



TRANSFORMATION IN THE HE SECTOR

CREATING A NEW POSSIBILITY
FOR STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Purple



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EXECUTIVE STRATEGY

The rate of change in the world of higher education is gathering pace. Learning is changing from teacher led to learner centred. Putting the “student” at the centre of learning but more than that, learning is becoming industry led, i.e. it is no longer the teaching establishment dictating the model, nor is it the student learning requirements dictating the model as some believe. It is the shifting nature of work as a result of both changing global economies and changing student priorities that is dictating the shift in learning model from being focussed and linear, to being broad, adaptive, and continuous over a lifetime.

The ability to learn and unlearn knowledge depending on the requirements of your chosen career at that specific point in time, combined with the increasing options available to you as an individual to utilise that knowledge and provide your intellect to a range of employers to meet an evolving industry will determine how you engage with your chosen learning providers over your lifetime.

How education institutions respond by getting to know their students and designing their services to deliver an experience that attracts that sense of lifelong learning loyalty will determine whether or not they remain part of the education fabric in the future.

BACKGROUND



The nature of work is changing at a remarkable pace. Globalisation, disruptive technology, the gig economy, low cost of entry leading to “challenger” organisations in every industry. Perhaps it's even fair to say that it is the world that is changing, not just the nature of work within it. Global instability as balances shift back and forth in trade wars, uncertainty of national and international politics e.g. Brexit, and the rise of populism and nationalism. Either way one thing is abundantly clear, the modern “worker” also needs to evolve, and that means taking a fresh look at how to remain competent as a worker in a rapidly, and ever-changing world.

With the changing nature of work, a skills mismatch is rapidly emerging. It is predicted by 2020, the US will have a shortage of 1.5 million college graduate level employees, and approximately 6 million too many employees who have not completed high school. As the nature of work shifts from repetitive, process driven tasks which can be automated, to value innovation and creation jobs, so the skill level required in employees both continues to increase, but crucially, to evolve and adapt over time.

(<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/future-of-work-in-advanced-economies>)

Traditionally we learn general base level skills and competencies at school and specialise and start to narrow down but deepen that learning into a more career focussed direction as we move through our teenage years and then, for many, on to University, vocational college, or apprenticeships. This linear journey of education and acquisition of knowledge generally stems from either a subject interest, a suggestion from parents, a natural aptitude or talent for a particular set of subjects, or on occasion (but less often) a long term career goal that necessitates a specific study route from an early age, e.g. veterinary science.

From there, our career path is narrowed further and once we enter paid employment, tradition dictates that you remain in your chosen career for life in the majority of cases, perhaps altering specialisations here and there, but broadly speaking once you've invested time gaining experience in your chosen career, starting afresh is too much of a leap financially for most to even consider.

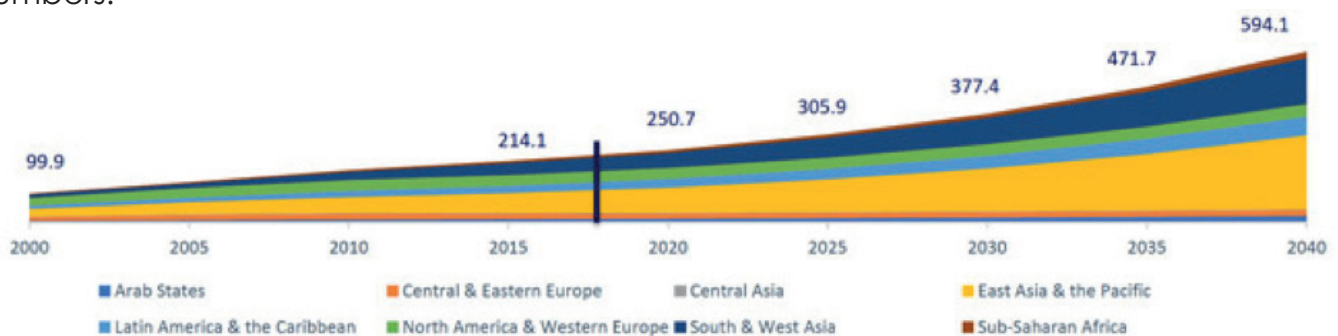


THE CHALLENGE

Higher Education (HE) establishments in the United Kingdom are facing an increasing set of challenges.

The introduction of student tuition fees led to new education establishments popping up left, right and centre to classify themselves as Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) and thus qualify to attract students and take a share of those tuition fees. In effect this attracted "challenger" learning institutions to compete with the traditional University model, meaning increased competition for students, both domestic and international.

University education globally is growing fast, just look at the projected increase in student numbers:



This increase in competition meant that HEI's needed to differentiate themselves along one or more of the following streams:

1. Reputation
2. Quality of teaching (both in terms of Academics, and course choice)
3. Employability (how many graduates go on to full time employment of their choice)
4. Academic research and links to industry
5. The student experience itself

Traditional establishments have long been used to competing on the first 4 points, but they are becoming a level playing field with really only a handful of red brick Universities relying on their broad reputation for excellence, and others on their narrow specialisation (e.g. Royal Veterinary College or London School of Economics). The Times 200 list of Universities rarely reveals big shifts from the usual suspects. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/best-universities/best-universities-world>, although there is a rise of Asian Universities breaking into the list and threatening the

usual establishment from Europe and the US. More establishments are now turning to the final point, the "Student Experience" as being a key area to differentiate and attract more students and the lucrative tuition fees that come with them.

