

1

Manual

Everything done by people.
Email, spreadsheets and paper.
No consistent process across teams.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Admissions managed entirely by email and phone
- Staff manually copying data between systems
- No shared view across departments

2

Digitised

Most HE institutions

Systems in place — CRM, SRS, finance platforms — but they do not talk to each other. People fill the gaps.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Multiple systems, no integration between them
- Manual handoffs and re-keying between platforms
- Teams build workarounds in spreadsheets

Jisc Digital Insights 2025: interoperability and AI guidance remain top HE priorities

3

Automating

Early movers

Point automation of specific tasks.
Real time savings in places, but no joined-up view and gaps remain.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Automated emails and basic workflow rules
- Some RPA in finance or HR
- Piecemeal — EY describe HE as still 'experimental'

EY / Jisc 2025: HE automation described as 'piecemeal and experimental'

4

Intelligent

Where leaders are heading

AI and automation complete whole processes end to end. Students get instant answers and actions, not just replies.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- A deferral requested at 9pm, processed overnight
- Mitigating circumstances handled without a queue
- Applications fully automated

5

Optimising

Processes self-monitor. Live insight across the institution. ROI tracked in real time.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Dashboards show hours saved and value daily
- Bottlenecks flagged before they become backlogs
- Institution-wide benchmarking against peers

WHAT WE HEAR IN MEETINGS

“ We know we need to do something but we don't even know where to start. Everyone's talking about AI but nobody's explaining it simply.

— DVC Operations, Russell Group university

“ Our IT team are worried about security and our staff are worried about their jobs. Until we can answer both of those, nothing will move.

— Registrar, post-92 university

“ We have seventeen different systems and none of them talk to each other. Adding AI on top feels like building on sand.

— Head of Digital Transformation, college group

“ Finance won't approve anything without a business case and we don't have the data to build one — because we're still doing everything manually.

— Director of Student Experience

“ The students expect WhatsApp and instant answers. Our staff are sending emails and waiting three days.

— Admissions Director, HE provider

“ We don't fully understand AI, if anybody mentions it, we just think ChatGPT.

— Admissions Director, HE provider

You are not behind. Most institutions sit at stage 2. The move to stage 4 is incremental — and it starts with a single process.

Start with one process, build up slowly.