



Readying students for professional success

University of Reading enrolls AI and increases digital educational opportunities while decreasing operation costs

University of Reading invests in innovations that go directly to students. Located 20 miles from London and competing with a prestigious set of higher education institutions, the university aims to ensure students realize real returns from their time, money, and efforts. A shift to a digital-first culture is graduating classes ready and qualified for jobs in growth-centric fields.



**University of
Reading**

Customer: University of Reading

Industry: Education

Country: United Kingdom

Preparing a century-old learning institution for an AI-ready future

University of Reading is one of the most popular educational choices in the UK and among the top research universities in the world. Famous for its world-leading climate change research and commitment to sustainability, students are drawn to its strong reputation and faculty expertise in law, environmental science, and business.

Recent investments of £500 million in teaching, student accommodations, and research facilities as part of its TRANSFORM initiative are paying off for the prestigious university. Enrollment is on the rise with 17,500 students. Faculty seats are full, with 4000 academic and support staff at three campuses in the UK and two campuses overseas. Awards are stacking up for sustainability, environmental leadership, and research impact.

The investments deliver returns for students eager to begin their careers. In a period where many students and parents are questioning the value of higher education, the University of Reading is graduating classes that are landing jobs. About 92% of the university's graduates are in work or further study within 15 months of graduating, and about 83% are in full-time professional or managerial roles, based on an internal Graduate Outcomes Survey.

At the Thames Valley campus, a hub for the UK tech market, companies such as Microsoft, Amazon, and Adobe are nearby. "We wanted to encourage technology and innovation in the area and give students opportunities to gain work-ready skills with big tech companies," says Stuart Brown, chief digital and information officer at the University of Reading.

For everyone at the three UK campuses, a big payoff has been the digital transformation of how, when, and where students learn and faculty teach.

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Vision

Accelerate academic and research excellence by providing students with a rigorous education and digitally connected learning opportunities

Strategy

Reimagine the campus through an AI-enabled digital lens so students gain direct access to personalized services that enrich learning

Outcomes

- Achieves ROI from £500M investment by graduating an elite professional workforce
- Enhances reputation as a powerhouse for providing work-ready skills for companies
- Helps meet sustainability goals, enabling energy savings of €300,000 annually

Unleashing AI in the network unleashes campus-wide opportunities

Like most universities, Reading has seen a huge growth in mobile devices and cloud apps. These trends were pushing the university to think more strategically about becoming digital. “We needed to enable new digital ways of working,” says Brown.

When the team shifted applications to the cloud, they took a close look at the campus edge infrastructure to ensure remote access for students, faculty, and staff was set up securely. “The education sector is seen as an easy target, so we needed everything to be simple and easy to use, but really secure,” he says.

What they found pushed them to make changes fast. The root of the problem was a campus network that had become complex, difficult to support, and ultimately, on an unsustainable trajectory.

“The network was flat, security was centralized, and we had limited visibility,” says Kevin Mortimer, head of operations at the University of Reading.

The legacy network was not ready for continuous online learning, and it held back Redding’s essential goals: create world-class facilities, become a sustainability leader, further research and innovation, and transform to a digital-first environment.

The university took decisive action and embraced AI innovation to deliver exceptional network experiences to students and faculty and simplify support for the IT team. By harnessing AI at the network level, the university could unleash opportunities across the campuses that touched facilities, campus safety, student learning, and faculty research.

The first order of business was to improve the reliability of the campus network, but a broader, more strategic goal was in sight. “We wanted to simplify, standardize, and optimize IT so that we could produce services that would add value for our students,” says Brown.

Shifting from cool technology to ready to deploy

AI-native innovation is the engine transforming the university’s campus network and enabling the creation of more engaging student experiences and technology services. The university’s first interaction with HPE Mist quickly shifted mindsets from cool technology to explore to ready to deploy.

Reading got to know the HPE self-driving network during a proof of concept (POC) test. Seeing HPE Mist in action on campus would let the IT team get a first-hand look at what AI-native operations could do in an educational environment. The POC, deployed in Reading’s six-story library with 1500 study spaces, proved to be a turning point.

“We knew the library would be a real test for HPE Mist,” says Brown. “We wanted to specifically see how it would handle all the metal, the high ceilings, and books. Being AI-native means the network continually makes itself better as it learns more about the environment, devices, and applications.”

HPE Mist passed the demanding test and forever altered the testing team’s vision of possible services they could offer students, faculty, researchers, visitors, and staff.

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– Kevin Mortimer, Head of Operations, University of Reading

Transitioning from Wi-Fi refresh to digital enabler

What started as a campus Wi-Fi refresh at the university turned into “the most digitally enabling thing we could do,” says Mortimer.

Once the university deployed HPE Mist, the campus upgraded to Wi-Fi 6 and virtual Bluetooth (vBLE) instantly. Network performance improved immediately, and the university gained precise indoor location tracking through the Juniper User Engagement cloud service and vBLE-ready APs. Juniper Wired Assurance and Juniper Wi-Fi Assurance cloud services simplify network management through AIOps.

“Our conversations quickly changed as we realized all the options we have with HPE Mist,” says Mortimer. The team relies on Marvis AI Assistant, Juniper Wi-Fi Assurance, and Juniper Wired Assurance for wired and wireless management, using AIOps for automated onboarding, configuration, monitoring, and proactive troubleshooting to ensure optimal user, device, and application experience.



The university uses Juniper Premium Analytics cloud service to identify space utilization trends. “We are helping with campus planning and advising campus operations on where to plan for maintenance and servicing,” says Mortimer.

Juniper User Engagement cloud service and vBLE indoor location-based services are foundational in student engagement efforts. Initial use cases are measuring and monitoring student success and improving campus health and safety. Students, for example, could use a mobile app to find less crowded study areas. Security teams could locate students during an emergency situation, and visiting guests could find directions to the closest restroom.

“If we know where students go and when, we can improve student retention and well-being,” says Brown.

Launching careers and securing educational success

University of Reading is listening—and responding—to its users like never before. Requests for student success metrics, improved student safety, and facility management insights are on project timelines, not wish lists. These initial successes lead to ongoing discussions within executive meetings about new services for everyone on campus.

Imagine, if you will, a student arrives at the campus. The HPE self-driving network recognizes the student, opens the parking gate, and directs her to an available parking space. When the student stops at the café on the way to class, the café’s mobile app greets her, offers her the usual, and perhaps even a discount. Location services guide her to the fastest way to class. Later, she can book a study space.

Beyond the on-campus student experiences, Reading imagines using analytics to ensure that students are engaged and on the path to success. Integrating location data with the university’s attendance management system, for instance, sheds light on whether a student attended class or spent more time in the library than the pub. If students permit this type of tracking, the university can take action to help them stay on a path to success.

“Everyone has ideas and use cases for HPE Mist that will make the student experience better,” says Mortimer.

Turning these ideas into real student-centric, educational services will keep Reading at the forefront of education leadership and let Reading do what it does best—graduate elite classes ready to land their dream jobs.



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