

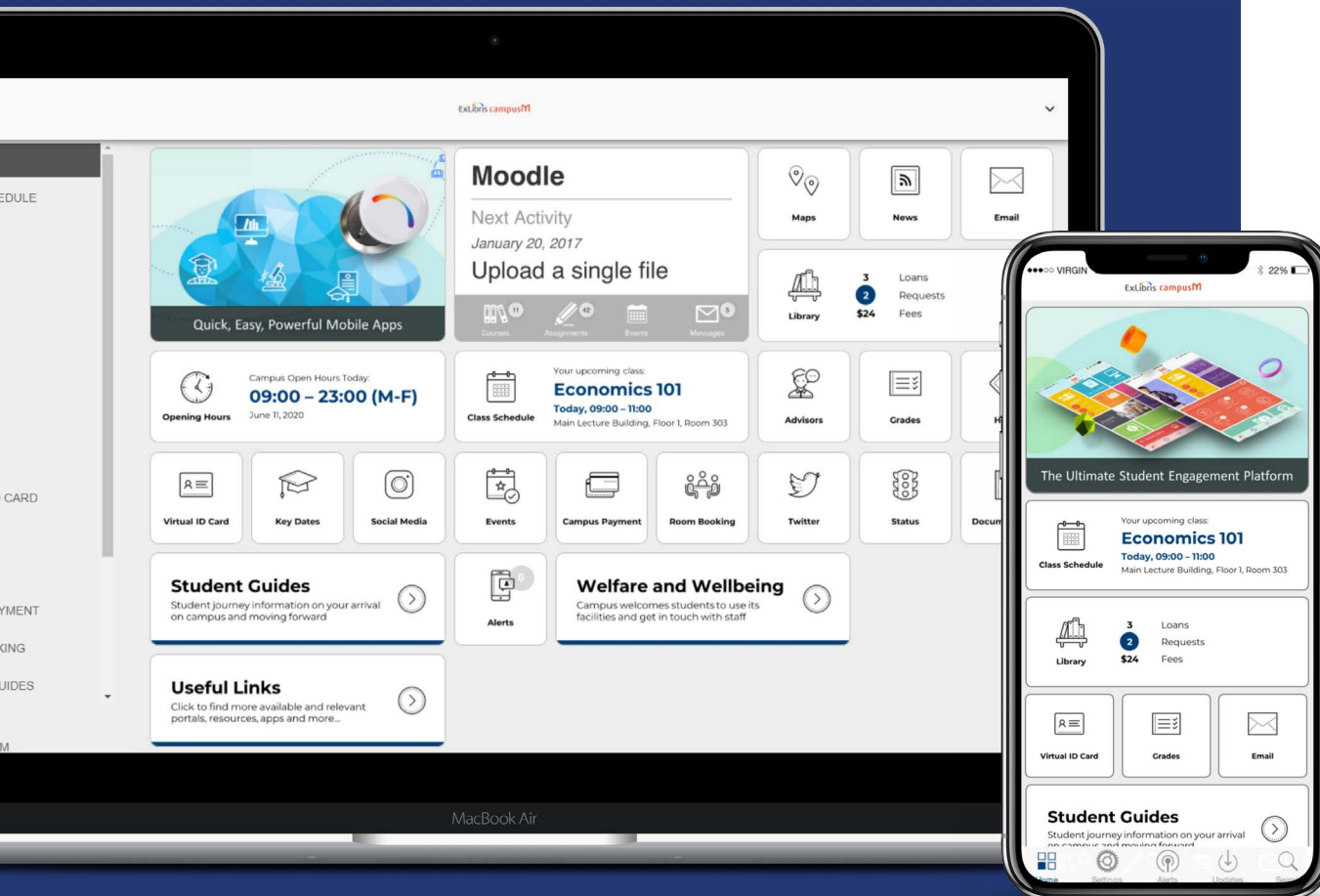
Understanding the digital lives of university students

2019/20 research findings

Findings from the third year of an annual multi-institutional study into the behaviour and preferences of users of university digital devices and services.

