

A photograph of three students in a classroom setting. A woman with curly hair is smiling and looking at a laptop. A man with glasses is leaning in from the left, and another man with a beard is leaning over from the right, pointing at the screen. They are surrounded by books and papers on a desk.

**5 tip guide to
connecting with
your students,
staff and
visitors**

Introduction

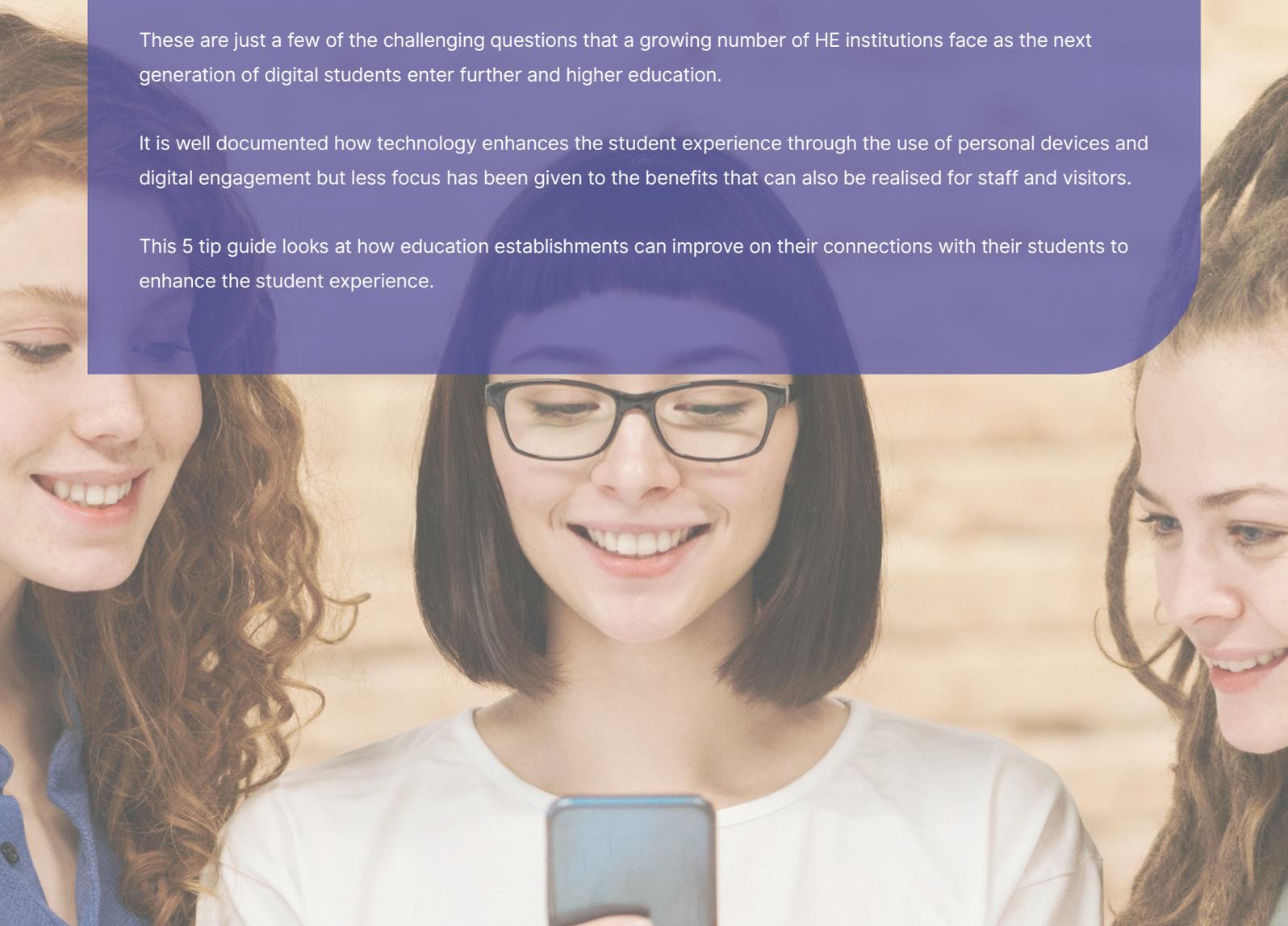
How are leading universities connecting with their community?

