

HOW SMARTPHONE APPS AND DIGITAL SERVICES ARE USED AT BUSINESS SCHOOL

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Introduction

AMBA & BGA

Mobile phones have become an extension of 'you'. As well as allowing us to talk to friends and family, we are increasingly using them to pay for purchases, order food, count our steps, watch the latest shows and even to meet our life partners.

Mobile phones are also encroaching on learning, whether that is listening to a podcast on how to network effectively or watching a YouTube video on how to retille your bathroom.

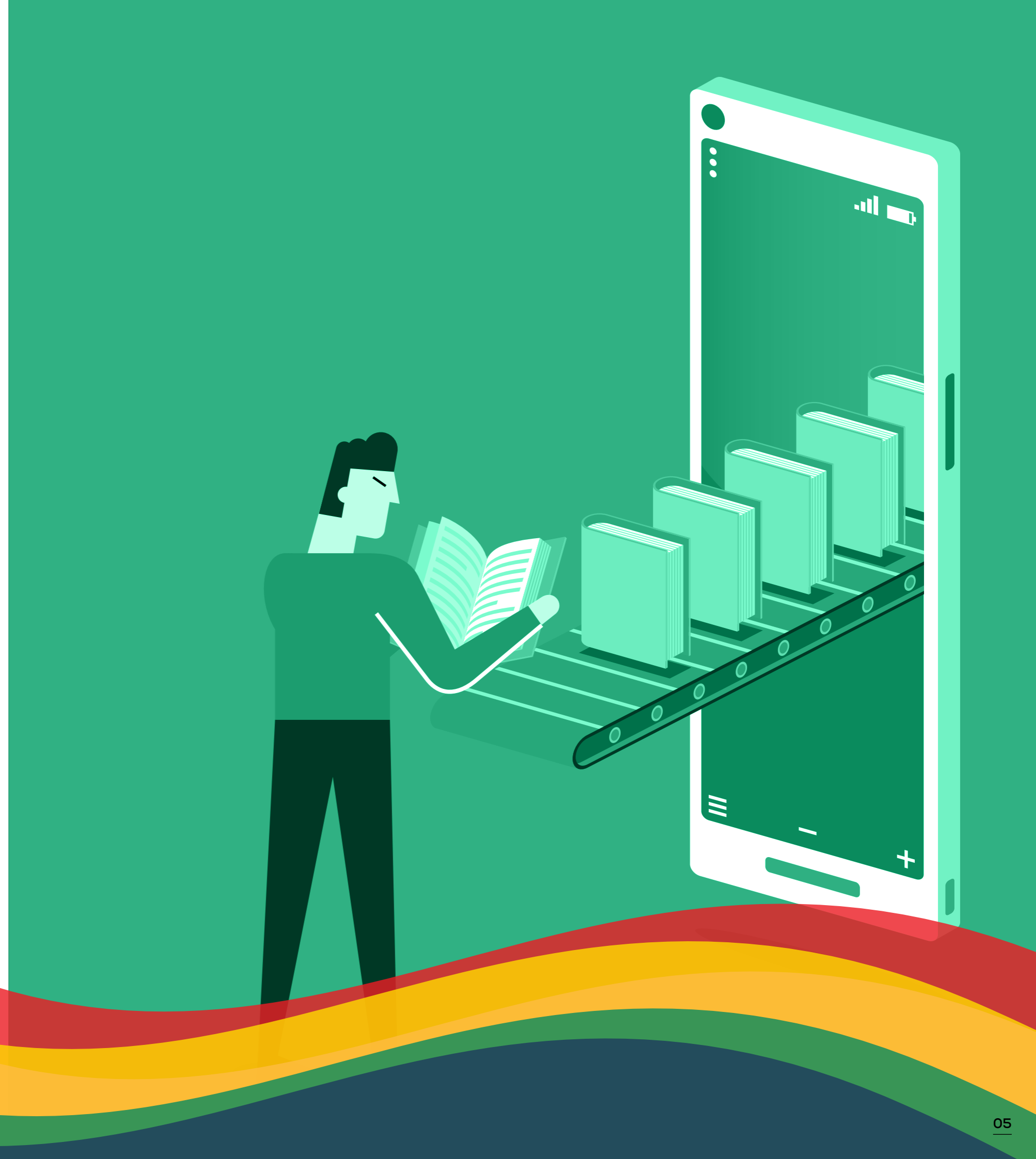
There is also a trend for learning on apps. Take the language learning app Duolingo, for example, which registered 12.3 million daily users and 49.2 million monthly users in the first quarter of 2022. This app allows users to take a couple of minutes out of their day to learn a language. It's a hugely successful model of gamification with ease of use that offers one potential recipe for success in the higher education space.

However, this survey shows that despite our reliance on mobile phones in every other aspect of life, laptops and desktop computers are still the most popular devices for people completing their studies – 90 per cent of respondents said that they used these devices the most during their studies as opposed to mobile phones, tablets or non-digital devices.

Having said that, 56 per cent of respondents agreed that a mobile phone is essential to completing a business course. This suggests that even though a mobile phone is not commonly the primary device for completing studies – it is still seen as a necessary tool for learning.

Right now, only half of respondents' institutions have an app according to our results, but it seems likely that we can expect to see more business schools exploring the benefits of using this model to teach students in the future.

Ellen Buchan,
Insight, Content & PR Manager
AMBA & BGA



Introduction

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Building the digital experiences your MBA students want – and need

Digital transformation is already top of mind for most business schools.

As makers of campus apps, we wanted to look beyond broad business school digital objectives to understand the role that mobile apps and web portals play within an MBA student's academic journey and beyond.

More specifically, we wanted to know what MBA students thought about how these platforms impacted or are impacting their student experience.

In surveying over 1,000 MBA students and recent graduates on their digital preferences, this report uncovered several trends that can further inform business schools' digital strategies

App usage among business schools is on the rise

App usage among business schools has risen by 37 percentage points, when comparing the experiences of those who graduated in 2018 and those who were studying in 2022. This is hardly surprising, given how MBA students feel about their school's app: nearly 80% of respondents said they find, or found, their institution's app useful.

Personalisation is key for your MBA student

The pandemic caused a rapid increase in digital innovation within business schools due to social distancing requirements and remote learning. As a result, schools had to quickly adjust to provide students with a high-quality digital experience. Even after the pandemic, most business schools aim to maintain the best digital practices implemented during remote learning. According to the AMBA & BGA Education Technology Report 2021-2022, 84% of the surveyed business school leaders want to retain the technology introduced during the pandemic.

