

Data capture technology speeds up the student application and onboarding process by leveraging intelligent automation

Powerful data capture software supports admissions teams by catering to the huge number of people applying for university and college openings.

The demand for higher education in the UK has increased. This trend remains sustained despite the disruption caused by the global Coronavirus pandemic and the impact of Brexit.

FAST FACTS

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At the end of the 2021 admissions cycle, **750,000 applications** from UK and international students of various ages were received through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service in the UK (UCAS) for full time undergraduate openings.

2



Since 1994, based on UCAS data alone, and not including applications made by individuals directly to institutions, student growth has been substantial. There has been an **85% increase** in applications and a **107% rise** in people subsequently going onto start courses.

3



The forecast therefore is for **1 million students applying** by 2026 – an optimistic growth prediction which commentators say is very much on track. This is clearly excellent news for the 277 colleges and 164 universities which make up UK higher education sector.

560,000 people were accepted by different universities and colleges.

This set a new record.

What are the challenges involved with student onboarding?

Such growth places a huge amount of pressure on admissions teams to cater for the sheer scale and quantity of applications, with a range of issues resulting:



Time is tight. There's always significant time pressure to process applications once received. For most undergraduate courses applied through UCAS each year, there's broadly speaking a 3½ month window from the January 26 deadline for most courses and the requirement to respond by mid-May.

But this doesn't consider the work overhead presented by clearing post-graduate applications, existing students transferring between institutions or transferring from one course to another, and individuals applying directly from either home or abroad. The application system has many permutations which place a huge burden on all organisations involved.



High volume of candidates, numerous different document types and languages. Admissions teams face a perfect storm not only in terms of applicant numbers but the need to handle a wide variety of documents to support the process such as financial, academic, personally identifiable information (PII), evidence about disabilities, and so on. Added to the mix are differing languages.

While much of this is now electronic managing this structured, unstructured, and semi structured data can be problematic given it comes through a variety of delivery channels; be it a portal, eForms, emails, attachments, scanned paper documents, as well as a variety of other documents. The issue is how to pull data out of one system to populate another so that the applications can be dealt with promptly. Often, a lot of printing and manual re-keying is done.



Errors from data entry. Repetitive manual data entry is not without its shortcomings. It requires training people, it's time consuming, and massively prone to error. A simple example would be someone typing 'O' for an 'O', or a 'l' for a '1'. Information can be easily mislabeled, misclassified, or have the wrong meta data assigned. Errors result in delays. Details then need checking with applicants and the productivity of staff is clearly impacted. Manual data entry is not a good use of time.



Validating or sharing information between different databases, applications, or providers. Multiple IT systems are used at academic institutions, with UCAS in the middle feeding student data to each system. Sharing information among these different systems can be challenging either requiring expensive integration involving customised coding or data entry clerks used as the 'glue' between them; resulting in the data entry problems already mentioned.



Budgets under pressure. The temptation maybe to recruit more administrative staff to deal with the ever-increasing volume of student applications. But this increases operational expenditure (OPEX) exactly when higher education organisations need to keep a close eye on costs, given the Coronavirus pandemic, has massively squeezed incomes.

It is an exciting time for higher education in the UK given the interest people have in taking courses. Whilst students clearly must go through a comprehensive series of steps to be accepted, it should also be remembered that the majority will pay for their own education and many will have a choice about where to go.

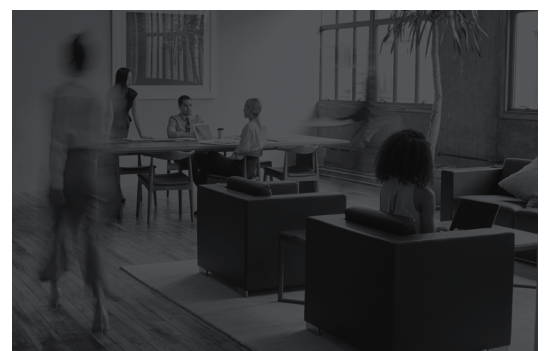
If the student application and onboarding process is drawn-out and inefficient, this can negatively impact the student's experience and their views of the university or college. Getting it right, quickly, and accurately - the first time - is therefore truly important, not least, from an overall reputation perspective.