- How are you delivering content to your users as a hybrid model of learning emerges as the 'new normal' in response to the Covid-19 pandemic?
- How are you responding to the changing digital expectations of your students, staff and visitors?
- Do the online experiences and the digital environment you offer to your population adequately match what your physical campus culture promotes?
- How much does the student experience feature within your establishment's digital strategy?

These are just a few of the challenging questions that a growing number of HE institutions face as the next generation of digital students enter further and higher education.

It is well documented how technology enhances the student experience through the use of personal devices and digital engagement but less focus has been given to the benefits that can also be realised for staff and visitors.

This 5 tip guide looks at how education establishments can improve on their connections with their students to enhance the student experience.



1 Start with the individual

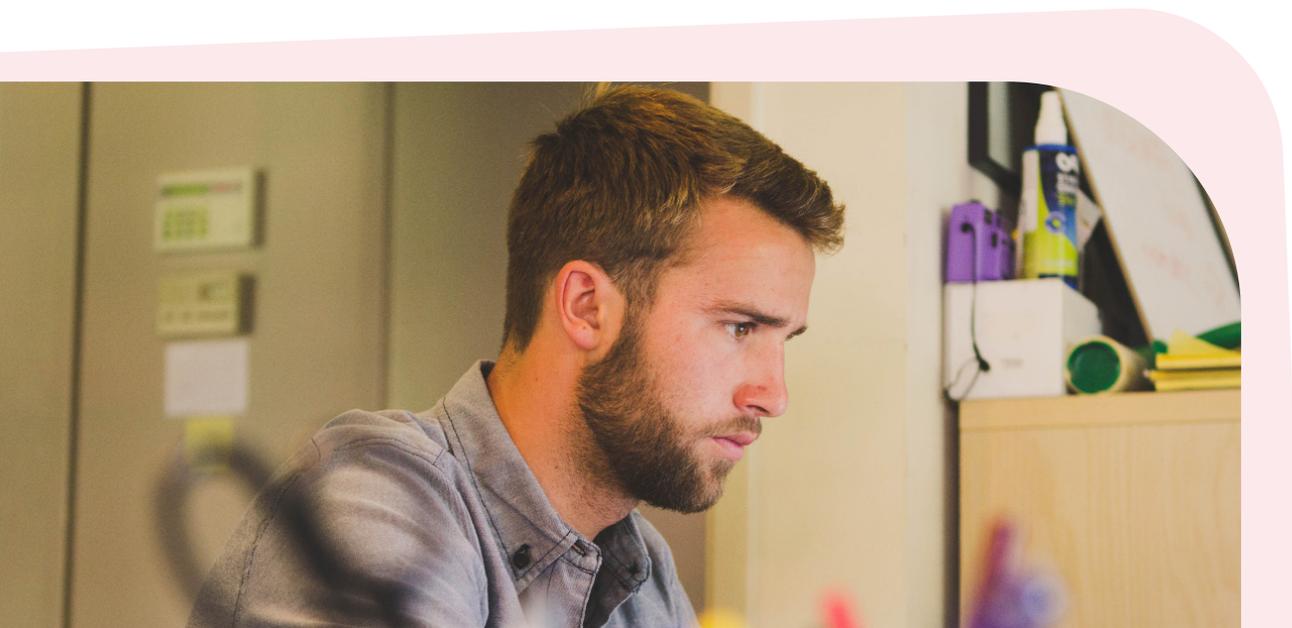
Today's students live in a digital world and have instant access to all information at any given time, from any location. They expect a personalised experience in all aspects of their life and this includes academic studies. Accurate, personalised information such as timetables, assignment deadlines and exam times for example are just some of the items institutions are being asked to deliver.

