University of Salford

Becoming the first social university in the UK through a culture of collaboration and engagement

Discover how the University of Salford has made social media part of the internal culture in order to foster and strengthen student relationships, improve collaboration, and enhance efficiency.

University of Salford, Manchester

Located in Salford, England near Manchester city centre, the University of Salford is ranked the eighth most influential university in the UK. With a focus on public research, the institution attracts 20,000 students annually, with over 3,500 international students.

700-800 social messages received during the clearing

2-4 minutes average response time during the busiest time of year

Second highest improver of National Student Satisfaction (NSS) score in education sector

What they did

The University of Salford's goal is to be the first truly social university in the UK. They wanted to embed social media across all relevant departments in order to:

- Build relationships with students

- Share widespread information

- Improve reputation and awareness

- Answer enquiries faster

- Enhance teaching and learning

Like so many higher education institutions, the University of Salford is growing their social media presence to meet their young and socially savvy demographic online.

Delivering a consistent experience for students

When Clark first arrived at the university, there were too many social accounts and no strategy, content management, or collaboration. The end result was an inconsistent social presence. Social media was used more for marketing, rather than to build student relationships, recruit or drive business.

As part of the renewed focus, the university needed to put less emphasis on self-promotion and publicity and more on creating two-way conversations. Likewise, when a student asked a question such as when an exam was or where a lecture was being held, someone in the press office might see it, email or ring a lecturer, and within a few days have an answer.

"Our target market is on social media—they know how to use it and they get the point of it. With nearly 100% of our audience already there and waiting for us, it's up to us to seize the opportunity. As a result of their familiarity with social media networking, students feel more comfortable raising concerns on one of these digital channels than perhaps in person. We recognise this and want to communicate with and help students on their terms."

Justin Clark, Senior Press Officer, University of Salford

The university needed to:

- Remove the perceived risk of social media

- Educate employees on best practices

- Tap into the full spectrum of social media's benefits to drive business and add value

Managing the biggest recruitment day of the year

Within a year, Clark had tightened up the university's social presence so that academics, lecturers, recruiters, and marketers were collaborating effectively toward one goal of better student services and increased business.

In the UK, universities have an annual clearing process. This one-day event is a central day that the entire year builds up to—exam results are released and university spaces that are unfilled become available to any unassigned students. The university wanted to ensure that they were prepared to handle the increased volume in social media activity.

How they did it

Increasing efficiency of social media workflows

Clark uses Hootsuite's collaborative tools to work more efficiently and securely with other teams and departments. By training staff to use Hootsuite's basic functions—or in-depth reporting and assignments for those more advanced—more team members can confidently listen and engage through Hootsuite. This means that Clark can work with staff to assign messages, reply directly to enquiries within minutes, mark messages as responded to, and schedule out content all from one central dashboard.

"A few years ago in higher education, social media used to be a 'nice to have' extra. Today, it's essential to thrive and survive in this globally competitive market."

Justin Clark, Senior Press Officer, University of Salford

"Once people realise that, say, 10 users can collaborate in Hootsuite—without needing to know passwords and without the risk of sharing unapproved content—the discussion goes from should we do it, to how do we do it. You can have your whole department involved on social media risk-free."

Justin Clark, Senior Press Officer, University of Salford

Competing to recruit among hundreds of universities

One of the university's biggest success stories since improving collaboration was during the annual clearing day. This is an annual event on Results Day, where UK exam results are released and remaining university spaces are matched up with unassigned students. Clearings are very hectic as thousands of students have a short space of time (clearing extends beyond a single day) to research, ask questions, and apply for their matching university.

Over 350 universities across the UK try to connect with prospective students and answer enquiries about course and facilities on social media. To manage this successfully requires planning, collaboration, and deep listening.

In the past, clearing enquiries were conducted over the phone or by email, which required call centres or long email threads among lecturers and academics. Moving to social, the university was historically only setup to catch direct @mentions, which meant that many enquiries were left unanswered. As more students turned to Twitter to ask questions during the clearing, the university staff would visit Twitter.com to respond—not knowing if another staff member had already replied.

Driving enrolments with social media listening

This time, Clark set-up multiple keyword searches and geo-located streams to catch all UK-based and international student enquiries related to different courses and departments—whether they mentioned the university or not. Not only could they conduct more advanced listening, but they could have multiple people collaborating without duplicating answers or missing messages.

"On a daily basis, we'll look out for what our students are saying online and spark genuine, one-to-one conversations with them. That one interaction could mean the difference between that student choosing us over another university—from a commercial point of view, that's a potential £27,000."

Justin Clark, the Senior Press Officer, University of Salford

They set up a dedicated social media clearing team to answer enquiries and each member had specific knowledge of the student recruitment process. They had a single team leader responsible for monitoring and listening across all social channels. The team leader would then assign individual messages to the relevant member of the social media clearing team to take action. This ensured the enquirer received the right answer first time in as short a timeframe as possible. On average, response times to enquiries were between 2-4 minutes.

The results

Deploying Hootsuite for the clearing allowed Clark to give access to a large group of university staff for the day. This meant that they could **work together to respond in real time to enquiries and promote open spaces for requesting students.**

The staff unanimously agreed that they **handled double the enquiries in half the time compared to the year before, seeing nearly 800 messages**. In the first **7 hours alone, they received 350 tweets** on @SalfordUni.

"We found Hootsuite to be very user friendly and an effective way to handle so many enquiries in such a short amount of time," says Clark. Using the assignments tool **saved the team significant time and resources** in getting the right responses out. This left the university more time to reach out to the students who hadn't directly mentioned them, and offer some of their services.

This was one of the first times that so many of the university's staff joined together to use **social media for recruitment and drive business**. Likewise, because the feedback during this campaign was so positive, Clark has been given more **buy-in to drive expansion of the social media program**.

"It's been a quiet revolution over the past year. Without having executive investment in social media, we couldn't prove it's worth. Now that we're increasing recruitment efficiency during times like clearing, we're getting the buy-in we need to prove the ROI."

Justin Clark, the Senior Press Officer, University of Salford