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2022

The Year to Join
up the Student
Experience



Forward

In the last two years, the UK's higher education sector has undergone a huge metamorphosis with institutes reacting swiftly and effectively to the effects of Covid, moving entire curriculums online whilst continuing to provide effective and remote student services across all functions. The whole sector galvanised and delivered the most significant change to its learning model to date, adapting old technologies and implementing new technologies to ensure a comparable student experience. It was nothing short of a remarkable adaptation for a sector that historically has taken its time to embrace and deliver significant programmes of change.

As a result of covid, and Brexit, and ever-changing funding models, institutions are beginning to think much more strategically about how the effective implementation and utilisation of digital technologies can attract students, enable staff, promote growth, and streamline business processes and equip them to survive in a world where digital strategies are the drivers of sustainable business. As demands creep up and budgets feel the pressure, HE institutions are increasingly looking at at fast to implement, value for money, ultra-efficient digital solutions which allow them to reimagine the nature of higher education; to deliver student-centric services; and to adopt a digital approach across the whole organisation that empowers efficient operations and the joined-up student experience every institution aspires to achieve.

Within this context modern educational technology solutions are rapidly reshaping the fundamentals of the Higher Education model and for many organisations this has been an opportunity to experiment and embrace exciting digital opportunities. Mobile apps, cloud services, chatbots, automation, and virtual reality are all finding their way into the learning experience.

However, for the majority, many parts of your organisation are lagging way behind this digital journey.

The problem?

People, processes, data, and technologies are siloed, and ultimately, this holds the sector back. To join up the student experience, universities need to focus internally and spend time considering how they can join up their people, business processes, data, and technology to deliver their future strategic objectives on the student experience.

Forward

This report focuses on the challenges of this rapid shift to a digital model and what you can do to maximise the potential of your institution. The good news is that there are many tools and techniques you can use to join up the student experience without having to embark on major change programmes and complex IT projects.

Importantly, there has been a definite shift in recent years away from big, long lead time IT transformation projects to smaller scale, “quick win” solutions. This is because the pace at which digital is revolutionising businesses is so rapid, by the time lengthy IT projects are delivered, they’re likely to be out of date.

Not only will they be out of date, but they’re expensive. For Higher Education where time and money are of the essence, it’s not viable to transform everything immediately.





Addressing the Challenges

The modern HE institution must have a well-defined strategy that sets it apart from other organisations. Offering a connected digital experience with both staff and students in mind is tough – there's no 'one size fits all' approach but there are common and consistent challenges across the sector.

Student expectations

Expectations of students have been dramatically changing over the last decade, including:

- Choice and Personalisation: an accessible, tailored and joined up experience, with continuous engagement and feedback
- Value for Money: affordability linked to clear outcomes in terms of learning and future opportunities
- Customer Service: responsive services available 24/7 and a single point of contact for enquiries
- Learn Anywhere: use of modern digital tools, mobile apps and social channels on a fully connected campus
- Blended learning experience: effective sharing, collaboration and virtualisation are essential ingredients of the physical or virtual classroom

Meeting these raised expectations of your Gen-Z students is a significant challenge while maintaining critical tuition income revenue for your organisation. Interacting with students who are used to doing everything online and expect an instant response requires managing more communication channels and technology if you are to attract, successfully enrol and satisfy their digital requirements.

Siloed systems and data

The chances are you are already on a transformation journey to adopt new technology and ways of working, but it takes time and a strategic approach.

The successful selection, implementation and adoption of new technology can be a complex effort encompassing the whole organisation.

Joining up your CRM, Student Information, ERP and Learning Management Systems, then connecting with external services such as UCAS across various stages of the student journey is not a trivial task.



Addressing the Challenges

However, offering prospective and current students a 360-degree personalised service and an accessible familiar point of contact is virtually impossible without core systems integration and data interoperability across your organisation.

Internally, streamlining your processes and gathering data for essential analytics and decision making is often a distant dream as your systems simply do not talk to each other. The value of the insights gained from such datasets is unrivalled. Getting to the data is crucial to knowing which steps forward you should take, and when.

Time and resources

The last two years has brought into sharp focus your digital maturity and readiness to meet such raised expectations without the potential luxury of time. You may need to upskill your current workforce and rethink your resourcing to meet these new challenges. You might want to optimise your processes to free up valuable staff time.

Drive business forwards, not backwards

Due to the necessity to shift to new digital channels and services quickly, many organisations have not had the opportunity to optimise their new technology and services. There is a fundamental limit to the benefits that can be achieved by simply replicating your old processes online and you may not have re-designed the new online processes based on a thorough understanding of the students' needs.