In addition to exploring blended learning and advanced educational technologies, business schools can enhance students' learning experience by personalising their app experience. The most popular campus app feature among MBA students is the personalised class schedule, according to 74% of the survey respondents. In today's technology-rich world, students want digital experiences that are adaptable, accessible, and tailored to their needs.

Older students, in particular, have multiple responsibilities and require a digital experience that allows them to learn on their own schedule. Business schools that provide a comprehensive digital experience, including online courses, virtual learning environments, and access to digital resources, are better equipped to meet the needs of older students.

MBA students want digital platforms to facilitate alumni relations

Alumni donations and references contribute to business schools' revenue and reputation. However, MBA alumni are also keen to maintain the relationship they've developed with their school. In this report, we found that 78% of MBA students (past and present) surveyed have or would have wanted to stay connected to their business school by using digital services or tools. By leveraging a campus app to facilitate alumni relations, business schools have a unique opportunity to drive alumni engagement to benefit the school as well as its graduates.

What's next for the business school app?

There are exciting digital disruptors emerging that will change learning and teaching. As business schools evaluate how new platforms like ChatGPT are impacting their curriculum, it is important to keep one digital disruptor on the radar: the smartphone. While mobile devices aren't new, they are a steady presence in our lives. We are constantly touching, unlocking and looking at our smartphones throughout the day – and so are MBA students.

Business schools can become a major presence in their students' mobile experience and an important part of their students' and alumni's lives by offering useful campus apps. Over half (56 per cent) of students and recent graduates believe a mobile phone is, or was, essential to completing their management course. If business schools want to capitalise on their students' mobile real estate, we recommend that they start by listening to what their students want and expect from the digital experience within their MBA programme. This report is a good place to start.

Matthew Sherlock,
Product Strategy Director
Ex Libris campusM

Executive summary

The devices students use for study

- 90 per cent of students and recent graduates said they use, or used, a laptop or desktop the most for their management course studies
- 56 per cent of students and recent graduates believe a mobile phone is, or was, essential to completing their management course

The usability of digital services

- 83 per cent of current or recent students and graduates said they use, or used, digital services to access learning resources
- Half of respondents rated the ability to access their grades through digital services as “excellent”

Use of apps in business schools

- App usage among business schools has risen by 37 percentage points, when comparing the experiences of those who graduated in 2018 and those who were studying in 2022

- Students and graduates most commonly use, or used, their apps to access personalised timetables (74 per cent)

- 79 per cent of respondents said they find, or found, their institution’s app useful

Alumni relations

- 78 per cent of respondents said they have, or would like to stay connected to their business school by using digital services or tools

Overall experience using digital services

- 78 per cent of respondents said they find, or found, accessing learning resources to be the most helpful aspect of a school’s digital offering for their overall experience

- On the flipside, students and graduates said they find, or found, connecting with their peers the most difficult aspect of using digital services



Methodology and participant demographics

Between 17 October and 2 December 2022, AMBA & BGA conducted an online survey of its student and graduate members, based in more than 150 countries. The survey specifically targeted members who were currently studying at a business school or had recently graduated.

In total, 1,002 members completed the survey and shared their opinion on how they used technology in their business course. These respondents were entered into a competition in which four people were selected at random to receive an Amazon voucher as a prize.

Considering the sample, 66 per cent were male and 33 per cent were female – one per cent of respondents preferred not to state their gender.

In terms of age, 41 per cent were aged between 35-44 at the time of the survey, 28 per cent were in the age group 25-34, 23 per cent were aged 45-54, five per cent were aged 55-64 and three per cent were aged 18-25. No respondents were older than 65 or younger than 18.

The survey covered an even geographic spread, as can be seen from Figure 1. Data has been analysed with the use of nine

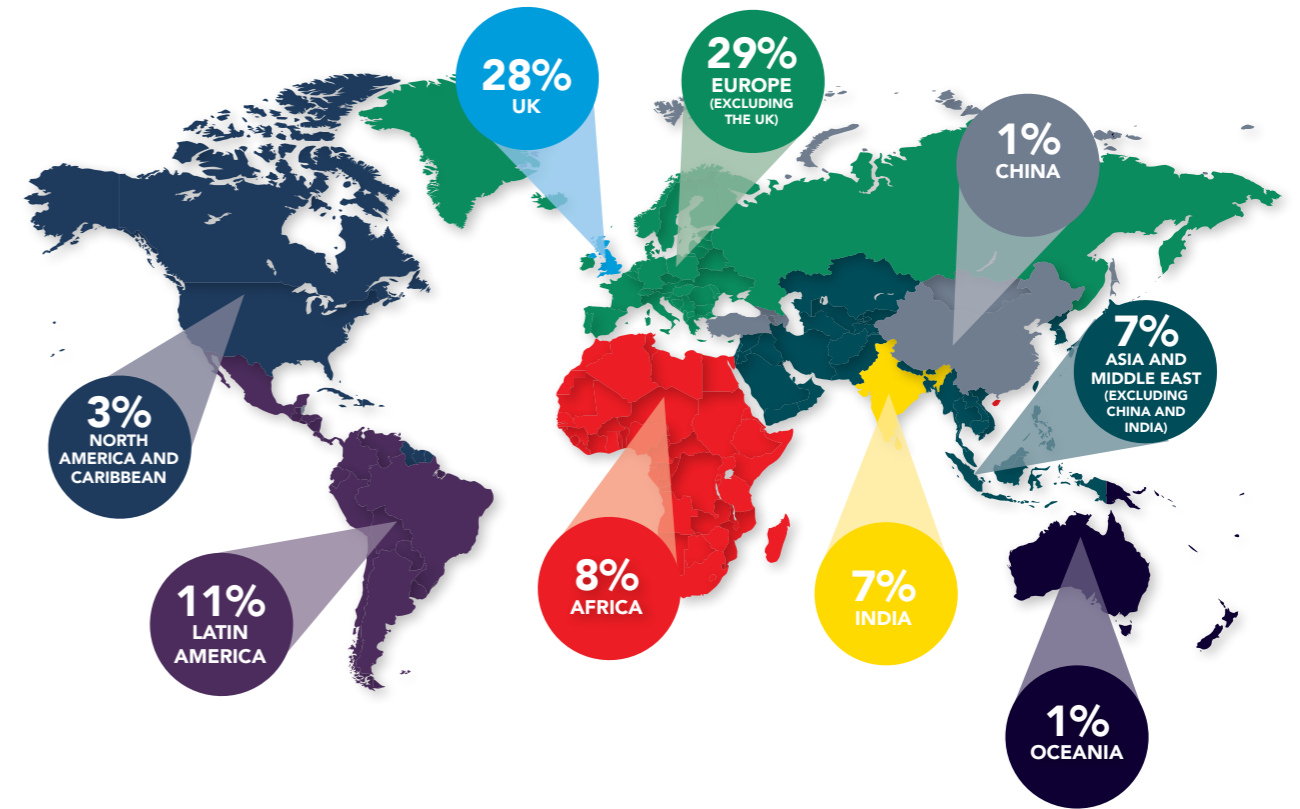
regions which reflect the geographic spread of AMBA-accredited business schools and the composition of the MBA market. For example, the UK, India and China are treated as separate regions within this report due to their distinct and separate markets, and the high volume of AMBA-accredited business school students and graduates based there. In instances when figures do not sum to 100% or to a combined sum, this is due to rounding.

