

# Birmingham City University

Birmingham City University is a large, diverse, and increasingly popular place to study, with over 23,500 students from 80 countries.

Incorporating a heritage that reaches as far back as 1843, Birmingham City University today focuses on practice-led, knowledge-based learning, providing students with access to cutting-edge facilities and real-world experience. Students are placed at the heart of everything the University does, giving them the best opportunities for future success.

## The Opportunity

The Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment (CEBE), within BCU, has a student body with a mix of commuter students and those who relocate for their studies. CEBE has approximately 4,500 students, with around 1,000 new students enrolling each September.

A diverse student body, with differing educational and cultural backgrounds and a high percentage of whom commute, create unique challenges for the Faculty. Whilst supporting students in the transition to Higher Education, and their ongoing development, the Faculty recognised that student outcomes are strongly linked to the sense of preparedness and belonging they feel to their new university.

Reflecting on the way students interact with each other, the CEBE team realised they needed a stronger Digital Engagement channel to connect with students—one that reached them wherever they were, cutting through the noise so the most important messages were always heard, and provided a feedback channel so the student voice was loud and clear.

*“Our incoming students are digital natives, and digital innovation is at the heart of our University strategy. Smart use of mobile technology, machine learning, and in-the-moment analytics will ensure we continue to provide great support and generate high levels of engagement. Our students live on their smartphones, we need to be there too.”*

**Professor Julian Beer**  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research, Innovation and Enterprise

## Why did Birmingham City University choose University Assistant?

The BCU team chose to work with Tandem Labs as early adopters of the University Assistant platform. University Assistant is the best way to engage your students where they are—on their phones and always on-the-move—whether they're preparing for orientation, looking for a job after graduation, or anything in between.

The platform enables the precise targeting of tailored content—articles, collections, videos, and more—so students get the right support, at the right time, using a mobile app designed for digitally savvy students.

*“When it comes to student success, digital engagement really matters. I'm delighted that we're working with a technology partner to accelerate this aspect of student support here at the University. This project will put us at the leading edge of student support and I'm confident it will further grow our students' success.”*

**Professor Claire Mackie**  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic

**>97%**

Adoption among first-year students

**>165,000**

Article, video, event, and notice impressions

**249**

Support conversations started by students

**>25 mins**

Time spent in-app per student

In the two orientation weeks (between September 10 and September 24) we saw unprecedented engagement by new students.

## How did we do it?

The Faculty team deployed University Assistant to more than 1,000 incoming students in the run-up to welcome week to support them as they prepare for university life, help them get to know their course and tutors, and make sure they get the best out of the events and provide real-time support during welcome week itself.

In addition, the faculty team are deploying the platform to all second-, placement-, and final-year undergraduates. With this wide deployment across the faculty, University Assistant has become the primary digital engagement channel for all student success matters; providing support and advice, gaining student feedback, and targeting cohorts with high importance articles, videos, and collections.

*“Our students are always on the move, and always on their smartphones. University Assistant give us a fantastic engagement channel that’s always within students’ reach. It helps us target our communications, it provides an intuitive support channel, and provides the leadership team with real-time analytics - so we can react and adapt to student feedback and insight in a more agile way.”*

**Professor Hanifa Shah**  
Executive Dean (Interim), Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment

## What we achieved together

Significant demand among students for smartphone-based engagement drove over 97% adoption of University Assistant during welcome week.

Articles, videos, events, and notices were seen by students more than 165,000 times, and any last minute changes to details (such as room changes, timing alterations, or new information) were made centrally, and sent directly to students via push notifications.

The high adoption, automatic push notifications, and ease by which changes can be made resulted in a smoothly delivered welcome week with high satisfaction levels.

Students asked in-the-moment questions with University Assistant’s low-friction real-time chat. The chat was instantly recognisable (the 2018/19 intake have grown up with real-time chat as their primary communication platform), and the university support team received insights into common, recurring questions, which were then addressed en-masse with articles and notices.

Faculty leadership were also able to analyse usage statistics from the platform to understand—in real-time—which articles and events were gaining traction with students, and which were struggling. In doing so, they were able to push notices out to targeted groups to nudge student behaviour and increase the attention to content and events that were known to be important to student success, such as academic skills workshops and mental wellbeing support services. Daily analysis of the analytics enabled the leadership team to rapidly intervene where necessary, and helped optimise welcome week for students and staff.

University Assistant is now being used to prepare students for the year ahead, with a focus on assessment readiness, placement year preparation, employability skills development, and ongoing social and wellbeing support. Course Leaders are creating tailored content and engaging their students in a highly targeted manner. A Digital Pioneers group has been formed to provide content governance and support the wider adoption of the platform, under the guidance of the Associate Dean for Student Learning Experience & Academic Quality.