Many facilities can gain significant performance advantages using capture technologies.

So, what can higher education admissions departments do to address these challenges?

The answer lies in maximising existing investments already made in existing IT platforms by improving data capture capabilities, regardless of whether Student Information Systems, CRM, ERP, enterprise content management applications, or a combination are used.

This is not a precursor to argue that existing systems should be thrown-away. That would be absurd. However, significant benefits can be gained



by overlaying complementary and specialist technology - data capture software - in tandem with what's already in place to boost the performance of existing IT systems and subsequent workflows.

The latest data capture software offers powerful and intelligent features to do this which introduces automation into the whole student application process. Automation can substantially help with document submissions. This includes electronic data and the automatic recognition, understanding, and routing of this information to the right team or system for action.

This eliminates the need for slow and manual data entry and reduces ensuing errors keyed into downstream applications. Put simply, data automation is a much faster and more efficient way to get data into the various systems, and a considerably better way to improve on how information is captured and shared within academic institutions.

3 ways data capture helps admission teams



Data capture is intelligent.

Any information from any source - EDI or XML feeds, email attachments, online forms, scanned data - can quickly be captured, ingested, classified, tagged, and data extracted using machine learning and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Exceptions or errors can be detected early on before they enter other systems which enhances data integrity, too.

The latest data capture software 'learns' based on content handled and historical tagging to make this a super-fast, accurate and reliable process, reducing the need for human intervention.



Software robots introduce automation.

Intelligent Process Automation - which includes AI and Robotic Process Automation (RPA) - can be used to automate the mundane, repetitive and error prone tasks involved with manual data entry. RPA also aids the integration of business systems and common workflow tools.