Course demographics

Of the respondents, a quarter (25 per cent) were currently studying, 15 per cent graduated in 2022, 12 per cent graduated in 2021, 11 per cent graduated in 2020, 11 per cent graduated in 2019, seven per cent graduated in 2018. A further 19 per cent graduated before 2018.

The survey first asked respondents how their course is being, or had been, taught. The most common answer was that their course is, or was, taught in a classroom (43 per cent) followed by a hybrid approach (40 per cent). Only 15 per cent are being, or had been, taught completely online with a further two per cent being taught in another way.

FIGURE 1: Regional composition of respondents



Part 1

Devices used for study

Respondents were asked what their preferred device was for various studying activities. As can be seen in Figure 2, using a laptop or desktop is by far the most popular choice for many activities, with 94 per cent responding they would use a laptop or desktop computer to write essays and 93 per cent to do research.

However, more than a quarter of respondents (27 per cent) said a mobile phone is their preferred device for completing time management and task management activities.

In addition, respondents are not always reliant on technology. A non-digital device was popular for students and graduates' note-taking activities (44 per cent) and reading (30 per cent). Elsewhere, nearly a third (28 per cent) prefer a tablet for doing their reading and 18 per cent opt for this device when reviewing lecture materials.

When asked for their most used device on

the course as a whole, the vast majority, 90 per cent, said that it is, or was, a laptop or desktop computer, while it is, or was, a non-digital device for five per cent of respondents, a tablet for three per cent and a mobile phone for one per cent.

Respondents were asked if they thought that using a mobile phone is essential in order to complete a business/management course. Respondents' opinions were mixed (see Figure 3). While 56 per cent agreed at some level that using a mobile phone is essential to completing a course, 31 per cent thought that it is not essential. The remaining respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

Splitting the data by respondents' year of graduation does not alter the results here significantly, see Figure 4. Given the rapid progress in technology in this area, it might have been expected that those who had graduated more recently would be more likely to think of their mobile phones as being essential components of study.

FIGURE 2: For the following institution/school activities, what would be your most preferred device?

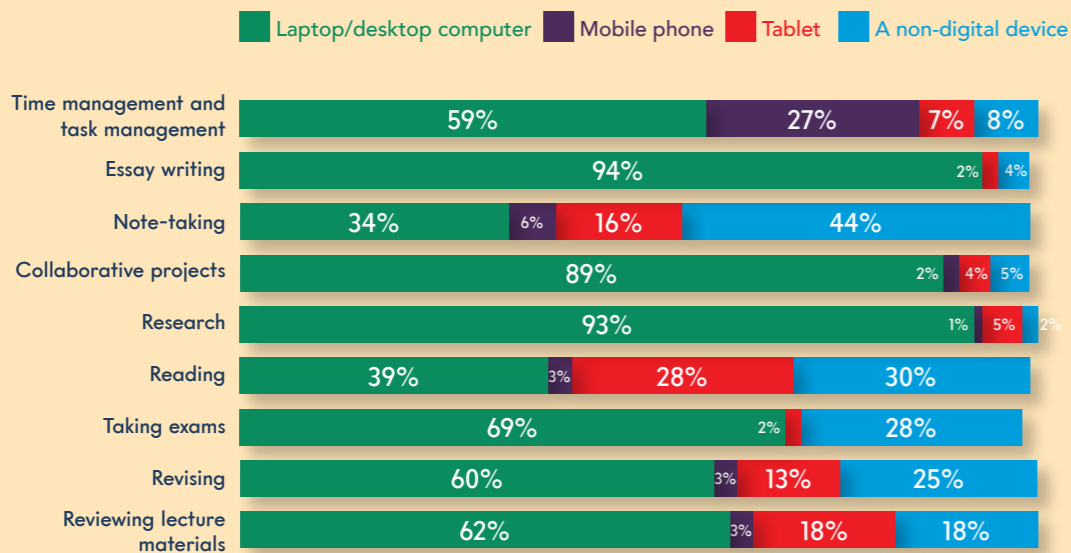


FIGURE 3: How far do you agree that using a mobile phone is essential in order to complete a business/management course?

