

Keeping students connected to the resources and support they need, while equipping them for the world of work.

.....  
Easing the transition to university and beyond.  
.....

Today's students are more digitally able than ever. Technology is central to how they live, learn, work and relax. So it's important that this experience continues seamlessly throughout their time at university.



Student reviews of universities now place features such as wi-fi performance high in their criteria when rating their overall experience. Social network StudentCrowd takes the votes of 5,000 students to rank universities based on their connectivity.<sup>1</sup>

Universities are striving to raise their game in a highly competitive market. To demonstrate the value they're offering to students, it's vital that they're able to provide the rounded experience these paying customers need and expect.

In a place of learning – especially one that's costing a lot of money – access to state-of-the-art IT facilities has a direct bearing on productivity and performance. It's no coincidence that student residence landlords are using offers of superfast broadband to attract tenants<sup>2</sup>

With deadlines looming, research to do and assignments to complete, students need to be able to get things done – wherever they are on campus, and whatever the time of day or night.

Strong, continuous connectivity from the lecture theatre to the halls of residence means students don't have to be in the library to complete their coursework. They can simply find a quiet corner, at a time that suits their rhythm, and give their assignment their full attention.

Access to hi-tech facilities and the internet is also essential for preparing students for the world of work – ensuring they leave university with a level of digital literacy that today's employers demand. From the process of recruitment to the fundamental workplace skills organisations are looking for, technology is crucial to almost every imaginable aspect of students' future success.

- 1 The top 3 Universities for wi-fi – reviewed by 4,986 students, StudentCrowd, August 2015:  
<https://www.studentcrowd.com/article/3-best-universities-for-wi-fi-2015>. (See also: The Top 43 Fastest UK Universities for Broadband Speeds Ranked, ISP Review, Aug 2016:  
<http://www.ispreview.co.uk/index.php/2016/08/top-43-fastest-uk-universities-broadband-speeds-ranked.html>)
- 2 Prime Student Living uses connection capacity of up to 250mb to lure students:  
<http://www.primestudentliving.com/blog/why-are-students-expecting-more>
- 3 Students' experiences and expectations of the digital environment, Jisc, June 2014:  
<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/blog/students-experiences-and-expectations-of-the-digital-environment-23-jun-2014>
- 4 BT Higher Education infographic:  
<https://business.bt.com/solutions/small-business/industry/education/changing-landscape-of-higher-education-infographic/>