ExLibris
campusM

alterline



Background

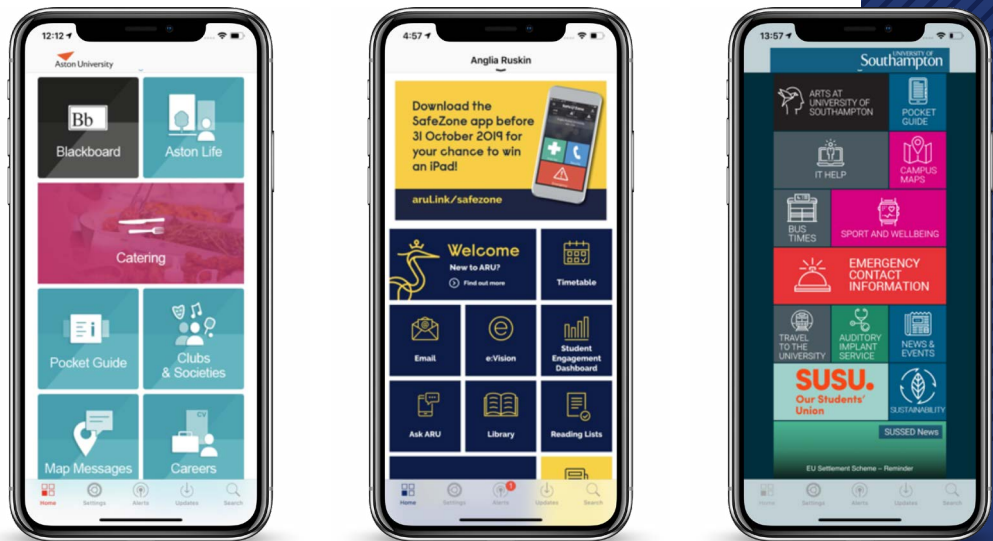
Smartphones are everywhere. In developed markets 90% of adults own one¹. We use them for everything from checking the weather and entertainment, to banking and household management.

As both the power of the devices we use and what they enable us to do evolves, it is more important than ever for higher education leaders to understand the relationship that their students have with technology. In this way they can make informed, data driven decisions on their digital and student engagement strategies.

Since 2016 campusM and Alterline have partnered to survey students on their attitudes towards technology, and their experiences of using various digital platforms.

This year to reflect the changing nature of technology, we have broadened the scope of the survey, asking for the first time about devices such as smart speakers, as well as investigating the role that technology has in the classroom.

This survey continues to give valuable insight into the digital lives of students and helps campusM to ensure that our product leads the way as a student engagement platform.



¹ Lee, P., Casey, M., Wigginton, C. and Calugar-Pop, C. (2019). Deloitte's 2019 global mobile consumer survey. [online] Deloitte Insights. Available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/insights/industry/telecommunications/global-mobile-consumer-survey.html> [Accessed 13 Feb. 2020].

Project

This project was the third year of a research programme commissioned by campusM and delivered in partnership with Alterline, an independent research agency, investigating the digital lives of students, examining how they use technology throughout their university life and understanding where their experiences can be improved.

An online survey was completed by students from five institutions in the UK and one in Oman: Edinburgh Napier University, Anglia Ruskin University, Aston University, University of Southampton, Imperial College London and Majan University College. The survey was promoted through the campusM app and was completed by both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

This paper reports on the findings from our survey which was completed by **2,176** students between October 2019 and November 2019.