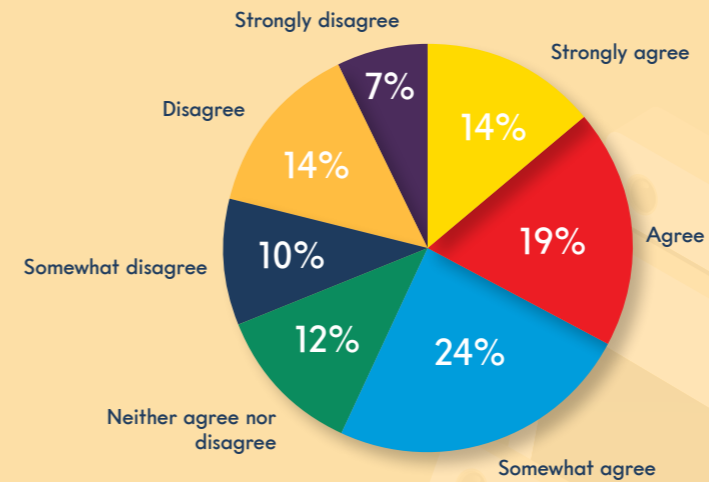
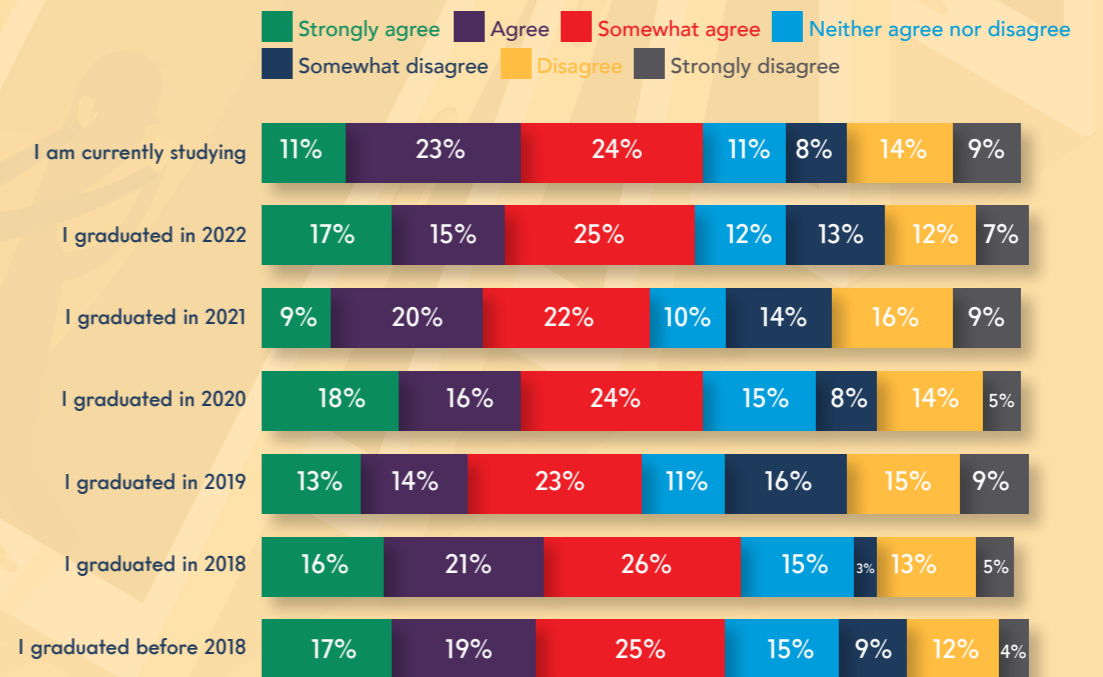


FIGURE 4: How far do you agree that using a mobile phone is essential in order to complete a business/management course? (Split by year graduated)



Part 2

Digital services

In this section, students and recent graduates were asked about the range of digital services that they were currently using, or had used, during their degree.

Respondents were most likely to have accessed, or are accessing, learning resources using digital services, as cited by 83 per cent. Other popular facilities or resources accessed on digital services are grades (cited by 77 per cent) the library (cited by 75 per cent) and personalised timetables and class schedule (65 per cent).

Less likely to be accessed by digital services are wellbeing initiatives (cited by 13 per cent) transport information (cited by 17 per cent) campus maps (cited by 25 per cent) and the digital campus (cited by 28 per cent).

Based on their answers in the previous question, respondents were asked to rate their experiences of using digital services for various facilities and resources offered by their business school. Respondents were generally positive in their ratings of most digital services.

Respondents were most positive about accessing their grades through digital services, with half (50 per cent) rating this as "excellent". Respondents were similarly

positive about using digital services to access the library and reading lists, with 47 per cent and 44 per cent rating these as "excellent", respectively.

However, roughly one in five respondents rated digital services for careers services (22 per cent), wellbeing initiatives (21 per cent) and transport information (19 per cent) as "average", highlighting areas for improvement.

The survey went on to ask respondents where they would like to see their school increase its use of digital services, offering them the opportunity to give their own answers. The most common resource mentioned here was the library.

A number of respondents also suggested having a single sign-on platform from which they could access all the information they needed. These respondents reasoned that it would make their programme easier to navigate and reduce the anxiety of having multiple logins.

Career services, mentoring, collaboration with other students, school news and feedback were also commonly mentioned areas in which respondents would like to see a greater use of digital services.

FIGURE 5: Which business school facilities or resources are you accessing, or did you access, using digital services?