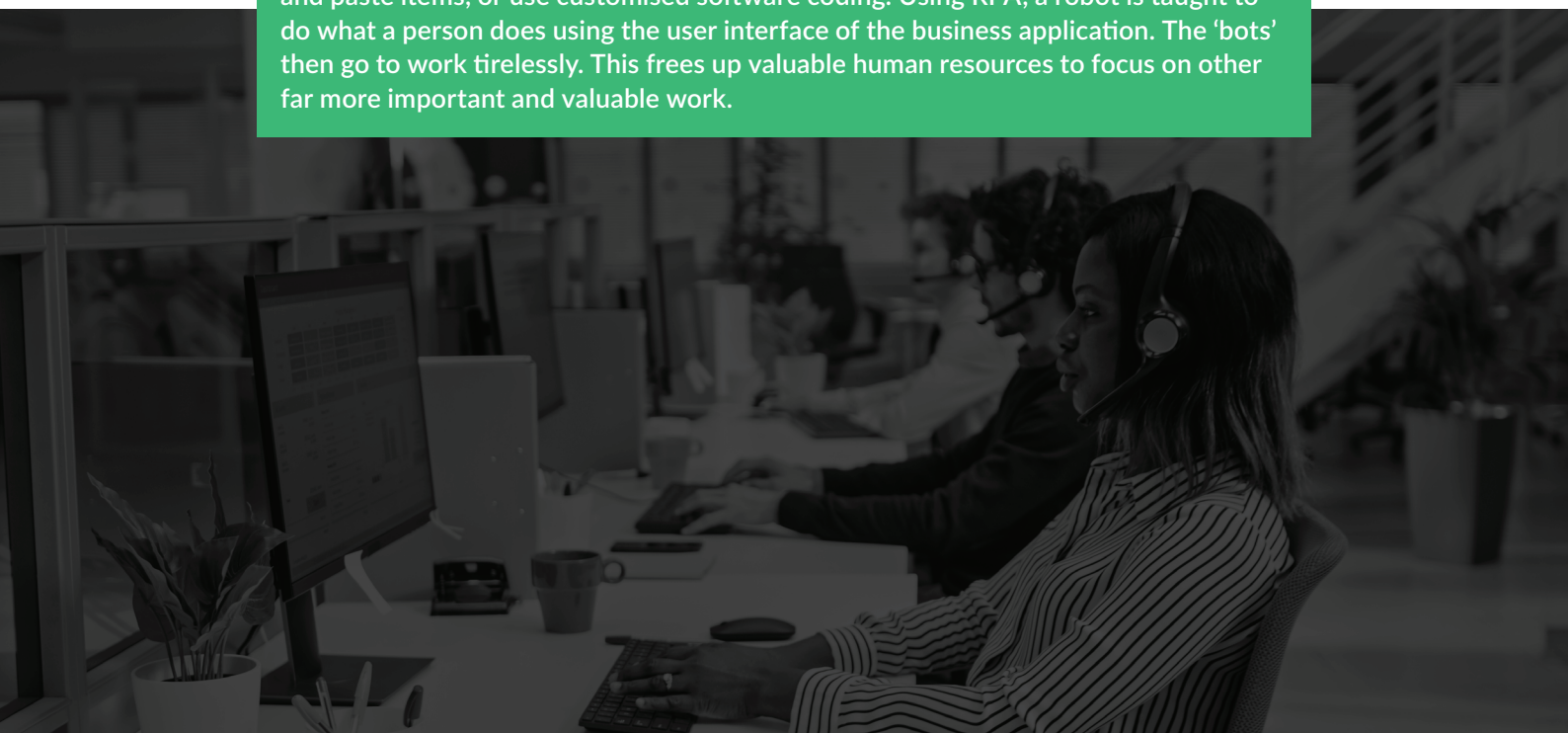


On premise or in the cloud - it's up to you.

Intelligent capture solutions can be installed on premise, run completely in cloud native environments, or implemented using a hybrid approach to complement whatever strategy university or college IT departments have in place.

In the case of a cloud approach, common Microsoft repositories such as SharePoint, Microsoft 365 and Azure storage are supported, along with Software as a Service charging models which offer pricing based on document volumes and features used.

For example, if administrative clerks want to import information from a capture solution to a business application, historically they'd have to manually retype it, cut and paste items, or use customised software coding. Using RPA, a robot is taught to do what a person does using the user interface of the business application. The 'bots' then go to work tirelessly. This frees up valuable human resources to focus on other far more important and valuable work.



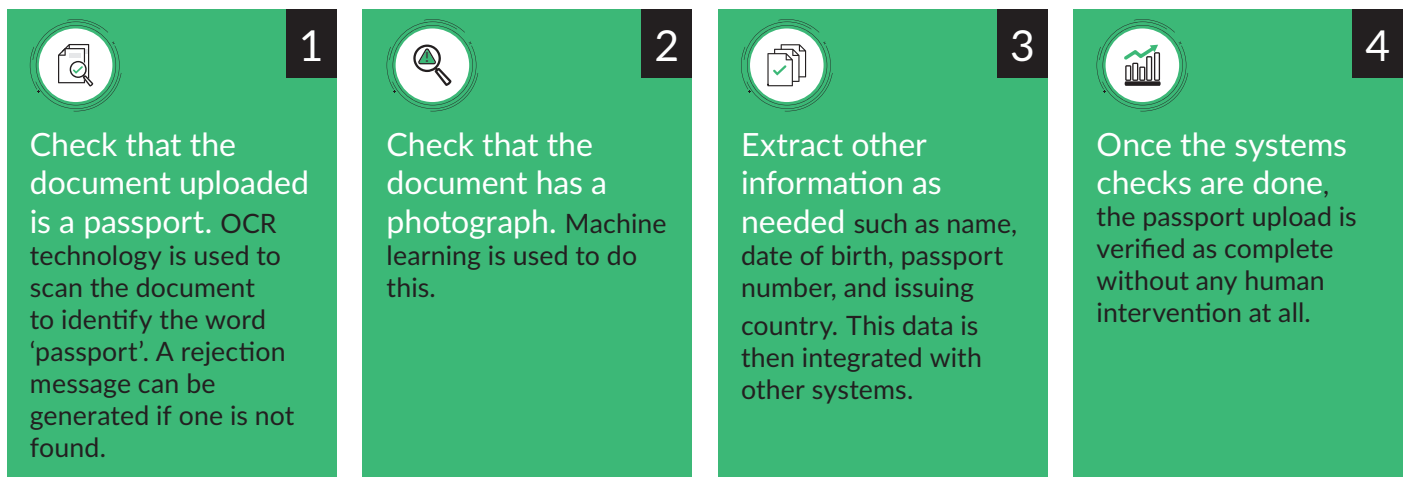
Benefits of intelligent data capture software:

