



How to get the most out of your student information system

Strategies to successfully implement a new SIS that supports your institution's vision



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How to get the most out of your SIS

One of the defining characteristics of the higher education sector in recent times is the growth it has witnessed, driven by rising enrolment figures and the shifting needs and expectations of students. This shift has led to increasing demands on student information systems (SIS), which, due to the nature in which universities have tended to grow organically rather than in a structured way, have often been extended piecemeal over time. Traditional SIS implementation, therefore, has involved laborious build-and-configure exercises each time a change or a new capability is required, taking away precious resources and making it harder for institutions to react in an agile way to market demands.

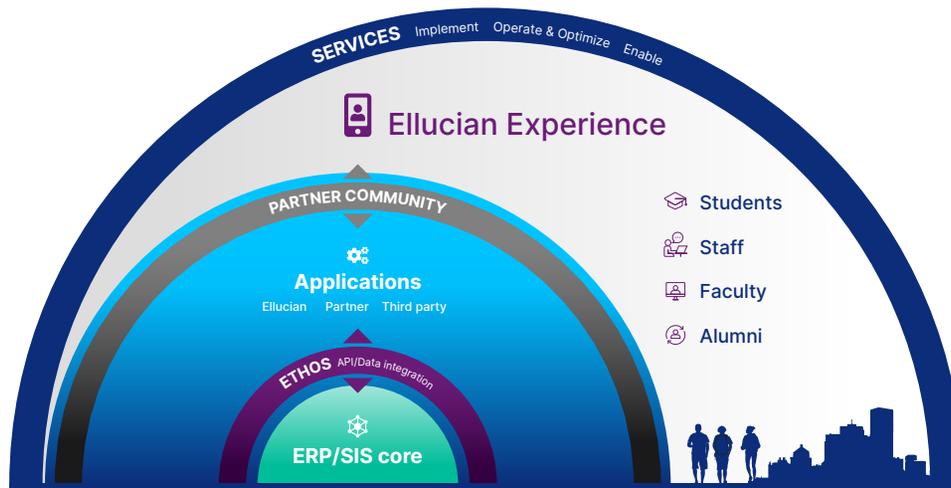
Higher education institutions need to be able to easily pivot and adjust processes, and this means bringing an end to monolithic unstructured student information systems. Effecting real change starts with your SIS—from accessing information on-demand to bringing relevant content to students at the right time, an institution's SIS needs to do so much more than traditional legacy systems enable. This means a new approach is needed.

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Questions you need to ask yourself before starting an SIS implementation

Unpicking years of customisation and complexity and considering how this key system will be supported is driving universities to reconsider how their SIS should support their institution's strategic aims in the medium to long term. For many this has meant recognising a need for a SIS that seamlessly supports its institutional ecosystem. Onboarding a new SIS is a significant undertaking, which is why managing the implementation of a new system was considered a once-in-a-career opportunity. To ensure you get the most out of your SIS, there are several considerations you will need to factor in from the start.





Will it meet our needs?

It is essential to first consider your vision of how your new SIS will support your institution. As higher education institutions typically grow organically, existing software infrastructure is often adapted and supplemented piecemeal. The challenge is thinking about how new SIS capabilities align with current processes and whether those processes add value and differentiate your institution or are merely a 'system of record'. This way, you can ensure your system is future-proofed and flexible enough to grow as you do.



How long will it take?

Historically, implementing a new SIS took 3–4 years depending on the volume of participants and the extent of configuration and customisation required. While some institutions may need a high degree of adaptability throughout the process, there are many benefits to a more streamlined approach with minimal customisation, particularly for institutions with fewer resources and smaller budget. When designed effectively, this can dramatically reduce the implementation timeline.



How much will it cost?

Time is money, and so much of the cost of a new SIS comes down to the resources it takes from the beginning of the project to completion. With an agile team and reduced customisation, cost efficiencies can be made, and you can realise the benefits of your new SIS more quickly. Consider the availability of your internal resources and the cost of their engagement for the duration of the project.