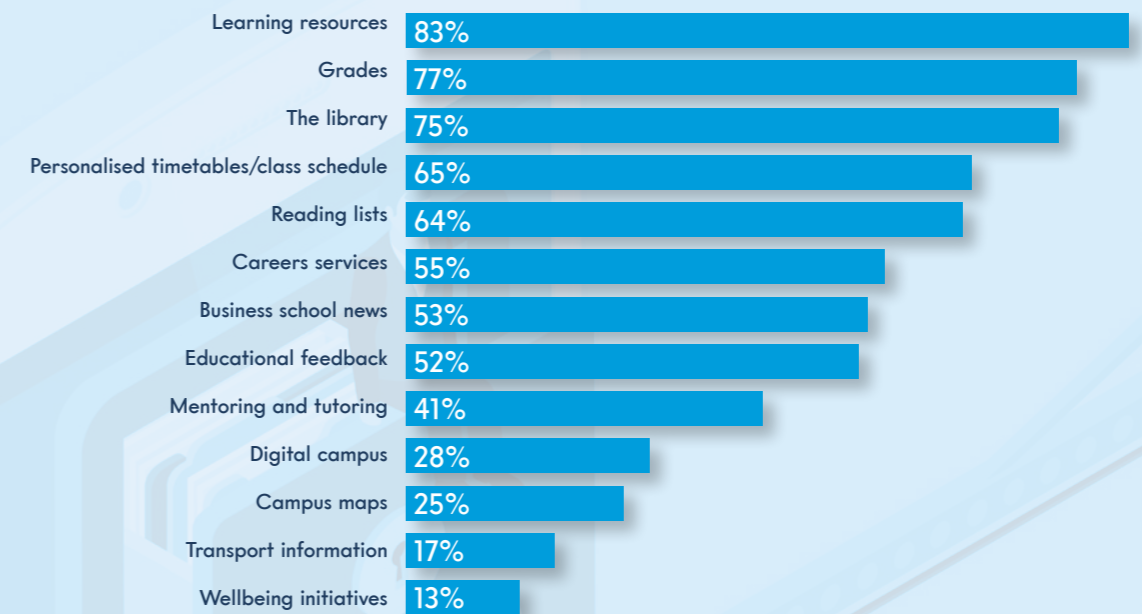
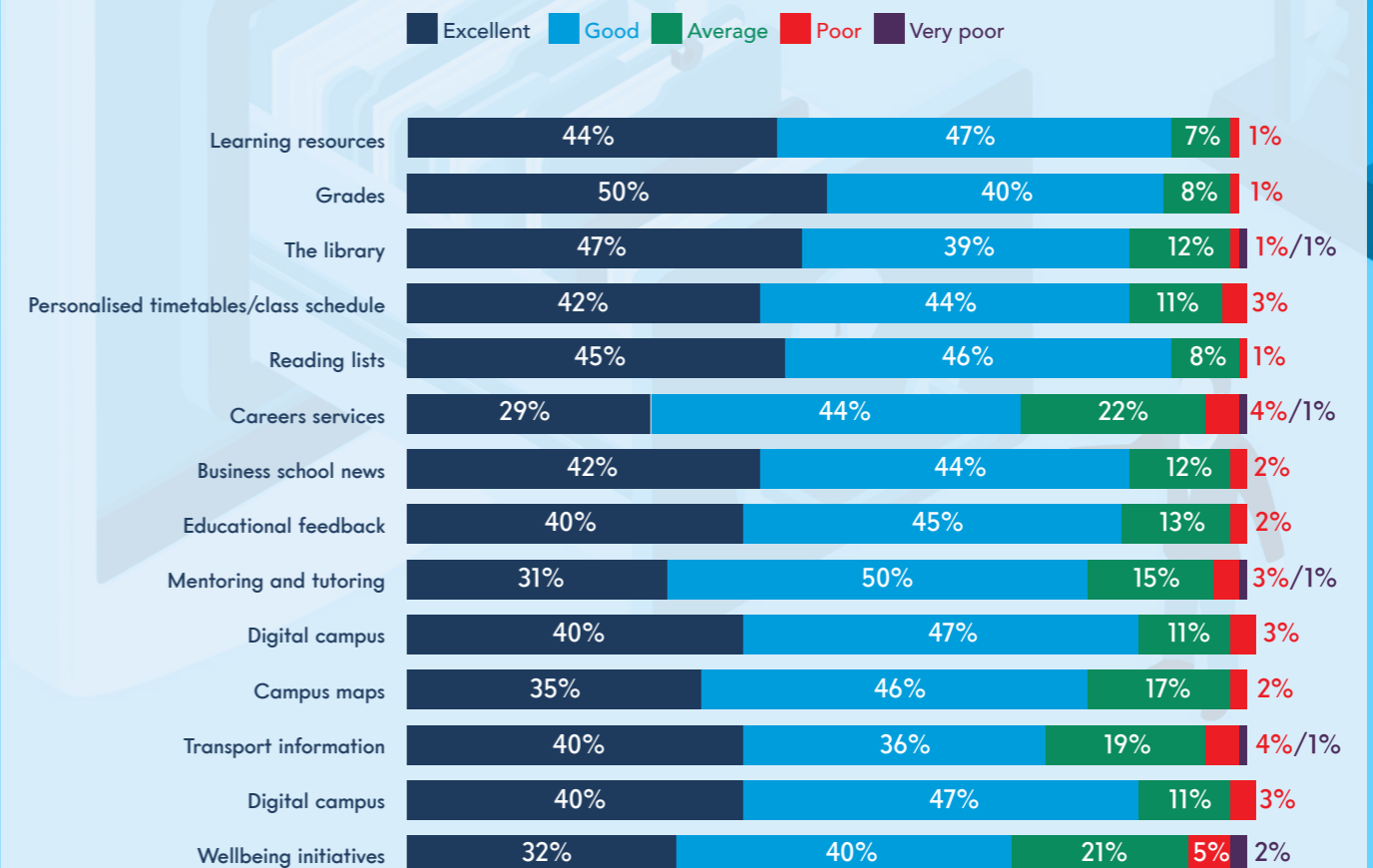


FIGURE 6: Please rate your experience of using digital services for the following facilities or resources



Part 3

Smartphone apps at business school

When asked if their business school has an app, or had one at the time of their studies, respondents were completely split down the middle. As Figure 7 indicates, 50 per cent said “yes” and 50 per cent “no” overall.

However, when analysing the results by respondents’ year of graduation, a clear trend towards the presence of business school apps emerges. Indeed, between the few short years of 2018 and 2022, there is an increase of 37 percentage points in respondents citing the presence of an app at their business school. Among currently, 65 per cent said that their institution has one.

Respondents who said their institution did have an app were asked more details about how they used this app and how they rated its functionality.

Specifically, respondents were asked which aspects of learning their school’s app had already contributed towards, if they would have liked/like their school’s app to perform certain activities and areas where they thought an app was unnecessary.

The most common use for business school apps is providing students with their personalised timetable/class schedule – 74 per cent said their app does, or did, this. Other common areas of use are accessing their learning resources on the go (cited by 71 per cent) accessing information about the campus/institution/school (cited by 67 per cent) and discovering upcoming events that they could attend (cited by 61 per cent).

A popular function that respondents would like, or would have liked, their app to perform is to search and connect with class colleagues or others in their institution (cited by 38 per cent).

In addition, a sizeable proportion of respondents would like, or would have liked, their business school app to be able to view and book resources such as computers, desks and rooms (cited by 35 per cent) access wellbeing initiatives (cited by 34 per cent) and receive critical communications through app notifications or SMS (cited by 34 per cent).

For what do respondents feel a business school app is unnecessary? The most popular answer was to “mark attendance” (cited by 35 per cent) ahead of “access to wellbeing initiatives” (34 per cent).

Respondents were then asked if they found their business school’s app useful. The results are fairly positive here, although they do indicate some room for improvement. While 18 per cent said that their app is, or was, “extremely useful”, 32 per cent cited it as “very useful” and a further 30 per cent cited it as “moderately useful”. At the other end of the spectrum, 15 per cent believe that their app is, or was, only “slightly useful” with a small group (six per cent) labelling it as “not useful at all”.

Those who said that their business school does not, or did not, have an app were asked about potential uses of interest. As Figure 9 shows, most respondents would

FIGURE 7: Did/does your business school provide an app?