Much like in any industry, HE's market themselves to their customers (in this case prospective students) through a number of channels (e.g. website, prospectus, fairs, events. etc), once attracted, they invite prospective students in to experience the campus, facilities, "lifestyle" and meet the academics, and then they need to convert that interest into an application, and onto an offer and entry into the HE system. The time and effort required to achieve that conversion rate from interest to onboard is a costly process, and competitive against other HE's both in the UK and overseas. Education is a truly global market, and with the increasing proliferation of online study it is becoming more so.

Universities are placing more emphasis on the overall experience whilst studying. The campus life, facilities, sports and clubs, but very little is sold to the student about post graduation life.

THE OPPORTUNITY



Creating a centre of lifelong learning that attracts the student before they are even eligible to enter higher education, and then creating a flexible, loyalty driven lifelong learning model whereby the student remains loyal to that institution for all of their learning needs during the course of their ever-evolving careers is the prize at stake.

(<https://www.forbes.com/sites/nataliapeart/2019/09/10/the-12-most-important-skills-you-need-to-succeed-at-work/>)

A huge part of creating that student loyalty is both in creating the brand that the student is attracted to but backing it up and reinforcing it with an experience that the student wants to retain for life.

HEI's are becoming increasingly aware of the need to provide not only a slick entry process, but a positive experience that encourages the student to remain loyal post graduation, and not only remain a loyal student for the future, but encourage a sense of lifelong belonging resulting in support in the future through forging industry relationships, philanthropy and ultimately bequests.

But how do HEI's go about both understanding, designing and optimising the ideal student experience? How does this enable establishments to leverage this experience into a model of lifelong, onsite and remote learning to support the objectives of the student as a worker in responding to the needs of their employer within the global economy?



UNDERSTANDING THE STUDENT

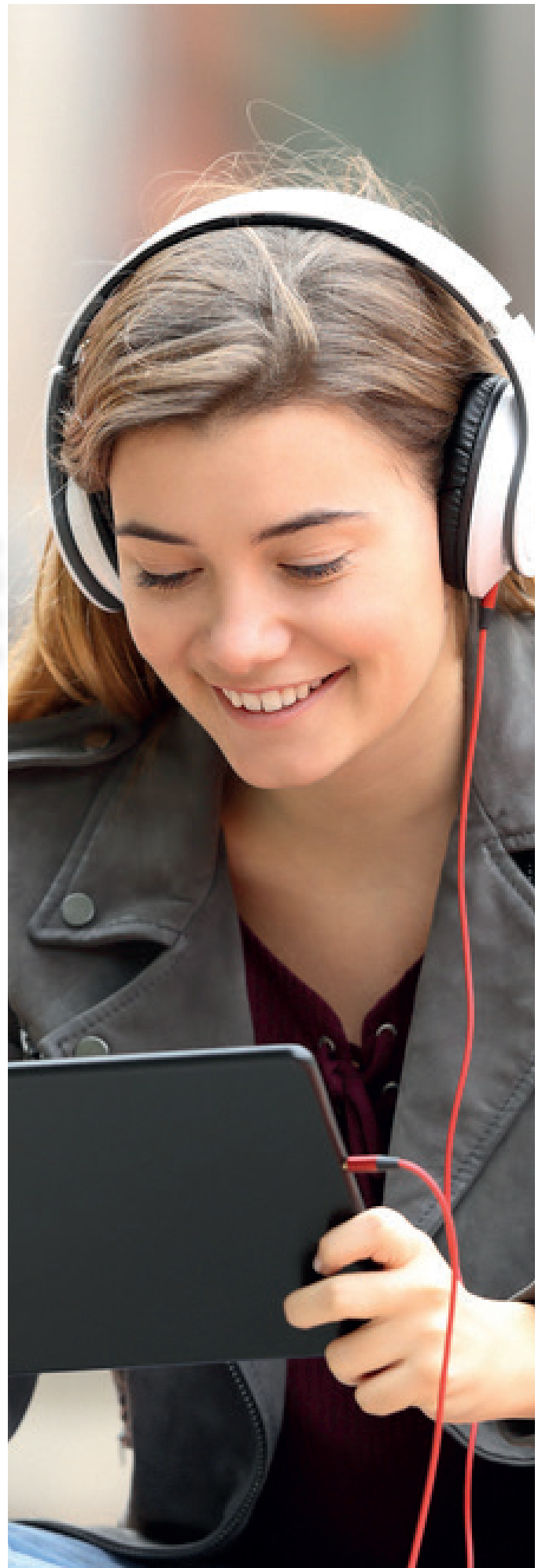
The first step any higher education institution needs to take is to establish and communicate clarity of vision and purpose regarding what they need to become, their target state and their reason for existing from the Student's perspective. What is the student's purpose that they are going to fulfil, bearing in mind that as we have discussed, the student's purpose is being determined to a greater extent by the shifting demands of the workplace.

