



Case Study

International Students Thrive at ACU, Flywire's First APAC Client

To best serve its international students, Australian Catholic University (ACU) has always been willing to try newer technologies. Before they ever leave home, for instance, soon-to-be ACU students can put on virtual reality headsets, and digitally walk through some of the most anxiety-inducing experiences of studying abroad – such as classroom etiquette, how to use public transit, or navigating campus.

That care for international students, mixed with ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit, is what Sharon Butler remembers well about what was Flywire's first customer in the Asia Pacific region – and one that she herself signed on more than a decade ago.

"They cared deeply about the student experience, so much so that they were willing to become early adopters," said Butler, who is EVP of Global Education at Flywire and one of its first employees. "I get sentimental about ACU. There's some people in the journey who are critical – and Rajan was one of them."

Butler's talking about Rajan Wijey, ACU's long-time Treasury and Insurance Financial Accountant, who had the foresight to see how important providing anxiety-free payments processing was to the international student experience. A lot hinges on a successful, worry-free payment – from timely visa processing to just having more time to prepare for life abroad. Wijey and his team had the foresight to understand the role an easy international tuition payment plays in those first positive impressions of a school. Wijey said with Flywire, he was "confident that it would be an extremely reliable, long-term partnership."

He's been proven correct. More than a decade later, ACU is serving nearly twice the international student population it did in 2012. That includes easing cross-border payments from countries – such as Nepal – that can at times prove particularly difficult when it comes to payment processing.



RESULTS

Increased student convenience

Secure payment processing in 48 currencies for students from 93 countries

Improved operational efficiency

2,200 hours saved in reconciliation, refund processing and support

More than doubled international student growth

Streamlined process helps drive student enrollment



ACU at a glance

1991

Founded

33,000

Students

3,600

International students

299

Programs of study

8

Campuses:

Ballarat

Blacktown

Brisbane

Canberra

Melbourne

North Sydney

Strathfield

Rome, Italy

About ACU:

acu.edu.au

Challenge

ACU looks to smooth international tuition payment processes

ACU is a young university with deep roots in the region. It formally opened in January of 1991, combining four Catholic tertiary institutions in eastern Australia that have origins dating back to the mid-1800s. The university now has seven campuses throughout Australia as well as a campus in Rome, Italy.

In just a little more than three decades, the institution has made a big impact, earning a place on prestigious lists alongside institutions that date back 100 years or more. ACU is ranked in the Top 300 in the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings. It's also ranked among the top 2% of universities worldwide, and first in Australia for graduate employment.

From its early days, an ACU education appealed to international students. In 2004, roughly 1,200 students (or 9% of total student enrollment) came to study at ACU from different countries, mainly from China, India and South Korea. By 2011, that number had more than doubled to just under 4,000, making up roughly 20% of its student population. ACU also saw source countries of international students shift and expand – with Nepal overtaking China, India remaining strong, and students coming from a total of 84 different countries, including France, Japan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Philippines and more. To give some sense of diversity, various countries other than those named above represented 20% of its total international student enrollment.

At that time, ACU processed international tuition payments via bank transfer or telegraphic transfers (TT), putting the burden on families to pay in Australian dollars no matter where in the world they were. Each transaction took days to trace, and many resulted in short payments that required follow-ups with each individual payer. The manual work taxed ACU's staff. In addition, students and their families had little visibility into when (and even if) their payments were received, delaying visa processing and other critical plans such as international travel.

Solution

ACU selects Flywire, becomes first APAC customer

Wijey and Butler met at an education conference in 2011. ACU went live with Flywire in 2012. Wijey was impressed with Flywire's grasp of the problems faced by international students, and flexible support for payment processing from geographies that can be more challenging. With Flywire, students and families are able to pay in their currency of choice, with the platform automating foreign exchange (FX) conversion and supporting local payment methods. As a result, ACU is now able to receive correct amounts in Australian dollars, which eases matching and reconciliation on the backend.

"We trusted Flywire and knew it would prove reliable from the very start," he said. "Right from the beginning, everything happened smoothly."

With Flywire, ACU is now able to continue attracting international students from all over the world without being concerned with how tuition payment processing affects enrollment. In 2019, nearly 5,000 international students studied at ACU. Post-COVID enrollment has dipped, but is already climbing back to pre-2020 levels, with 3,602 students from 93 different countries enrolling in 2021.

Benefits

Flywire digitizes, automates payments in 48 currencies

With support for more than 140 currencies worldwide, Flywire handles transactions for the 48 currencies needed by ACU students. Wijey appreciates Flywire's clear user interface and excellent reporting functionality – which makes it easy to see the status of student payments and take action if there is an issue. Students can easily track payments online – and know exactly what they owe and when payment has been delivered, with a clear line of sight into fees. If they or their families run into an issue, Flywire provides around-the-clock multilingual support to help navigate the payment process.

As a result of a decade using Flywire, Wijey estimates that ACU has saved more than 2,220 hours in reconciliation, refund processing and support time. Flywire's reliability and exceptional service and support has helped streamline their internal accounts receivable processes. Flywire has processed more than \$79 million Australian dollars in cross-border tuition payments for ACU students, and counting.

"Our students are satisfied and happy with Flywire's service and the system itself," he said. "Service is really exceptional, and Flywire is extremely reliable. They always deliver."

To date, ACU has processed more than 8,280 tuition payments with Flywire and is able to provide anxiety-free payment experiences for its growing international student population. As a trusted partner, Flywire is always willing to work with ACU to help innovate on whatever it needs next to best serve international students.



We really enjoy working with Flywire. The Flywire staff works really well together which reflects on a positive customer experience and defines the day-to-day business operations.



Our students are satisfied and happy with Flywire's service and the system itself. Service is really exceptional, and Flywire is extremely reliable. They always deliver.

Rajan Wijey | Treasury and Insurance Financial Accountant



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