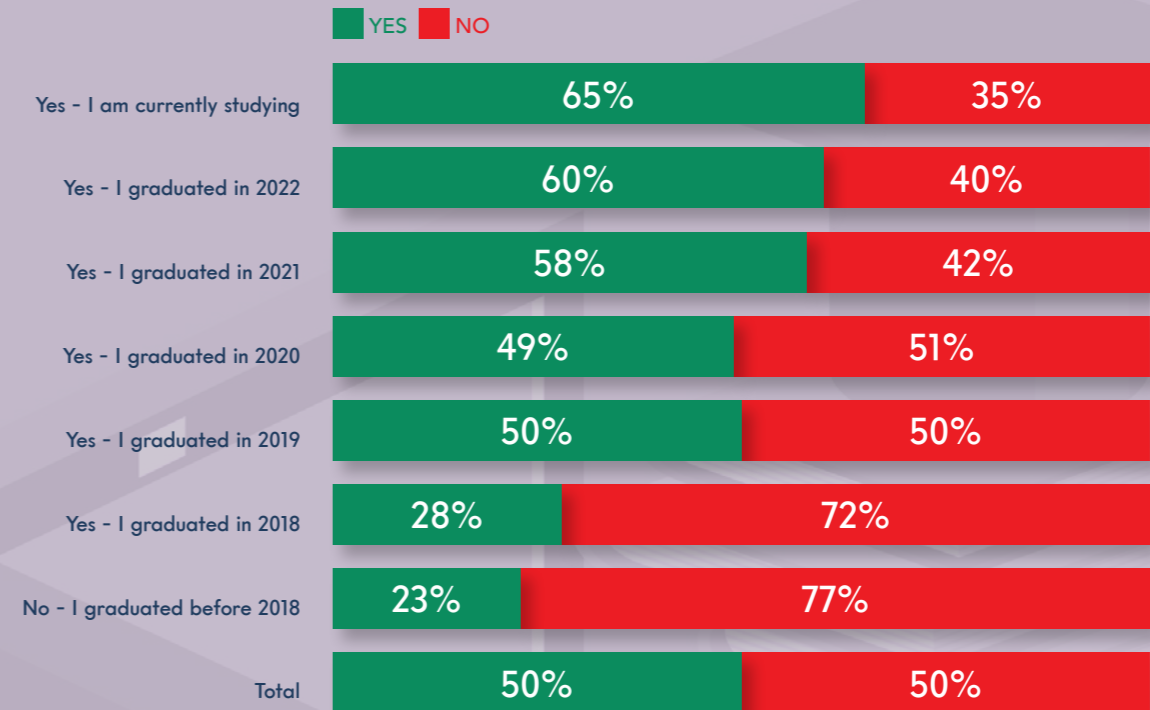


FIGURE 8: Uses and opinions on business schools’ apps

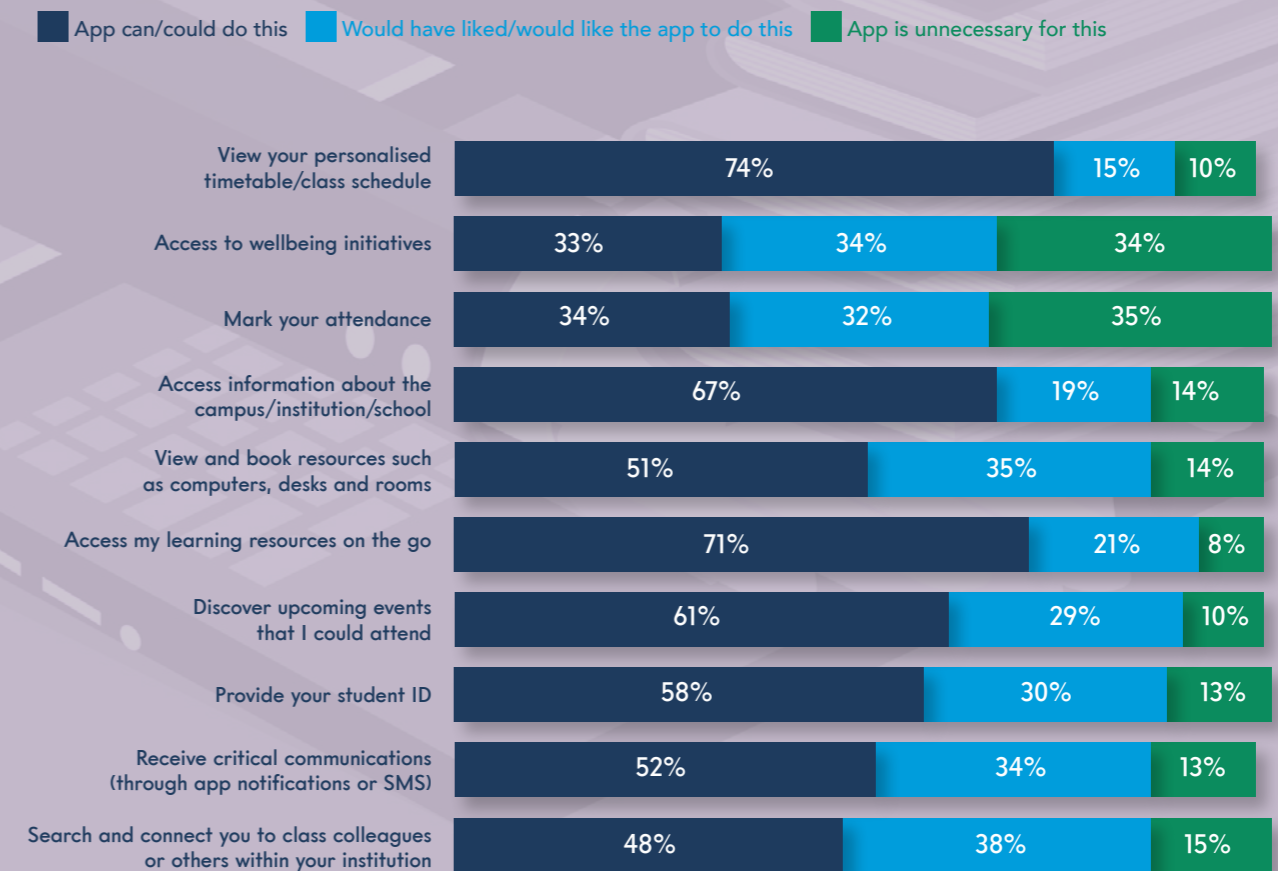


FIGURE 9: Areas where an app would be helpful
(among respondents citing no business school app during their studies)