Technology is an important part of student's lives... especially smartphones

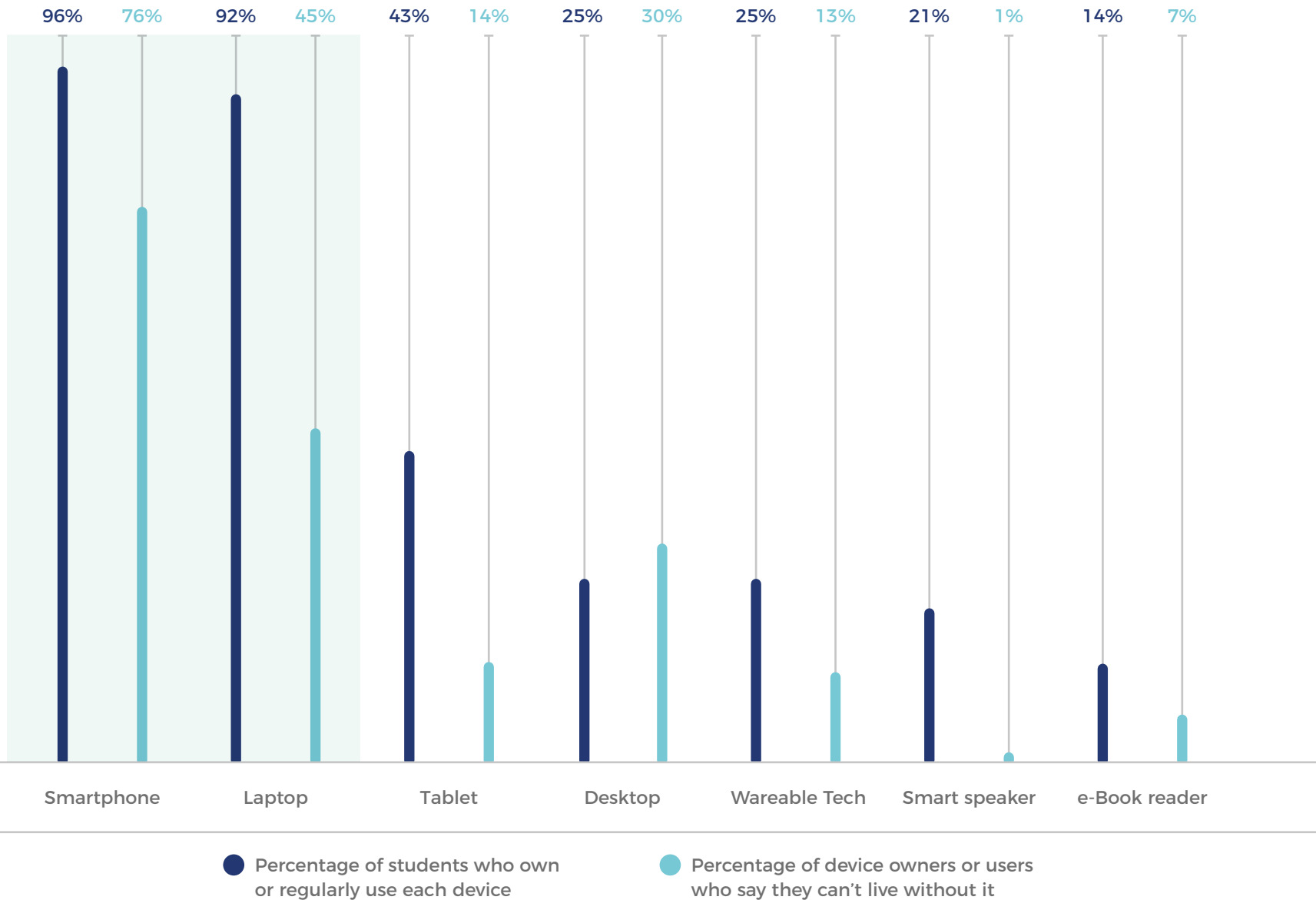
Almost all students own or regularly use a smartphone and a laptop, with smartphones being the most commonly used device. Use of these devices is unchanged from the 2017/18 survey.

Students see smartphones as most integral to their lives, with almost three-quarters of users saying they are unable to live without their smartphone, compared to 'just under half' of laptop users.

Students who took part in the 2019/20 survey were more likely to own wearable tech and an eBook reader than those who took part in the 2017/18 survey (25% and 14%), but how important they are to students remains static.



For the first time this year, we asked students about their ownership of smart speakers. 21% said they own a smart speaker, almost as many as those who own a desktop PC.



Students see technology as vital to their studies – more so than to their social life

Only just over a third of students (38%) agree that their social lives would be ruined if they did not have their digital devices. Many more see technology as vital in their academic life; 90% admit that they would struggle to complete their studies without technology.

Students highlight that some areas of their studies are totally reliant on technology. These include accessing lecture and revision materials, e-resources and materials and writing and submitting coursework.

They also state that doing administrative tasks, finding classes and communicating with tutors and their peers is made easier thanks to technology.

“Online portal gives me access to everything I would need to coordinate my learning. Without blackboard, my timetable and email, I would be very unorganised and may end up missing out on important information.”

90%



% who say they would struggle to complete studies without technology

38%



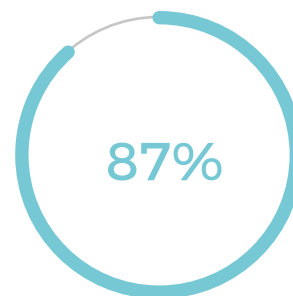
% who say their social lives would be ruined without digital devices

Students are confident using new technology, however are much less confident about how their personal data is kept secure and private whilst using it

As well as technology being an important part of their lives, students are confident when using new technology.

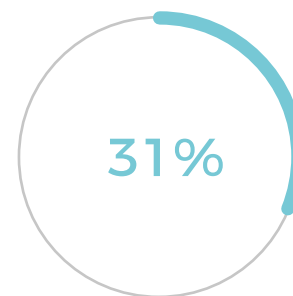
Though they are confident, they do value technology, such as online apps being easy to use. In order to be seen as easy to use, apps need to be simple but effective to operate with clear, flowing and clean menus and navigation.

Their confidence in using new technology does not transpire in to being confident their personal data is secure and kept private whilst using that technology, which could indicate them feeling a lack of control in terms of how their personal data may be used.



