

Submission to the Support for Students Policy

Guidelines Consultation Paper

September 2023

Introduction

TechnologyOne is an ASX100, global Software as a Service (SaaS) company. Founded and still headquartered in Brisbane, we have offices across six countries. Our enterprise SaaS solution provides powerful, deeply integrated enterprise software that is incredibly easy to use. Over 1,200 leading corporations, including government departments, statutory authorities are powered by our software.

Our global SaaS solution provides deep functionality for the markets we serve, including full end-to-end student management systems for tertiary and higher education institutions. TechnologyOne's market leading position is based on a commitment to reinvest about 20 percent of revenue into R&D year on year.

TechnologyOne provides its global OneEducation software solutions to 90 percent of Australian universities, 50 percent of UK universities and seven of nine universities in New Zealand.

TechnologyOne welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.

The Global Retention Challenge

TechnologyOne has observed that the challenge to retain students is common across the higher education markets we serve.

It is also clear that the cause of students failing to complete courses of study were often extraneous to the university, such as increases in the cost of living putting increasing financial pressure on students. However, these are not likely to be ameliorated by requirements that place the burden of success on students, such as the 50 percent pass rule.

In order to gain greater insights into the challenges facing students in the UK, TechnologyOne last year commissioned research into the impact of financial pressures on students.

The data show seven-in-ten students have considered dropping out of higher education since starting their degree. Nearly two-fifths of those gave rising living costs as the main reason, while 69% of all students admitted to adjusting their spending over the last term because of the rising cost of living.

Half of students reported having to cut back on eating out and nights out (54% and 50%), more than a third are cutting back on heating (36%), while a third are reducing their spending on basic groceries. In addition to maintenance loans, more than half of students (52%) reported having a full or part-time job to fund their 'basic lifestyle' at university and their rent, utilities and food. Overall, more than half of students (54%) claimed that rising costs are 'ruining' their university experience.

It is likely, based on our insights in Australia, that similar pressures are being felt by students locally.

The Technology Opportunity

The key to improving retention, as identified by the consultation paper, is the proactive identification of disengaged or disengaging students.

There are preventative actions universities can take. For example, smarter timetabling to give students more consistency in their class loads can be crucial in allowing them to balance study and work commitments.

Universities then also need to have mechanisms in place to spot at-risk students through their engagement patterns. Predicting student attrition requires making sense of multiple data sources – how many terms is the student enrolled for, have they transferred to another program, have they been given an academic warning for failing grades, have they sought support services, are they enrolled fully online?

Modernising the way universities communicate and interact with their students is key to being able to offer strong support and to spot early warning signs before struggling students walk away from their academic studies.

Progressive organisations recognise that digital transformation is the key to solving these challenges. Smart solutions better support the administrative and pastoral needs of universities and their students. Our Software-as-Service solution for example provides higher education leaders with real-time, holistic data-driven insights.

We know that investing in smart technology and analysing the right timely data can be transformative in helping universities identify and intervene when students are struggling – financially and emotionally – and ultimately helping them stay the course.

The good news is the software systems required to provide these insights is already available, and most universities have the core of them. The integration of existing financial, student management and resource allocation systems can allow for the automatic interrogation of these data to provide “red flags” against individual students at risk.

Data Trust and Reliability – Embedding Fairness and Responsibility

Data-driven solutions have the potential to significantly enhance educational outcomes, but it is crucial that such initiatives are underpinned by trust, transparency, and ethical considerations.

Data trust is of paramount importance in the process of identifying at-risk students. This encompasses the responsible collection, storage, and utilisation of student data to identify those in need of additional support, ensuring data privacy and security, obtaining informed consent, and employing anonymisation techniques to protect individual identities.

Recognising data trust necessitates a commitment to bias mitigation, algorithm transparency, and accountability in decision-making processes. Ensuring that these systems are fair and equitable is fundamental to avoid perpetuating existing disparities in the education system. Reliable data metrics can identify areas of improvement, allowing universities to allocate resources efficiently, enhance academic programs, and address challenges proactively.

We see the importance data metrics offers as a foundation of reliability and objectivity upon which university leaders can base their decisions. These metrics encompass a wide array of factors, from enrolment and retention rates to financial sustainability and student outcomes.

By recognising the importance of these data-driven measures, the government can empower university leaders to make well-informed, evidence-based decisions that benefit both the institutions and their stakeholders.

Ultimately this will enable universities to remain accountable to their students, faculty, and the broader community by demonstrating the outcomes of their decisions transparently.

Contact

TechnologyOne would be pleased to provide further information upon request.

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