This requires you to take a fresh student-centric design approach. Consequently, your students may now do everything online, but you are still grappling with clunky processes and old technology with lots of manual working behind the scenes

- Disjointed experience
- Low student satisfaction leading to a higher dropout rate
- Lack of data insight to make effective decisions
- Internal bottlenecks and inefficiencies
- High level of manual effort, often with seasonal peaks
- Exhausted staff with low morale

Addressing the Challenges

With HE Institutions there's clearly an urgent need to modernise the student experience to appeal to today's learner and increase revenue. New education services are continually entering and disrupting the market based on clear learning outcomes, and increasingly obtaining a degree certificate may not necessarily be the student's main objective. Online and distance learning models are becoming more popular, and students have more choice than ever, meaning that traditional monolithic learning models could soon be a thing of the past.



The Opportunity

Joining up the Student Experience

2022 is the year to re-imagine your student experience.

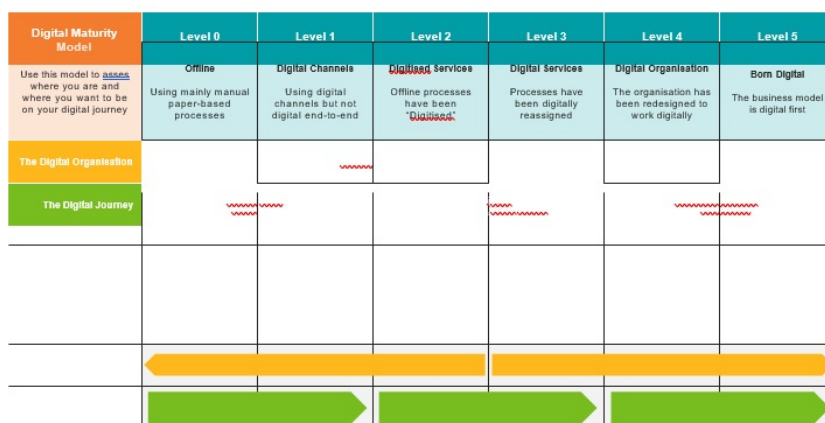
Many practices developed during the last two years will be here to stay, and you must think about how to redesign the way your people, processes, and technology work together. Many organisations have also restructured and are now leaner, so the opportunity is now, or you will get left behind. As previously mentioned in this article, it doesn't have to be a lengthy IT program. There are so many quick wins that have high impact to kick start the process.

In the current climate, successful organisations will be thinking about a transition rather than a transformation.

Transition is an agile approach where you make incremental changes that takes your organisation from being fundamentally analogue by design to one that is digital design. This transition enables business to quickly pivot in an ever-changing world of business.

In the diagram below, this is represented by moving from a Digital Maturity Level 2 (you have digitised your offline processes) to Level 3 – you have redesigned your processes by fully leveraging digital technologies based around a solid understand of your student needs.

Transformation as a term often gets in the way of delivering positive change and practical improvements that provide immediate benefits to your customers.



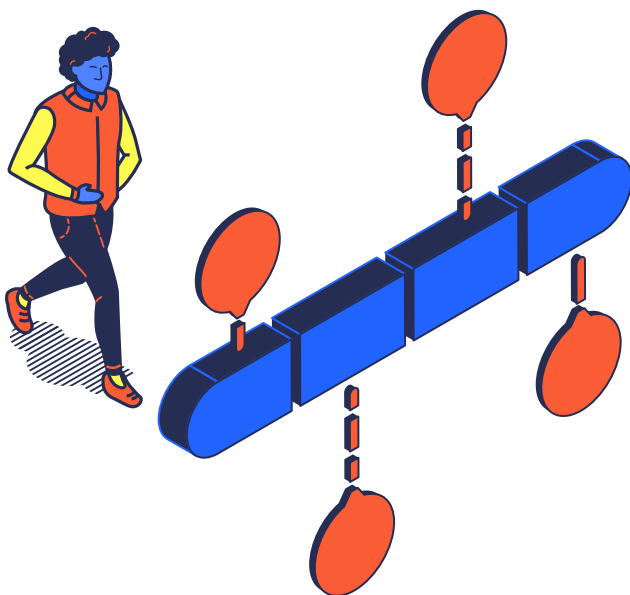
Conclusion

As society rethinks the value of post-secondary education, accelerated by the in response to COVID-19 and Brexit, higher education institutions are responding to prove their value via joined up, flexible ways to prepare students for the workplace.

It is simply critical the digital journey is unified to help your institution rethink and achieve this direction. If you don't, you risk becoming outdated in the face of rapidly changing circumstances.

As touched upon earlier in this article, it's imperative that as a large business, you make digital transitions efficiently and effectively, operating with a lean business approach where pivoting and responding to change is easier. Technology such as artificial intelligence, automation, blockchain and advanced analytics can all change the way in which services are delivered to students. It's incumbent upon HE institutions to recognise that potential and leverage the power of those technologies in the most relevant ways.

Over the years of working with many Higher Education institutions, we have found the most successful institutions have implemented a unified view of their organisations capabilities that aligns initiatives, investments, and strategy to compete and engage the student to achieve their best possible potential.





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