Are confident using new technology

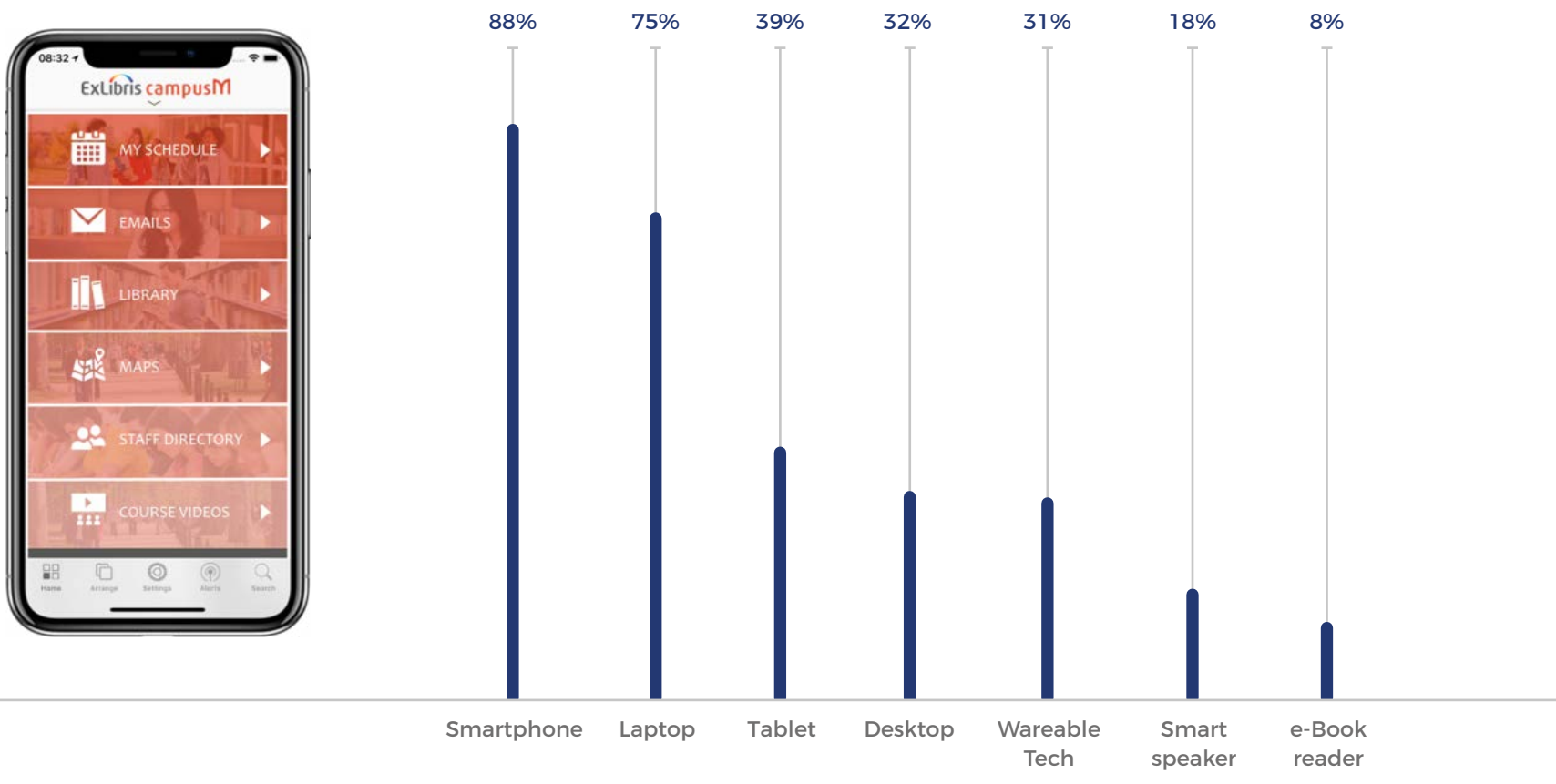
“It’s easy to scroll through the app, searching and navigating is painless. It looks and feels good which makes the experience a lot better.”