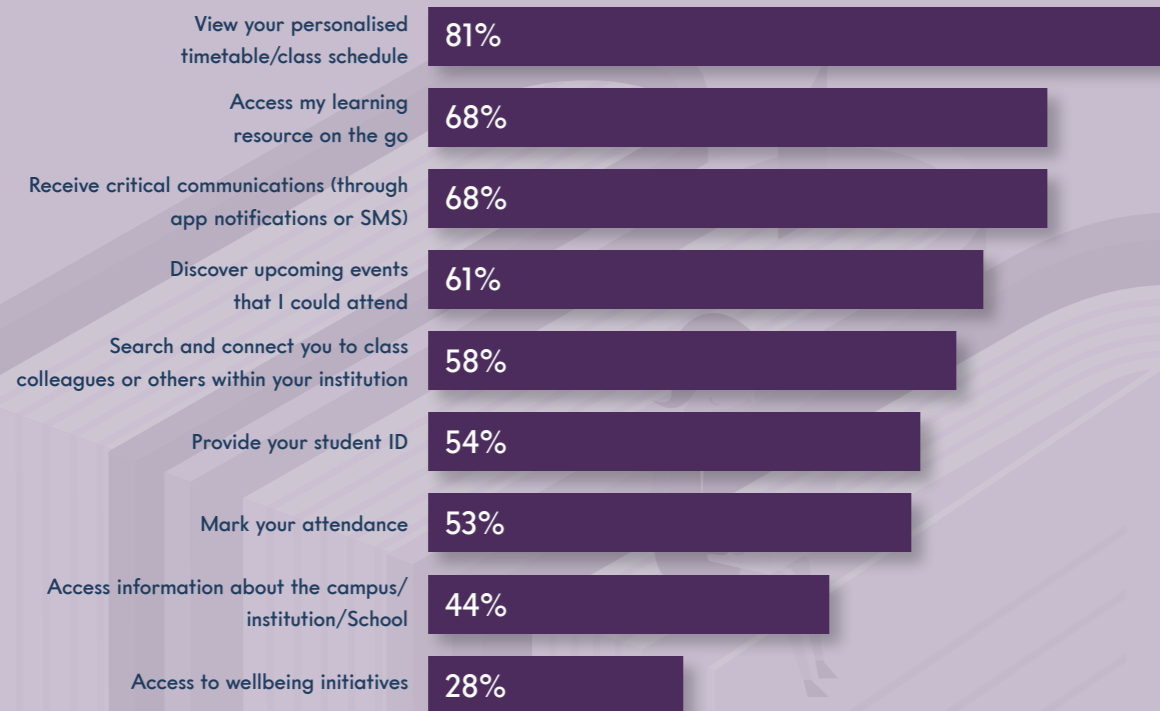
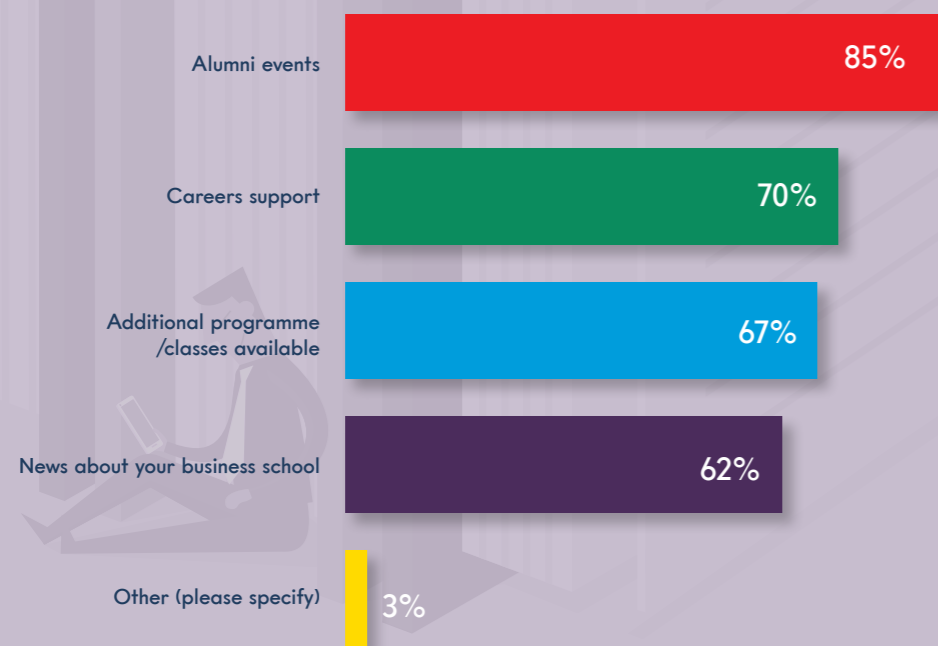


FIGURE 10: In which areas would do you, or would you like to, have a digital experience post-graduation with your business school?



like, or would have liked, to be able to view their personalised timetable/class schedule on an app (81 per cent).

Other popular answers included accessing their learning resources on the go and receiving critical communications through the app (both 68 per cent).

Respondents didn't think that an app would be, or would have been, particularly helpful in accessing wellbeing initiatives, with only 28 per cent selecting this option.

Post-graduation digital experiences

This section of the survey also asked about the post-graduation digital experience respondents have, or would like to have, with their business school.

When asked if they already have, or would like to have, a digital experience post-graduation with their institution, 78 per cent of respondents said "yes". This implies that the majority of students and alumni would like to play an active role with their business school after their graduation.

The survey went on to identify areas of interest for post-graduation digital experiences, as shown in Figure 10.

Responding students and graduates are most interested in hearing about alumni events – 85 per cent picked this option – ahead of careers support, which was selected by 70 per cent of respondents.

Some common answers among those specifying "other" include:

- Staying in touch with classmates
- Seeing the latest case studies and having access to learning materials
- Seeing job opportunities
- Networking opportunities

Part 4

Overarching opinions

The last section of this report considers the overarching opinion of students and graduates towards their business school's digital offering.

Respondents were first asked what they found the most helpful out of a range of options – with the results shown in Figure 11.

Overall, respondents find that accessing learning resources is, or was, the most helpful to their experience and learning – 78 per cent picked this option. Other popular answers were knowing what their grades were and how they were performing as well as knowing about upcoming deadlines, selected by 63 per cent and 62 per cent, respectively.

Notably, students and graduates have not, or had not, found accessing support services, including wellbeing, IT help and financial aid, as well as getting help through their business school's digital offering to be particularly helpful to the overall experience of their management course.

Respondents were then asked which of their business school's current digital offering they found to be the most difficult to use.