1. **Automates the capture of any content**, in any format, from any source, or device and stops the errors associated with manual data entry.
2. **Adds value to existing IT investments** by introducing complementary overlay technologies – there's no 'rip and replace' of systems already in place
3. **Boosts the efficiency and performance** of existing systems and processes by using a specialised, niche, and focused solution
4. **Offers fast, easy, and scalable deployment** using on-premises, hybrid, or cloud native delivery, capitalising on standard Microsoft platforms like Azure and SharePoint
5. **Agile 'pay for what you need' solutions available** - ideal to cater for peak demand which can then be switched off
6. **Speeds up** and makes the admissions function more efficient

Data capture software enhances the student experience – onboarding is faster with fewer errors and fewer requests for information resubmissions.

Use case for automation: Passport Checking.

The identification and verification of a student's identity is an important element in the application process. Intelligent data capture solutions can easily automate this so that admissions clerks don't have to manually check that it has been done properly. The software can be used to complete the following steps:

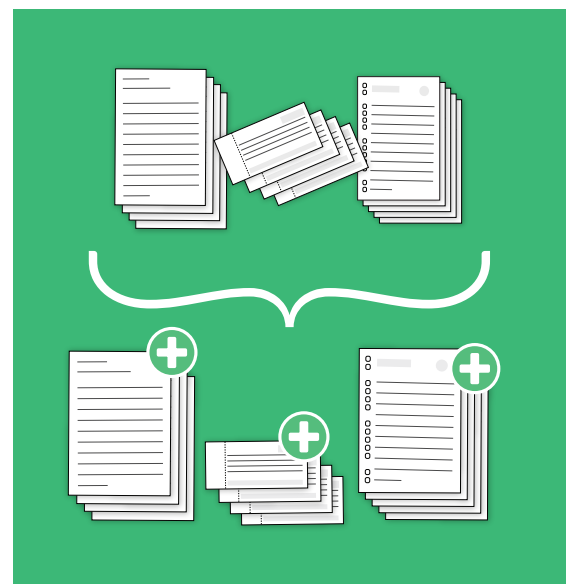


FAST FACTS

What sort of documents can data capture software be applied to?

Intelligent data capture software can be 'trained' to extract, classify, and route data contained in the following types of document:

1. Application forms with personally identifiable information (PII)
2. Passport, visa, birth certificate, and ID information
3. Financial information like bank accounts
4. Proof of residency
5. Personal statements
6. Academic transcripts
7. Certificate of English proficiency such as TOEFL or IELTS
8. Certificate of graduation
9. Reference letters
10. Any personal information related to a disability



We're here to help

Admissions efficiency is the marriage between people, processes, and technology.

Ensuring the annual admission cycle is well managed is crucial for any higher education institution looking to quickly onboard students, at lower cost whilst guaranteeing the best possible end-user experience.

Talk to us to discuss how intelligent data capture and automation can help you efficiently and cost effectively streamline this critical process.

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