Feel confident that their personal data is secure and kept private whilst using technology

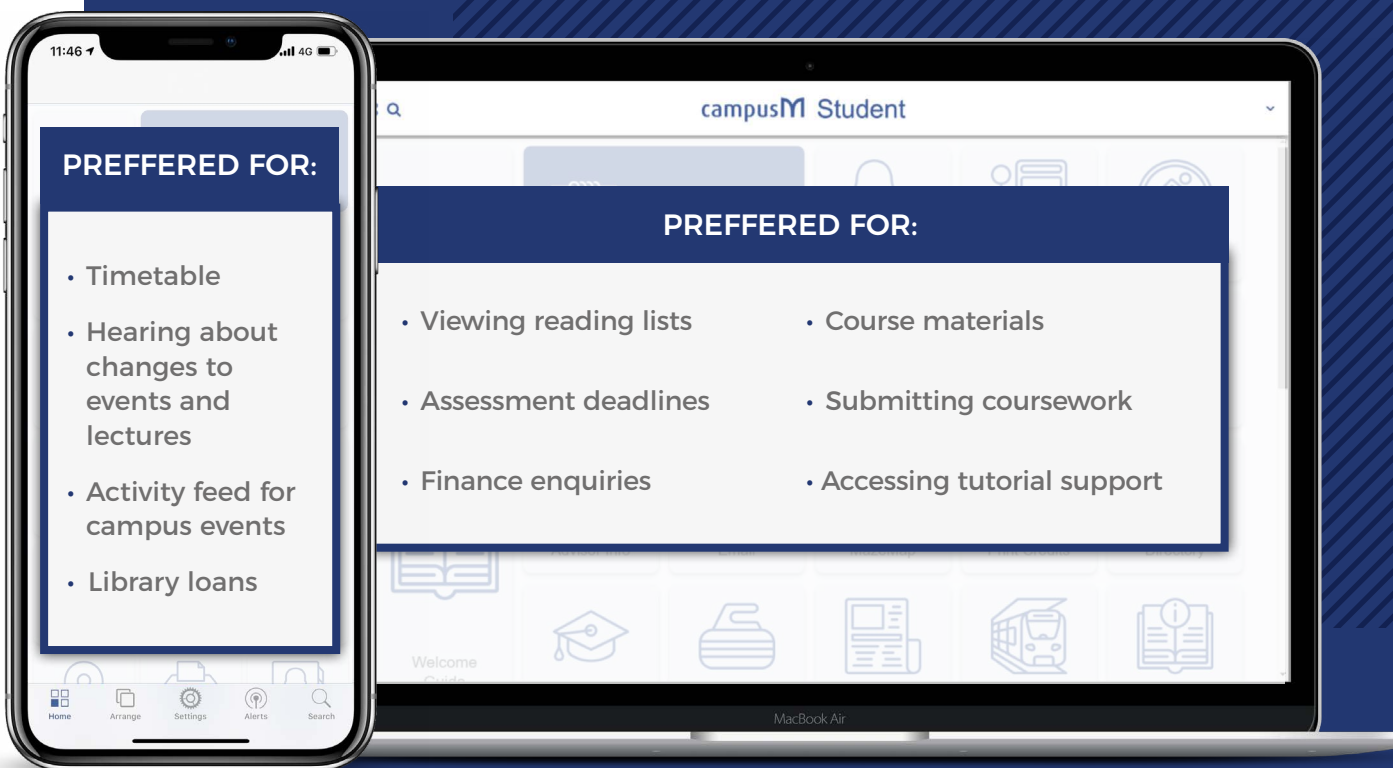
Smartphones are the most often used device for study and university-related tasks, especially for simple, quick activities

88% of students use their phone for university at least once a day, while slightly fewer (75%) use their laptops for their studies at least once a day.



Proportion of students who own each device who use it at least once a day for university

Students use their mobile device when they need information immediately or on the move. For more time-consuming or complex tasks, accessing portals via laptops is the preferred option.



Smartphones are preferred for activities that require a simple information check



Laptops are preferred for activities or tasks that require more time or attention

More than half of students see an institutional mobile app as one of most important digital services universities can offer

Which digital services do students select as the most important?

“The online portal is great because I can access my email, blackboard and online timetable straight from a hub and not have to log in every time. It also has additional features that I don’t use that often like adding printer credit and changing my password which I find helpful.”

“The app shows my timetable and updates to the timetable as well as bus times, ensuring I can be in the right place at the right time.”

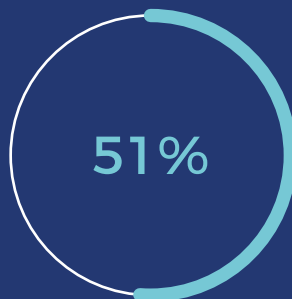
“The ability to quickly and easily access set readings for my course from anywhere, almost any time, has allowed my work schedule to be as flexible as I need it to be.”