How difficult will it be?

Difficulty is relative, as barriers to growth and change are different in every institution, but by considering what challenges you may face in implementing new systems, you can pre-empt obstacles and work around them. The key is removing uncertainty. Modern approaches should reduce both the time taken to implement and the burden on your resources.

How do you take the uncertainty out of the process?

Uncertainty is one of the biggest causes for lengthy SIS implementation, high costs and overly complex solutions. Using a framework, such as the UCISA's capability model, allows you to identify and focus on functions and processes that align with your strategy while offering real value to your students and stakeholders. By gathering this clear picture of what success looks like, you're better able to achieve your goals more quickly without adding further pressure to your valuable staff time.

Change has accelerated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic—more so than we've ever seen before—with online learning replacing the majority of face-to-face classroom teaching. At Ellucian, we've seen how quickly UK institutions were able to gather resources efficiently to bring about change and keep the lights on. However, for those institutions on outdated legacy systems, introducing new functions posed challenges due to software and system limitations. With an average time to delivery of 3–4 years, the pandemic highlighted how the typical implementation of a new SIS wasn't suitable for those needing an urgent change. What's needed is a faster, more streamlined approach.



Towards a new standard in HE enterprise architecture

Moving towards a faster, more agile SIS involves an architecture founded on future-proofed technology and governed by set standards that inherently reduce risk.

Standards define specifications by which we operate—or in the case of SIS implementation, drive a structured plan. Increasingly, this is how business functions are developing, as commonality of delivery makes providing great customer experience along with data-driven engagement much easier. With many institutions now competing foremost on customer experience, it's critical they get this right.

Taking a standardised approach to SIS implementation reduces risk and time to delivery. Higher education institutions share similar language with the processes and functions that govern day-to-day activity within each organisation—in the UK, this is defined with the UCISA capabilities model.

Taking these pre-existing capabilities and building out associated artefacts to support SIS implementation permits an “out-of-the-box” deployment approach, allowing the delivery of complete business processes. This way of implementing a package of SIS solutions provides a monitored, measured and controlled deployment. It reduces the time to deliver, improves the quality of the initial deployments and ensures that customers are clear on what the initial solution will include—it's a win-win.

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What to look for when selecting an SIS for deployment

When embarking on an SIS deployment project, the end goal is to gather data more efficiently and use those insights to improve decision making. To achieve this, determine if your project meets the following selection criteria:

SIS activated against a pre-configured solution, with the flexibility to ensure institution-specific requirements and continual improvement needs can be met

Ahead of beginning implementation, alignment sessions with real-time simulations visualising what the finished SIS will include

An approach that simplifies implementation by aligning specifically developed delivery artefacts to the UCISA capability model

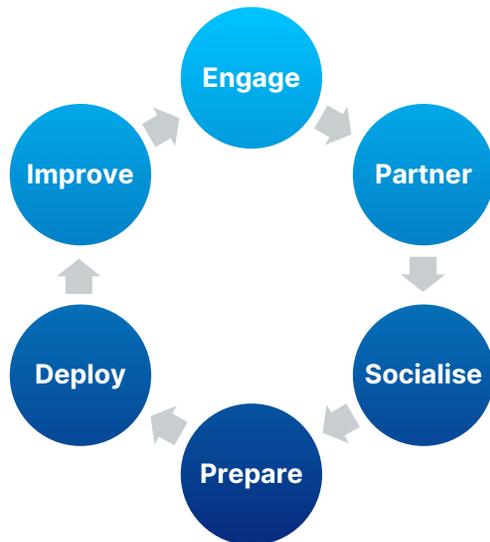
Configuration, validation and simulation all completed pre-deployment, removing the need for any heavy lifting



Discover the Ellucian approach

Ellucian has condensed our experience into a newly defined methodology, incorporating our established capability model and proven cloud services. This allows us to accurately map out your journey and deliver a student information system aligned with your strategic priorities.

Learn more about how you can follow a templated approach to implement your new student information system and work towards achieving your business goals.



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