Staff prioritise communications with students and this is often executed in a number of different ways, though some are inefficient and costly. Communicating with each other is often a damaging second priority if considered at all. Individual departments tend to be aligned on their own departmental goals and priorities but it is easy to forget that there is one common goal throughout every department in an institution. Although IT and student experience teams may sit in different parts of the building, campus or even world, it is key that communication and cohesion are prioritised.

Wrapping the institution around the learner, visitor or staff member – i.e. putting them at the centre of all systems and actions, improves perceptions of your organisation, creates efficiencies in teaching and learning and inevitably improves engagement and satisfaction scores.

Digital environments in one form or another have been around for some time but only now are they becoming an expectation. Many student system teams recognise this and are developing mobile applications that support the any-time, any-where student requirement but a large collection of apps is becoming just as inefficient as having none at all.

Introducing a digital campus as a gateway to those apps and systems and building customisable dashboards that put your student, staff member or visitor first is the only way you can offer a truly tailored experience.



Be bold enough to make systemic change

A university or college's reputation directly impacts revenue. From attracting and recruiting staff and students to securing research funding, reputation can be perceived as one of the most important factors influencing decision making. A positive reputation brings many valuable resources and when utilised successfully will strengthen business position and continue to reward. The opposite is true when reputation isn't actively managed and scarce resource is underutilised.

One of the biggest yet unrecognised risks to reputation is individual departments being aligned to their own departmental goals only and working within silos to achieve these. The silo mentality will negatively impact operations, reduce employee morale and may contribute to the overall failure of an institute or culture.

Having a clear vision across the senior leadership team is vital to success. With reduced funding across the whole of the education sector, budgets are tighter than ever. Instead of coping with a smaller amount of money, joining up with other departments to collaborate on larger, all-encompassing projects will prove to be more valuable and will enable your institution's vision to be realised.

Having a well-connected senior leadership team that regularly communicate and work towards one common goal as a priority will address the traditionally interconnected nature of university and colleges and remove the barriers to addressing underperformance – in whichever department or area this happens to be in.

The key to success is to discuss change requirements that are both inside and outside of your department. New business processes and technologies should be learner-centred and changes to accommodate this will span multiple areas of work. Larger supporting teams may potentially increase available budget but most importantly will prioritise requirements for the greater good. Institute-wide changes may be required but this will only improve the reputation and situation for all.





Implement robust system connections

Connecting individuals

Students want the ability to manage their lives by having access to all relevant information at any given time, from any location, on any device. Easy and secure access to institutional networks and wireless local area networks (wifi) are generally available at most institutions although these do not always work as seamlessly as students would like. Overlay the complex world of single sign-on solutions and identity management and IT teams can very quickly be over-loaded with a seemingly far from adequate solution.

Allowing both staff and students to connect with a university and each other should consider and remove any geographical or technological barriers. For many students, this focus on the student experience is a key consideration when choosing where to study and when scoring their campus on the National Student Survey.

Enabling learners to access the information they need to make a success of their learning whilst enjoying a simple app-like experience from the device of their choice is vital to connecting tomorrow's students to the campus and increasing engagement.

One-click access to all key university systems increases engagement. Enabling the ability to tailor that access and send communications based upon identity and location elevates your institutes position to one offering a true personalised experience.

Connecting system data

The field of learning analytics is having a significant impact on higher education and is growing because of the data access we now have. Providing that this ability is being taken advantage of, universities and colleges are able to detect patterns in various scenarios to improve areas such as enrolment and retention. For example, when students leave a programme, when does it typically occur? Is it within a particular month or after a particular unit? What changes could be made to improve student retention?

Introducing the ability to derive conclusions from student data enables an adaptive and more personalised learning approach helping both students and institutions to succeed.

Connecting all of your institution's systems is one of the most effective ways to reduce costs, increase quality, and standardise processes. By implementing a digital campus that leverages all existing IT investments by bringing them together onto one customisable interface and ensuring all your systems and data are integrated, your institution will be able to better connect to students, staff and visitors.