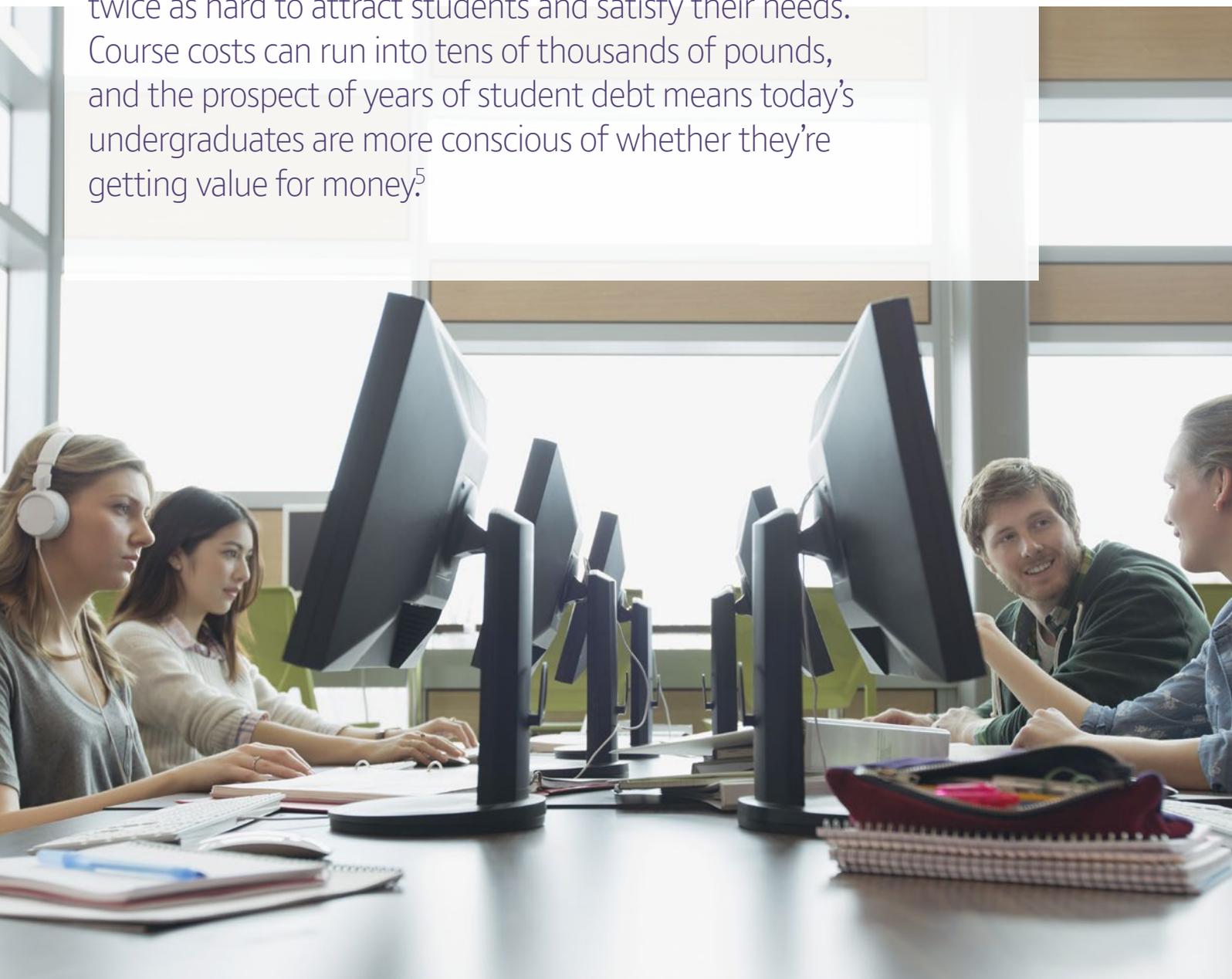
Jisc, which promotes digital services in Higher Education, notes that students everywhere now expect:

- Robust wi-fi right across campus locations.
- The ability to easily connect personal devices to the university network.<sup>3</sup>

[View BT infographic<sup>4</sup>](#) 

# Turning technology into tangible value – for students and financial backers as well as universities themselves.

With the rising cost of tuition, universities must now work twice as hard to attract students and satisfy their needs. Course costs can run into tens of thousands of pounds, and the prospect of years of student debt means today's undergraduates are more conscious of whether they're getting value for money.<sup>5</sup>



Students' financial supporters want to know that they'll have a return on their investment. For parents, the usual measure of this is that undergraduates go on to enjoy a successful career and financial independence. Lenders, meanwhile, hope to see student debts paid back in the shortest possible timeframe.

Research commissioned by the Quality Assurance Agency<sup>6</sup> found that modern ICT, support for collaborative learning, and preparation for the workplace are considered a pre-requisite. If an institution fails to deliver these vital elements, it's considered to be failing in its mandate. If it surpasses these expectations on the other hand, word-of-mouth feedback and external reviews can be very powerful – especially in this viral digital age.

Investing in a state-of-the-art learning environment, and reliable and fast communications, will deliver value for students and their financial backers, and for a university, by:

**Allowing the highest possible learning experience face to face.**

Students come to university for the direct contact with subject experts. Therefore, a good learning experience begins in lecture theatres and seminar rooms. Allowing students to 'plug in' during these sessions means they can take notes as they go, look up references and check facts in real time. The tutor, meanwhile, can use digital technologies to bring external experts into the room virtually.

