it’s an invaluable process that will save us time, paper, resources, in effect fully realize the promise of new technology.”