University of Sydney

Tap Into the Future: How the University of Sydney
transformed campus life with digital ID

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Jodie Lowe, Senior Product Owner,
Information Communications and
Technology at the University of Sydney

Transforming the campus experience

In 2024, the University of Sydney – a global top 25 university and the first university established in Australasia – embarked on a project to streamline and simplify campus life for students and staff across its 143 buildings and 150 research centres.

"We decided it was time to modernise how we manage ID cards because the old system was showing its age - it had been around for over 20 years and was starting to feel like a bit of a dinosaur," says Jodie Lowe, Senior Product Owner, Information Communications and Technology at the University of Sydney.

After years of relying on a clunky system, Jodie and the team knew it was time for a change.

The University managed up to 100,000 active cardholders at any time, including staff, students, affiliates, and members of the public.

"Our original campus card was essential for everyday life here: it got you into buildings, labs, and libraries, it let you borrow books, print and scan, and even pay for laundry in student accommodation.

"We worked with Gallagher to introduce digital ID cards, not just to tackle the growing cybersecurity risks of our ageing platform, but also to give students and staff a smoother, more modern experience.

"We knew that students were using digital bank cards, boarding passes, and concert tickets on their phones.

"So our goal was to move to a secure, mobile-friendly solution using Apple and Google Pay, so students and staff could just tap and go. Simple, fast, and future-ready."

Access granted

With a relationship already spanning over 30 years, and after a competitive global tender, the University of Sydney was pleased to join forces with Gallagher Security to come up with a resilient, trustworthy solution for staff and students.

"The card system was deeply embedded in a complex web of integrations and customisations built up over two decades. But the goal was clear: modernise, secure, and simplify the way ID credentials were issued and managed," says Jodie.

The University chose Transact Campus (Transact) for their extensive track record within higher education sites and their unique ability to offer NFC-enabled mobile IDs through Apple and Google Wallet.

"We wanted to work with Transact because of their excellent experience in transitioning to digital IDs, with an impressive 75 years spent working with higher education clients," says Jodie.

Joining the project was Mike Margrain, Gallagher Security's Technical Director for APAC and IMEA.

"This was a major project for the Gallagher Security team to support, and we enjoyed working with the University of Sydney and Transact to deliver a transformative solution – one befitting today's learners and staff," says Mike.

"We wanted to use our award-winning Gallagher Security technology coupled with Transact's proven, quality products to provide the university with a solution to issue, manage, and revoke ID credentials.

"The integration between the Transact Mobile Credential and Command Centre, allows university students and staff to gain fast, secure access to areas on campus, simply by 'badging' or tapping their smartphone or Apple Watch at a Gallagher reader.

"We knew it was important for the university to have a result that was seamless for students and staff. From the inner city of Sydney to the Great Barrier Reef, the university has teachers, researchers and students based all over Australia so we needed to create a solution that would work and gain buy-in."

Developing the solution required custom software engineering to securely and seamlessly synchronise credentials between the Transact Cloud and Gallagher Command Centre. It also enabled field controllers and door readers to recognise and process the new wallet credential formats.

"Thanks to Gallagher's intelligent reader technology and robust HBUS communication protocol, the upgrade was remarkably efficient. Most of the existing readers received the update automatically over-the-wire, with a smaller number of older legacy readers needing physical replacement," says Mike.

Mike described it as a solid effort by Channel Partner ARA Group to upgrade the university's hardware infrastructure. While the university has more than 3,600 Gallagher door readers and 2,100 Aperio doors, only 1,700 required replacing, alongside the deployment of 515 multifunction printers.

After months of load testing across systems from multiple vendors – and many long days and equally long nights spent perfecting the incoming system – launch day was an outstanding success.

Staff had the opportunity to sign-up for their digital ID cards first, followed by students a week later.

At 9am on the morning of 22 July 2024, communications began to roll out to students. Jodie organised a campaign across the university's website and internal channels, electronic banners in major buildings and libraries across campus.

Jodie remembers the excitement of seeing hundreds beginning to sign up for their digital ID cards before the numbers started tracking in the thousands.

"We were live, and it was a huge success. We had the Gallagher and Transact teams on standby to help with any teething issues, but it was a smooth roll out for both students and staff," says Jodie.

Mountains of positive feedback from students and staff quickly followed, and the announcement about the digital ID cards and how to create one remains the most clicked item in the student e-newsletter.

To date more than 58,000 digital ID cards have been set up by cardholders using the Transact eAccounts app and adding the card to Apple Wallet or Google Wallet.

Cardholders now have access in minutes to a secure and convenient digital ID that replaces the need for a plastic ID card.

Success unlocked

Jodie is delighted with the adoption rate and calls the project a major success.

"The successful collaboration between the University, Gallagher and Transact demonstrates our shared commitment to re-imagining the digital experience.

"The result is less demand on our operational and support teams and a vast improvement of the customer experience.

"By introducing a modern card management system and a digital ID card for our staff and students, we have simplified processes, ensured data protection and provided advanced self-service options.

"The transition means there are no more long lines at the Student Centre to request your first card, and no long wait of up to four weeks to receive it. They have immediate access to services now."

The project has successfully created a faster, safer, and more user-friendly experience.

"We have significantly reduced the human effort required to issue cards. We save over 1000 hours per year with the introduction of automated services such as online photo submission and ID verification," says Jodie.

"Alongside this, by going digital we have reduced plastic waste and improved our environmental impact. This is a big win for the university too, as we're very proud to be powered by 100 percent renewable energy.

"And of course, we've removed the cyber risks we faced as we have enhanced data security.

"Our aim was to deliver technology that just works for our customers and colleagues. Simple and easy, and we've achieved that and more.

"Having Gallagher and Transact partner with us was the key to helping us deliver a successful product. We couldn't be happier with the results, and we are very grateful to Mike and the Gallagher team for their dedication and commitment to help us provide a better place to work and place that works better."

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02/2026