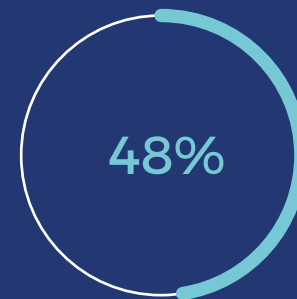
3 Most important digital services according to students



Institutional mobile app

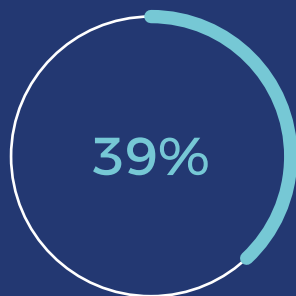


Accessing the course timetable

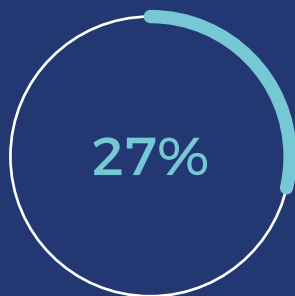


Lecture recordings and notes

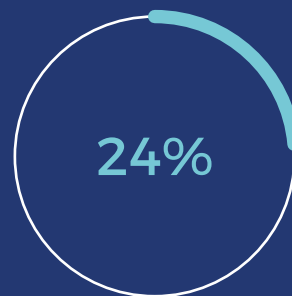
Compared to the 2017/18 survey, The mobile app is seen as the most important digital service, rather than the second most important.



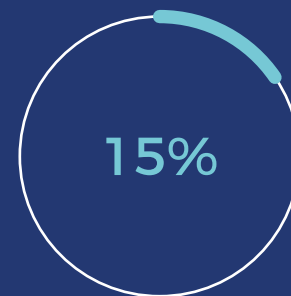
The student portal



The virtual learning environment



Accessing the online library catalogue

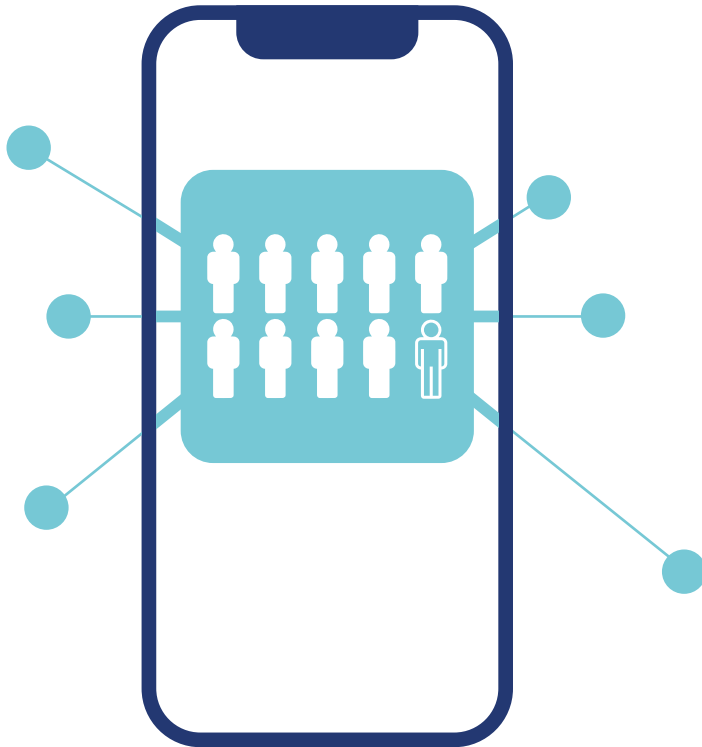


The institution website

Services that were seen as being less important were: student enquiries (11%), print credits (7%), fee payments (7%), cashless payments (6%), careers (6%), managing student records (6%)

Alongside core features of the app, students see several others as vital, and many more as 'nice to have'

9 out of 10 students prefer a single app that covers all aspects of their studies (rather than multiple apps)



