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**5 reasons why you might want to**

# re-think your security operations

# Is your security strategy ready for a new context?

Security operations, in many cases, rely largely on processes that sit across multiple communication channels that are not joined up. This means security leads face challenges in creating a whole university approach both in terms of delivery of the service and inputting to the strategic agenda.

We've put together a few points that we believe security leads in Higher Education environments might want to think about.

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# 1  Student safety is increasingly becoming a key criterion for young people choosing a university

With around a third of all students[1] likely to become a victim of crime during their time at university[1], it's easy to see why almost 16% of all students and parents see security as a key criterion for university selection. The likelihood is that this will go up and not down over time.

This adds a new dimension to the student prospectus agenda and conversation.

It is clear that universities who can evidence a robust and transparent approach to managing security across campuses and student accommodation will create a clear differentiator in a very competitive marketplace. As student numbers, especially in the international student space, fall, putting increasing pressure on finances, delivering a strategic approach to security operations that can be clearly articulated in student acquisition marketing materials is important.

Where, in the past, responsibility for security has largely sat as a separate functional area, it is now likely to become a more integrated element of the student acquisition narrative.

The challenge lies in being able to produce reliable evidence of security-based metrics to inform compelling messages to students. Often, where processes rely on a variety of tools and reporting requires bringing lots of data sets together in a manual way, this can be time consuming, labour intensive, and might not be as accurate as it needs to be.

It might be time to re-think the way safety and security operations are managed. Digitally transforming the way this is approached by implementing a specialist incident management solution with integrated, powerful reporting capabilities can help. The right solution would provide security leads with the insights on operational performance and the statistics their colleagues need to develop student acquisition messaging that reassures students and their parents that you have got security covered.

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# 2 Freedom of Speech and the impact on Security Operations

**The Freedom of Speech Act due in August 2024 could have direct impact on the volume and type of incidents your security team handles.**

With the recent rise in student political activity and protest, largely due to the conflict in Gaza, we have already seen a shift in students' appetite for protest and the shape it takes.

The Freedom of Speech Act means that Universities will have to support activities that may include unpopular voices, providing they are not unlawful. This could result in more protests and a need to protect those unpopular voices.

> This impacts security teams in two ways.
>
> Firstly, it could result in the need for more staff due to increased activity.
>
> Secondly, it could result in a higher volume of more serious incidents that may be subject to a high degree of scrutiny and where actions taken need to be defended. In some cases, depending on the profile of the event, it might also require working with third parties such as the police and other emergency services.

Universities should consider ways of underpinning the policies they have developed to support the Freedom of Speech Act with a digitally enabled solution for security operations management.

Using a solution that connects security officers on the ground directly with the decision-making unit ensures a real time response to incidents as they arise. That same powerful two-way communication, combined with location mapping tools, also enables quick and easy deployment of personnel to the exact point of incident. This has a positive impact on resource numbers as it reduces the need for higher volumes of staff.

But when evaluating incident management solution options, it is important to also consider how well they enable you to integrate diverse teams, including from external parties such as the emergency services, into your processes and communication channels. This is vital to effectively managing more complex or critical incidents both in real-time and data protection/ safeguarding terms.

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# **3** Today, student safety is not just about incidents or crime

A staggering 39% of students state they experience a decline in mental health whilst at university[2]. This is a clear indication that student wellbeing needs to be on the agenda of safety and security teams across campus.

This will involve both reactive and proactive measures.

Should there be a wellbeing related episode, safety and security teams will need to reactively respond to the situation. They will be at the front line, needing to quickly and effectively report details in a factual, non-emotional way whilst still delivering an empathetic response to the individual involved. Those in the decision-making chair may need to be able to bring the right specialist teams into the process as soon and as efficiently as possible.

However, processes can be put in place to help mitigate the risk of such incidents occurring by having a proactive approach to student welfare checks.

Having the ability to manage routine tasks to support student wellbeing such as regular inspections, checking out accommodation and including things like lighting or security locks etc - ensures visibility at specific times and places in the same platform as incident management activities. This should also be a key consideration. It will help security leads to drive resource efficiencies and easily create incident reports from routine task activities, combining and correlating more activities so they can be done simultaneously and to everyone's benefit.