As can be seen from Figure 12, connecting with peers is, or was, what respondents found most difficult to use among their school's digital offering – 43 per cent chose this option.

The results also indicate that students and graduates find, or found, accessing support services such as wellbeing, IT help and financial aid as well as getting help difficult, with 36 per cent and 30 per cent selecting these options, respectively.

Lastly, respondents were asked to expand on a time when digital services at their business school have been invaluable to them.

Answers here varied but several key themes emerged, including:

- Being able to follow learning content and materials when not able to be in class
- Being able to access the library remotely
- Seeking online guidance
- Access to timetables and campus maps
- Being able to review professors' PowerPoint presentations
- Accessing exam results
- Submitting coursework
- Learning about career opportunities
- Accessing mentoring
- Being able to do course and related reading on the go
- Payment for tuition fees

FIGURE 11: From your business school's current digital offering, what do you, or did you, find the most helpful to your experience and learning?

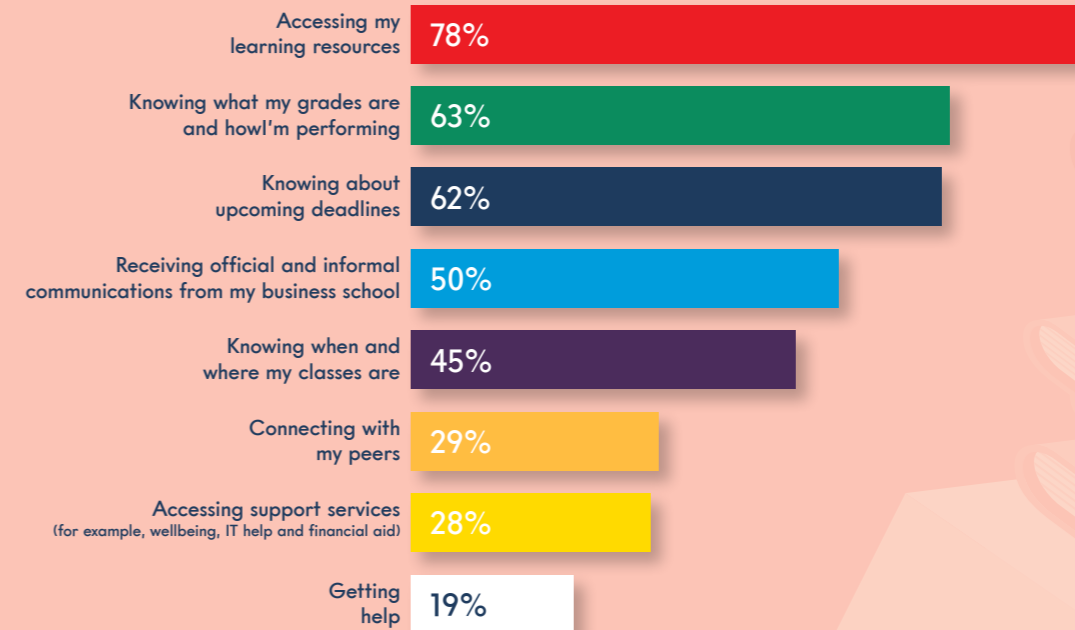
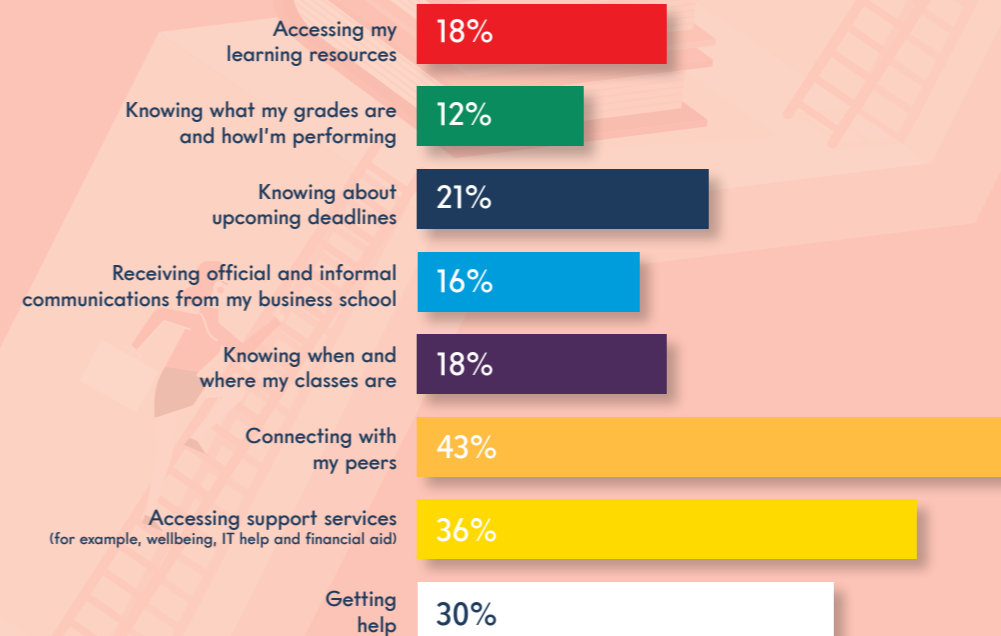


FIGURE 12: From your business school's current digital offering, what do you, or did you, find to be the most difficult to use?



Conclusion

This report shows that current students and recent graduates of AMBA & BGA business schools are very much reliant on technology. More than half, for example, believe that a mobile phone is essential to the completion of a management course.

In light of this statistic and in the context of the 2020s as a whole, it is perhaps surprising, therefore, that only 65 per cent of current student respondents said that their business school has an app. This proportion drops to 50 per cent when including graduate respondents.

However, among respondents who said that their school did have an app, most rate them positively – with 80 per cent believing them useful to some degree. For those schools currently without an app, our results show a clear area of potential to provide students with something they will find helpful to their learning experience.

Learning through an app is still a relatively unexplored territory for business schools. As technology becomes ever-more sophisticated, it is likely that we will see expansion in this regard. People are going to expect to have information at the tip of their fingers, wherever they are. There might come a time when opening up a laptop is not considered quick enough for accessing information and students will expect to be able to connect with their fellow students and professors, receive pertinent information and access their school's library from a simple swipe of their smartphone.

Right now, students and graduates most appreciate being able to access their learning resources online on the basis of these results. Top of their lists for improvement in the digital sphere, meanwhile, is something that makes it easier to connect with their peers at business school.