Once the purpose and vision are clearly defined, communicated and understood, then the institution can move onto understanding what defines value from the student's perspective.

A clearly understood purpose and vision provides a guiding compass point for the institution whilst they go through an extended period of transformational change. When iterative change happens rapidly and over an extended period of time, including experimentation and redesign to meet evolving needs, staff and students require something firm and unchanging to hold onto as a grounding point. The purpose and vision gives them this anchor.

It is imperative that the institution does not try to dictate what value is, as they are not the party receiving it and making use of it. It is for the students themselves to determine, and for this some segmentation may be required as value for one may not be value for another.

There are a number of different approaches to gaining a deep understanding of your customer or in this case, student base. So HEI's need to go through an initial phase of "discovery" to understand both what they know, what they don't know, and crucially to start to uncover what they don't yet know that they don't know!



STUDENT PERSONAS



Simply put, personas are generic, personified representations of different segments of your customer base. If you are a supermarket for example, you probably want to target your advertising to different demographics as the people who buy denture fixing paste may not be the same people who want to buy peanut brittle so you would separate them into different target segments. So too in HEI we need a way of understanding and representing the different demographic and psychographic makeup of our student body.

Once we have created these different student personas which give us a generic profile of the types of students we have, and why they are at our institution, how they interact with the institution, the value they perceive, the pain points they experience, the emotional journey they go through, etc, we can then use these personas to take them on task journeys through the institution and play out how they experience it within each persona.

We can also use task journeys to represent an end to end interaction that the student typically experiences. For example the admissions journey, from doing research and perusing the institutions' prospectus through to the UCAS application, attending the campus open day, interviews, completing the application, going through clearing, accepting the offer and choosing course modules, choosing accommodation, and finally arriving at the University and attending freshers week.

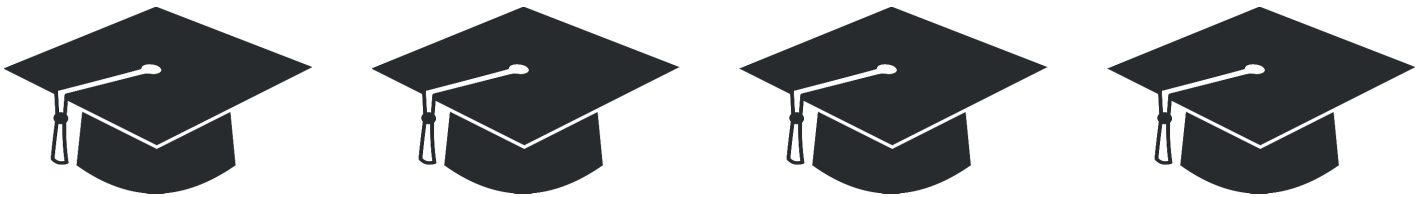
Each student persona will experience this admissions process slightly differently for example overseas students may struggle to attend open days.

By understanding both the groups of students, the value they gain (and pain they experience) from their interactions through the typical task journeys, we can then understand how the institution's processes, organisation structure and underpinning systems and technology either help create this value, do not contribute to value creation or worse, hinder or remove value from being delivered to the student.

Complementing the creation of personas and task journeys, the HEI needs to gain a high level snapshot of all the business processes in use across the institution to create a visual model of the opportunity for improvement, and the opportunity to stop doing work that isn't creating value for either the student, the organisation (as an entity) or the staff within it.

TASK JOURNEYS

The task journeys, underpinned by this high level business process information and an understanding of the core business lines of the organisation allow us to map clear end to end service lines to demonstrate how the organisation currently delivers services to the end consumer of those services, in this case, the student. By following the flow of work, and not the organisation structure or the process structure we see how the workflow to deliver a service is actually designed, measured and managed. It may be fragmented, have numerous delays introduced, numerous points where quality errors creep in and re-work has to be carried out, but ultimately, the student receives the service.



THE FINAL STEP

The key next step then, is to redesign the end to end service so that it flows freely, with quality designed in, and cost driven out through the appropriate application of efficiency and technology to deliver the end to end service in the most efficient and effective manner. The ultimate (and final) quality step in the end to end service having been pre-defined by the person receiving the service themselves, in this case, the student.

We can then put in place a number of measures that enable us to track the outcomes, the student experience, over time. More importantly we can put in place measures that enable us to both measure our capability to alter and improve those outcomes, and also predict what impact they will have on the outcome measures themselves.

All of this helps an HEI to understand, and take control of the end to end student experience with a goal of creating a loyalty to their brand that will keep those students coming back throughout the life of their careers as they need to continually adapt and gain new knowledge. The ability to do this via different channels will also determine who will rise and fall in that list of top 200 Universities in the world.