## 39%

of students state they experience a decline in mental health whilst at university

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# 4 Students need to be engaged in their own welfare

**With 68% of students reporting that they don't believe campus security keeps them safe[3], and this figure rises to 71% amongst women, it is clear that there is work to be done in this area.**

Resources, both physical and financial, are limited and with responsibility for significant geographical areas and multiple buildings with a variety or purposes, it is challenging to have visible presence everywhere at once to change this perception.

With students studying until late in the evening in libraries or lone workers such as research students or staff often feeling isolated in dedicated facilities, it is easy to understand this perception of vulnerability.

By giving students and staff access to a dedicated app for reporting concerns they have about their safety that is fully integrated into your incident management and safety operations platform, you are giving them a tool to help them feel more secure.

Standalone apps go some way to addressing this, however, by using an app that is fully integrated with your core platform, you can easily assess the situation and deploy resources directly to the point of need in real-time, so staff and students know that their concerns are being responded to.

You should also ensure the core platform is able to report on these incidents to gain insight into trends based on location, type of incident or concern reported and to provide a date and time stamped audit trail of actions taken.

**71%**
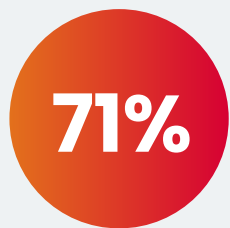
**of female students don't think campus security keeps them safe**

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# 5 The Digital Transformation of Incident Management and Safety Operations
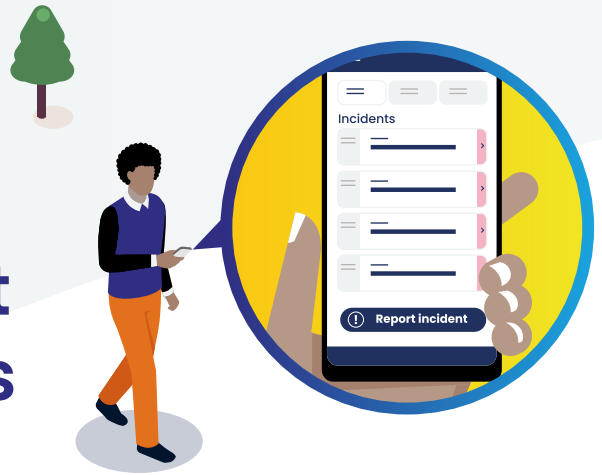
## What could it mean for you?

There is clearly a balance to be had between making more students and staff feel safe and the resources available. Moving to a digitally enabled Incident Management and Safety Operations solutions can help get that balance right.

Where teams are reliant on email communications, end of shift written reports and a variety of communication channels that make it difficult to work out what is happening in real time and even more difficult to collate what has happened for reporting and analysis purposes, security teams can experience significant productivity inefficiencies. A high proportion of time is spent on administration and not on managing situations as they arise. This can also often lead to having to deploy larger teams to help ensure all aspects are covered.

Having all incidents, tasks and issues logged, assigned and managed through a cloud based, digitally enabled platform means incident and task details are created real time, people can be deployed to where they are needed most based on real-time visibility of priorities and all types of 'events' can be reported on with the touch of a button, and with auditable details of actions taken.

This means that the admin burden is significantly reduced, or possibly eradicated altogether, the student and staff experience is enhanced as they see a clear and direct correlation between something being reported and action being taken and, in a functional area of responsibility where evidence is often required, risk is mitigated because everything is recorded directly in the platform as it happens.

It is important not to blur the lines though. Safety and Security is a serious business that needs a serious approach to management. Deploying a platform that is specifically designed to promote best practice in this area will always deliver better results than attempting to try to manage this through other platforms that were not designed for it.

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**Find out how Halo can help you get connected and keep your campus safe.**

**Visit us at halosolutions.com**

**Sources:**

1. www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/student-advice/after-you-start/staying-safe-at-university

2. FE News | Nearly two in five students say their mental health has declined since starting university / www.fenews.co.uk/student-view

3. Report: only one-third of UK students trust campus security to keep them safe (epigram.org.uk)

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