Research by Jisc<sup>7</sup> has found that, although students want flexibility in where and when they can access resources, they don't want technology to be a substitute for 'real people, in the same place, learning together'. The ideal solution, then, is an environment which combines the best of both worlds: face to face learning and sharing, supported by complementary facilities online.

**Enabling the learning experience to continue beyond the 'classroom'.**

One of the ways students measure a university's value is the number of direct contact hours with tutors. But good technology and connectivity can help build on students' lecture/seminar experiences – creating the option of out-of-hours tutor interaction over the web, for example.

This allows students to ask questions and get vital additional feedback between formal sessions, improving their ability to grasp a subject fully. This can help undergraduates to complete coursework more confidently and to a higher level.

With good digital facilities, tutors can also point students to a range of additional resources online that they can access in their own time, reinforcing what they've learnt or explaining it in new ways – strengthening their learning.

All of this can help a student reach their full potential, while improving their enjoyment of their course because they feel more in control.

5 Student doubts rise over university value for money, BBC Education, June 2016: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-36480882>

6 Student Expectations and Perceptions of Higher Education. London: King's Learning Institute, Kandiko, C.B. & Mawer, M. (2013): <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/learningteaching/kli/People/Research/DL/QAARreport.pdf>

7 Students' experiences and expectations of the digital environment, Jisc, June 2014: <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/blog/students-experiences-and-expectations-of-the-digital-environment-23-jun-2014>

### **Keeping students organised, to maximise attendance and results.**

The more routine that using ICT becomes to everyday campus life, the better organised students will be. Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), which won a Guardian award for the ‘best student experience’<sup>8</sup> uses technology to provide personalised course and timetable information to students digitally.

In a blog about the developments, Mark Stubbs, Head of Learning and Research Technologies at MMU, said the move was a response to students’ requests for personalised information on assignment deadlines, recommended reading, exam times and more. MMU uses web services to collate this and presents tailored information to students via a new virtual learning environment and campus mobile app.

By ‘wrapping the institution around the learner’ MMU successfully improved perceptions that courses are well planned. This has translated into improved satisfaction scores in the National Student Survey.

The more connected students are into university networks and systems, the easier it becomes to monitor their engagement too. Data analytics can be used to track patterns and anomalies in students’ online activity – such as frequency of login, and whether they’re downloading the available resources. This can help universities to spot whether a student may be having problems or losing interest – while there’s still a chance to turn the situation around.

### **Maintaining relationships – and equilibrium.**

Beginning Higher Education is a huge transition. Staying in touch with family and friends can help students settle in, especially if they’re a long way from home. Having easy access to technology and reliable wi-fi can help relieve stress too, providing access to online entertainment for a generation that prefers streaming content to mobile devices to watching TV<sup>9</sup>

Technology can also provide vital access to online support in the form of self-help, mutual interest groups, student chat rooms and general advice.

International students, who pay a lot of money to study at universities in the UK, can be particularly vulnerable to feelings of homesickness and anxiety, especially if distance makes it hard to see their family or visit home as often as they would like. The Brexit vote has had an impact on how some overseas students feel about studying in the UK too. So it’s more important than ever that universities go the extra mile to make these valued undergraduates feel included, connected and catered for.<sup>10</sup>

As well as equipping them with a cheap and easy means of staying in contact with home, a good digital connection means these students will stay on the university’s radar. Therefore, faculty and support staff can swiftly address any signs of withdrawal from classes or coursework.

---

8 MMU wins Guardian best student experience award:  
<http://www.mmu.ac.uk/news/news-items/1937/> (see also  
<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/blog/5-top-tips-to-enhance-your-students-experience-11-mar-2013>)

9 How millennials in the UK are swapping TV time for Netflix,  
Business Insider UK, July 2016:  
<http://uk.businessinsider.com/how-millennials-in-the-uk-are-swapping-tv-time-for-netflix-2016-7>

10 What do international students think of the UK after Brexit?  
University Business, August 2016:  
<http://universitybusiness.co.uk/Article/what-do-international-students-think-of-uk-after-brexit>

### Enabling work-ready skills development.

Unless students are accessing the latest technologies and digital services every day as a routine and important part of their time in Higher Education, they won't pick up the vital skills they'll need in most fields of work after university. The QAA/King's College London report on student expectations of Higher Education includes comments from students noting that employers 'aren't just looking for grades' now.<sup>11</sup>

Digital literacy is essential in most professions, and high on employers' list of criteria when shortlisting candidates. So giving students easy access to the latest technology and facilities for whatever they need to do on campus carries important value, both during the undergraduate years and for the rest of their lives.