CORE SERVICES



Job vacancy search



Library loans



PC Free



Timetable



Searching numbers and contacts



ChargeBox locations



Library search



Campus maps



Travel information



Finance enquiries

ADDITIONAL FEATURES

ABSOLUTELY VITAL



Assessment deadlines



Accessing course information



Emergency contacts



Grades and performance information



Registering attendance



Booking study spaces



Viewing my reading list



University news and notices

Tracking campus activity

NICE TO HAVE



Activity feed for campus events



In class voting

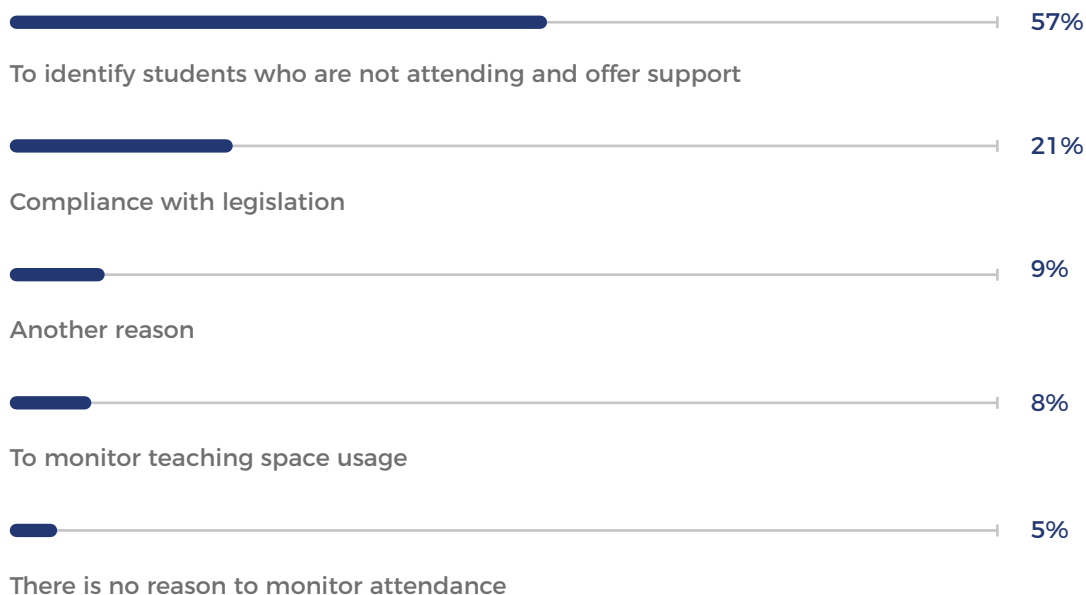


Viewing coursemates' progress

Monitoring attendance and offering support to students who need it can help drive academic success

The majority of students believe the main reason universities monitor attendance is to identify those who are not attending and offer support to those students.

Most universities monitor student attendance in lectures/seminars. Which of the following do you think is the main reason for doing this?



The majority of respondents felt that attendance was directly linked to course success and felt that those who struggle should get help and support

This could highlight an opportunity for the institution app to allow students to engage with their attendance and to be contacted if any concerns arise.

“Sometimes students will start not attending lectures and it can quickly become a habit. The reason it’s hard to stay on track and keep attending lectures is that there is no one to hold you accountable, such as a parent or teacher like in their previous years. Therefore, a student might find it difficult to hold themselves accountable and keep attending lectures which is why I think attendance should be tracked to offer support to students who need more support.”

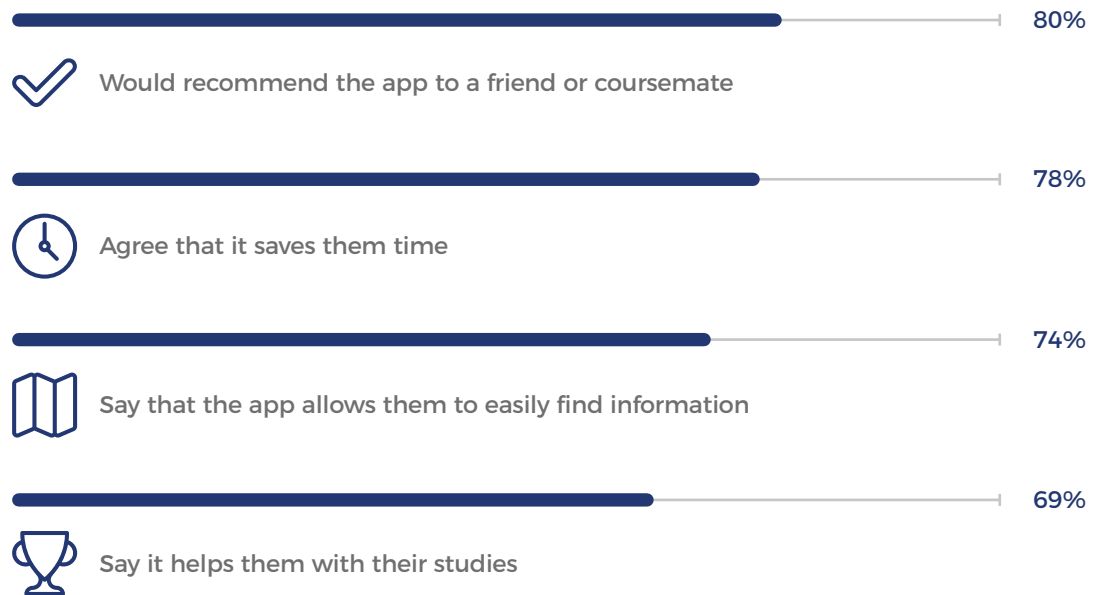
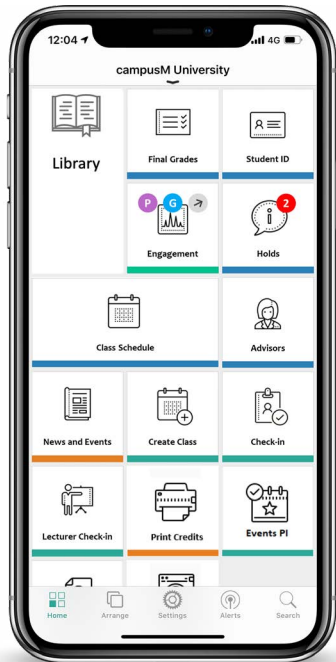
“If students are unable to make it to lectures there could be a reason for it and if it’s a matter that can be dealt with it is fair and good that they can get the support they need if they are afraid to ask for it.”

