



CASE STUDY

The Student Success Blueprint:

How LSBU Uses Technology to
Empower Students





Over the past five years, London South Bank University (LSBU) transformed support for its nearly 17,000-student-population to reach their goals. How? By building a technology backbone to boost student success.

The U.K. university, which ranks in the top 10 of universities globally for reducing inequality, has a high number of students facing challenges – whether they’re from low-income families, living with disabilities, or coming out of foster care. At this point, student success may seem like a commonplace term. Improving retention means that students complete degrees, move on to rewarding employment, and have lifelong affinity toward their institution.

To move the student success needle, institutions must do whatever it takes to give students the resources they need at the right time and in a way that makes it easy for them. This is according to Dale Vander Wall, a Higher-Education Industry Advisor for Salesforce, the cloud-based software company working with LSBU. “Timing is really important here for the students,” he adds, “because every student is different. Every experience is different. They all need support and resources at different times in their education journey.”

The third edition of [Salesforce Connected Student Report](#) found that globally, students are asking for more resources to assist them in their academic careers. For students participating in the survey, “more help managing my course load and work/personal life” ranked at the top of their concerns (alongside “more financial aid”); however, only 62 percent of students surveyed said they could get questions answered easily at their institution.

At LSBU, the most recent student success efforts began in 2019. The university inventoried existing services and supporting technology and found “a complex web of highly customized systems”: seven customer relationship management (CRM) systems used around the institution, along with a student records database. Alex Denley, Director of Innovation and Transformation at LSBU, compared the institution’s previous approach and services to a jigsaw puzzle. “The pieces were all there but they just needed to be put back together again,” he says.

As the university began to develop a new strategy, staff members engaged students. “They knew we offered a raft of great services,” says Denley. “They just didn’t know where to find them.” Students sometimes felt they had to stand in long lines to get help, only to be told they were in the wrong place.

The university began to work toward a single, integrated CRM that would make it possible to access detailed information in a central place. To create “this single source of truth”, the university mapped student journeys from the point of admittance to alumni status and closely listened to what students, staff, and academics wanted.

In the new system, each LSBU student regularly fills out a multi-dimensional questionnaire and meets with a personal tutor throughout the year. Tutors can access this information in the CRM via the student’s personal development plan. “We now have a whole level of insight that we’ve never had before,” says Denley.

The information gathered while the students work on their personal development plans gives the university a more powerful way to meet each student’s unique needs. The university used research

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from its education school to define the questions asked to students and always provides a space for students to tell, “What are the things that matter to you that you would want us to know?” shares Antony C. Moss, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Education and Student Experience at LSBU. The students might indicate they are a first-generation student, for instance, are a parent, or are having to care for an elderly relative. Three-hundred-and-thirty students in the past year have declared disabilities that they did not mention at admission, says Moss, possibly because they feared discrimination when applying.

LSBU is testing the ability of the student success platform to reach out to students to prompt them to take action. For instance, students who indicate that they are not comfortable with computers may get a suggestion that they book an appointment with the university’s digital-skills team. The university is trying digital outreach with 450 students, with the goal of reaching the entire student body in the fall.

Data indicate that the new platform is advancing the university’s mission. More than 1,000 LSBU staff use the platform, nearly half a million student queries have been fielded, and students are viewing nearly 44,000 knowledge articles a month. For universities interested in building a similar integrated system, Moss urges leaders to engage academic staff “early and often.”

It can be easy, Moss says, to drift into being too technology-focused. He suggests asking faculty and staff members, “What is making your life hard?” That makes it possible, he says, to find onerous, time-consuming tasks and convert them to “one-and-done” tasks. At LSBU, academics, including the students’ tutors, were scheduling appointments through email exchanges and tracking the appointments in spreadsheets, a process that can now be done swiftly and simply using a calendar function. Such small-scale wins, he says, encourage academics to become more involved in designing the system and using it.

Strong support for students has a significant reputational pay-off for academic institutions, as found in the third edition of Salesforce Connected Student Report. Students who felt they could get their questions answered easily, had the academic support they needed, and could easily sign up for an advising appointment were also more likely to say they had a “great” university experience.

The experience of LSBU mirrors what universities are trying to do: Go beyond using data just for recruitment, unify data systems, and break down data silos. “Institutions today are working toward finding ‘leading indicators’ that get them ahead of what is happening in students’ lives instead of coping with problems after they occur,” shares Vander Wall, Salesforce Higher-Education Industry Advisor. Institutions are emphasizing student well-being, including physical and mental health. “The pandemic was gasoline to the fire of recognizing how disconnected the experience is for students,” he says. As LSBU continues to develop their integration of Salesforce, they’re working to lean further into functionalities like workflow trend analyses – allowing the university to facilitate earlier interventions to ensure individualized student success.

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