The need to improve the country's digital capabilities was highlighted in a House of Lords committee report published in February 2015. The document, *Make or break: the UK's digital future*, noted that the Higher Education sector had 'not responded to the urgent need for reskilling,' and called for institutions to develop courses to give students the skills they need. Developments are now being tracked by the Digital Capabilities Group of the Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA) in an annual Digital Capabilities survey<sup>8</sup>.

Jisc is working closely with universities across the UK to help boost digital literacy among undergraduates and better prepare them for the workplace<sup>9</sup>. Imperial College London now includes a Digital Literacies course as part of its medical curriculum, for example. This takes medical students through the use of common IT applications as well as more specialist medical systems. Emerging technologies such as wearable devices and their potential impact on the patient-doctor relationship are also covered. All of these skills will come into play in these graduates' futures, so they'll leave their place of learning prepared for a 21st century career in medicine.

### Starting the transition to work before graduation.

Equipping students with advanced ICT resources, robust connectivity and deeper digital skills also gives them chance to navigate career opportunities and start preparing for interviews before they graduate.

Recruitment processes are changing quickly as employers adapt to digital opportunities for finding the best candidates. Many job opportunities are found through digital and social channels now, and the application and interview process has been transformed as many companies use tools such as video CVs and video interviews to vet and select new talent.<sup>14</sup>

And the sooner new graduates can start applying for jobs, the sooner they'll be able to secure the right kind of work: a position that matches the skills and knowledge they've acquired during their time at university.

11 Student Expectations and Perceptions of Higher Education, p38. London: King's Learning Institute, Kandiko, C.B. & Mawer, M. (2013): <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/learningteaching/kli/People/Research/DL/QAARreport.pdf>

12 Digital Capabilities Survey, UCISA: <https://www.ucisa.ac.uk/digcap>

13 Jisc Digital Student – Exemplars: <https://digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org/wp/exemplars/>

14 The Digital Recruiter: 4 Things That Changed The Way We Recruit Forever, CoreHR blog, February 2016: <https://www.corehr.com/blog/the-digital-recruiter-4-things-that-changed-the-way-we-recruit-forever/>

15 BT higher education infographic: <https://business.bt.com/solutions/small-business/industry/education/changing-landscape-of-higher-education-infographic/>

To be able to meet these needs, universities need robust campus connectivity and a fit-for-purpose ICT environment.

View BT infographic<sup>15</sup> ▶

# How BT can help.

Technology moves at a lightning speed. So, however advanced your Higher Education institution may be in ICT terms, it's important to plan ahead for student needs tomorrow, as well as their expectations today.

BT can help you improve your university's connectivity and digital learning facilities and provide a clear plan for the future, taking you where you need to be at a pace that's right for you.

We can help you:

- Provide a continuously connected campus.
- Create a dynamic and bespoke virtual learning environment.
- Stay ahead of students' evolving needs, with scope to keep growing and developing.

This will allow you to:

- Impress and satisfy students now, be ahead of their demands, and send them out into the world equipped with everything they need to get a great job.
- Make technology and communications an integral part of your institution and the daily activities of your students.

Remember that good news spreads quickly, especially in this digital age. Next time there's a student poll on ICT and wi-fi, make sure it's your university that's getting the highest ratings, boosting undergraduate intakes for years to come.

[Click here](#) to find out more about how BT can help bring your university up to speed, and prepare it for the future, or call our dedicated team on **0800 032 0025**.