4 Get actionable feedback

Understanding the staff and student experiences of your campus is critical to the success of your organisation. Knowing how to obtain this information and then what to do with it is at the core every success story. So where should you start?

Student Journey mapping

The first action required for any establishment serious about taking action on feedback is to complete a mapping exercise. Mapping your student experience journey is critical to understanding where your data gathering points need to be and enables you to integrate those insights so you can continually monitor the impact of your actions. The student's journey has been long documented and can be broken down into as many different sub-sections as is necessary depending on your internal structure and team responsibilities.

THE STUDENT'S JOURNEY



Source: Ackerman & Schilbrowsky, 2007

Gathering feedback allows you to gain an insight into how students perceive their interactions with you and paints a richer picture than process mapping alone. It also takes into consideration both functional and emotional needs, helps to prioritise areas that require focus and highlights the successes of your changes.

How to gather feedback

Institutions need to ensure that individuals are being recognised and show that their voices are heard in decision making. You can set up a number of different ways in which you are able to gather this feedback. They include:

- Formal representation on academic committees
- Feedback via specific student/staff committees
- By completion of satisfaction surveys
- Involvement in the institutional academic reviews of departments
- Direct communication (face-to-face, by email or by telephone)

You should then seek to integrate all insights with those collected through journey mapping, including other data points such as the student union's termly reports or relevant committee meetings. This will mean that your findings can be discussed with student reps, programme teams and central services to ensure the best steps are taken to meet student needs. It is important not to just listen to your staff, students and visitors but to demonstrate the willingness to change too so it's understood that feedback is being taken seriously.

5 Understand your data sources

The role of a university's operations team is to manage the acquisition and utilisation of resources in order to enable strategic goals. Providing leadership and management across many teams and functions can be challenging and deciding on how best and where to intervene can be complex. There are many areas to explore when looking to improve the student or staff experience and so utilising your data in a simple yet effective way is key to success.

Information management is at the core of operational decision making. Having access to data, an understanding of how to use data and enabling the ability to join up data sets brings many benefits and huge reward.

Joining datasets allows you to build statistical models of satisfaction and dissatisfaction across areas of the organisation which can then be validated and explored through focus groups. For example, year on year analysis of your National Student Survey data will help you to identify trends in satisfaction, attitudes, and performance. Working with focus groups to validate these findings will help you to build a business case for change or improvement.

It is important to continue to monitor and measure your findings as changes are implemented to ensure you continue to improve a situation and not just replace one issue with a different problem.

Learners differ in their prior educational experiences, home and work contexts, and individual learning goals. Experience of technology and confidence in using it to learn are new sources of diversity in the student population.



Conclusion

As more and more digitally savvy students enter further and higher education technology will continue to be required to enhance the student experience and connect your campus community.

- **Think digital campus**

There are many ways to improve the connection between your students, staff and visitors. Delivering a robust, flexible, digital environment that compliments your physical campus will be key and should be prioritised. Your solution should be appropriate to the needs of your students and institution with relevant content for multiple audiences.

- **Think individual, not organisation**

You should refer to the student lifecycle and fully consider the user experience. Information should be tailored to each individual user and not just exist for your college or university. Consider the needs of diverse groups of learners too. Getting your information architecture right is vital and structuring your content in a way that is relatable will increase engagement and improve retention rates.

- **Think BIG**

Your college or universities reputation is crucial for attracting students and recruiting staff. If changes are required across multiple divisions in order to create the appropriate environment then it should be supported with qualitative and quantitative data and embraced by all. Enable you college or university to trade on your academic reputation.

myday is a complete digital campus. A portal and mobile app solution that improves student engagement, satisfaction & results, supporting the whole student lifecycle.

The myday digital campus software addresses all of the considerations listed within this guide and much more.

**Learn more about myday at
www.myday.collabco.com**

If you would like to talk to one of our advisers today about any of the information included in this guide or how myday can instantly boost your student experience, and then continue to deliver the rich experience you aspire to achieve then

please call **0800 048 9515**
or email **info@collabco.co.uk**