Students remain highly satisfied with the campusM app

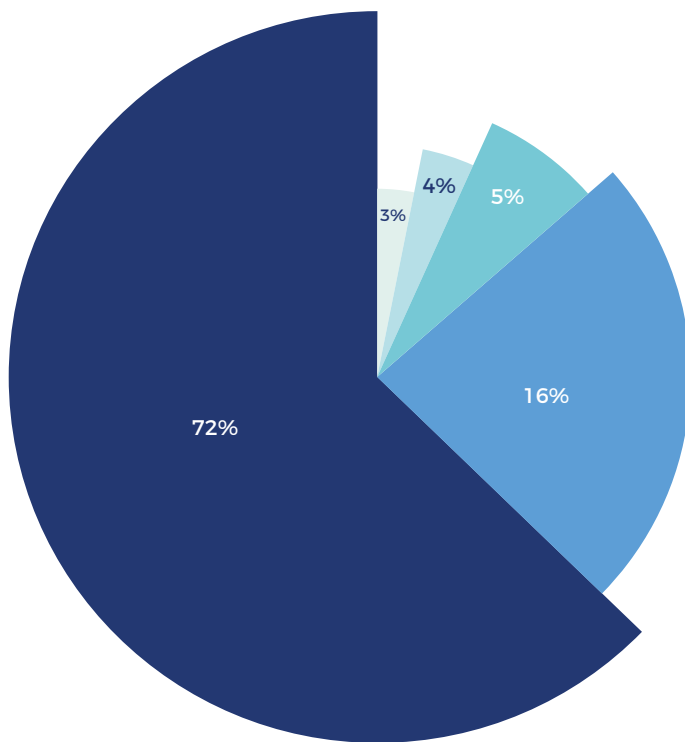
Four out of five students with the campusM app would recommend it to a coursemate.

It's most often described as useful, easy, simple and helpful, which aligns with the words students use to describe their ideal app. Students agree that the app saves them time, allows them to easily find information, and helps them with their studies.

The value it provides to students is reflected in the high frequency of its use: 88% of those who have the app use it a few times a week or more, with half using it multiple times a day, and a third saying they “could not manage” without the app.

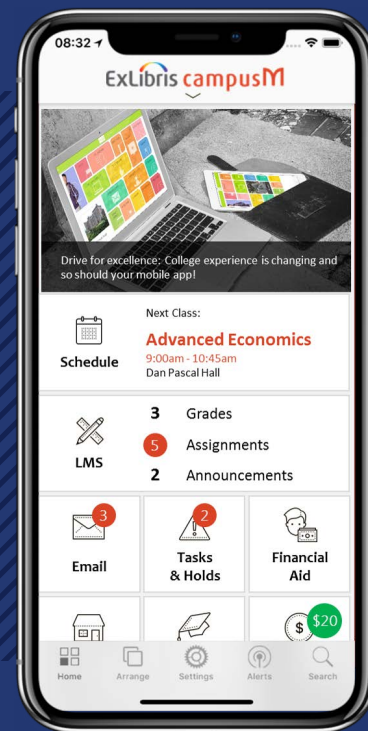


The majority of students are frequent users of the app: as shown in the figure below, almost three quarters use it at least once a day.



- At least once a day
- A few times a week
- Less than once a week
- Around once a week
- Never

45%



Say they **“could not manage”** without the app





**Thank you
for reading**

campusM apps are used by some of the leading teaching and learning institutions in the world, and we are committed to ensuring that students and other stakeholders get the best possible app experience, no matter what device they are using.

Get in touch to find out more.

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