Unlocking Value in Digital Credentials:
Improve Efficiency and Drive Revenue
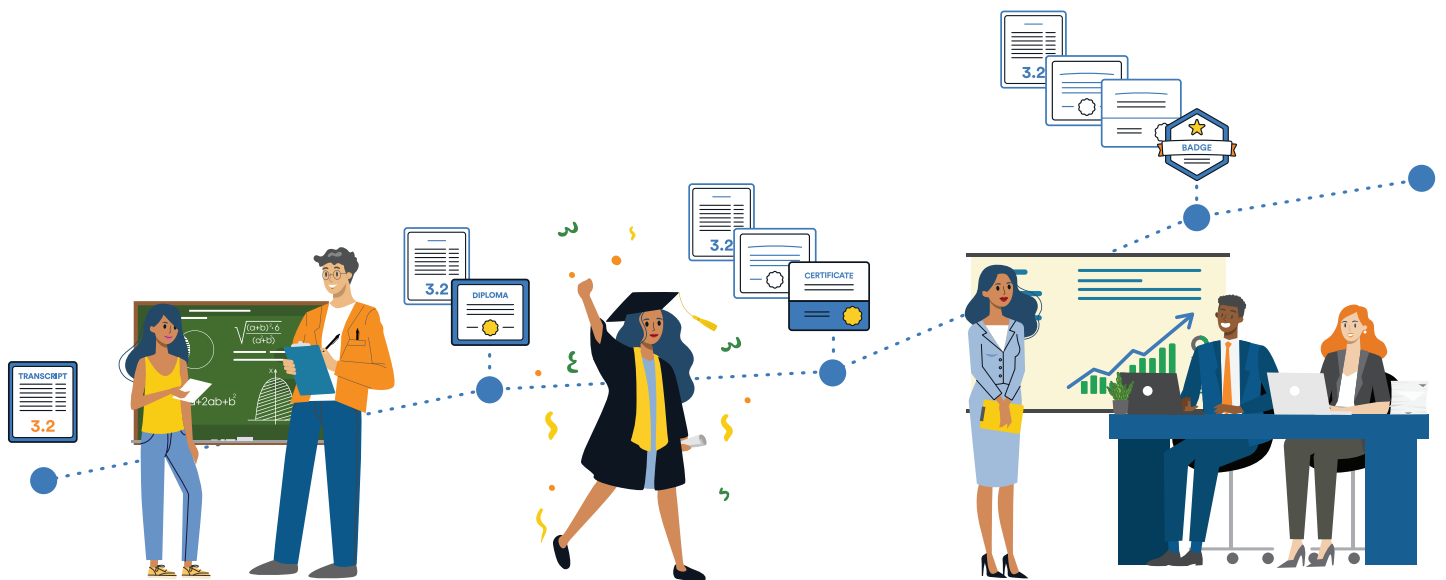
Parchment
By Instructure

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Executive Summary

As universities face shrinking budgets, the value of tuition fees for domestic students has been falling in real terms. Combined with a decline in international students, shifting learner expectations, and outdated manual processes, these challenges make digital credentialling a smarter, more efficient way to work.

With the right strategy, it's more than just an administrative task — it becomes a powerful driver of efficiency, cost savings, and sustainable growth. From reducing fraud and admin burden to generating new revenue through flexible pricing models, modern credentialling is a high-impact opportunity hiding in plain sight.

Parchment Digitary Services is a digital credential management platform that enables secure, scalable digital issuance of transcripts, certificates, and badges — fully integrated with your existing systems and adaptable to your institution's policies.

Learn how forward-thinking institutions are transforming credentialling into a strategic asset that meets learners' needs and the organisation's goals.

Under Pressure: The Financial Strain in UK Higher Education

UK universities are under growing financial pressure. Budget cuts and frozen tuition fees are forcing tough decisions, from course closures to major staff cuts.

Cardiff University, for example, is planning to cut nearly 10% of its academic staff[1], and Dundee may cut over 600 roles to address a £35M shortfall[2]. And with **72% of institutions expected to run deficits**[3], relying on international tuition is becoming more risky due to visa restrictions and global uncertainty.

UK tuition fees for domestic students have also been frozen at £9,250 since 2017, losing real value due to inflation. This has put growing financial pressure on universities, with nearly half of vice-chancellors expecting to run at a loss in 2024[4]. While raising fees could help, it's politically and socially unpopular. Many institutions have relied on higher-paying international students to offset the shortfall, but even those numbers are now declining.

Growing Support for Modular and Micro Learning

At the same time, modular learning and the UK's new Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) are transforming how students access and pay for education. The House of Commons describes this as delivering a "radical shift in the tertiary education system, by unifying the student finance systems for further and higher education courses."[5]

The LLE will enable learners to access short, flexible courses throughout their careers — but many universities still lack the systems needed to deliver, stack, and credential these modular pathways efficiently.

That's why credentialling deserves your focus. It's a core process in every institution — but when modernised, it can reduce costs, improve the student experience, and open new revenue streams.

"**Micro-credentials have a key role to play in upskilling and re-skilling the workforce as short, credit-bearing courses that support a learner-led engagement in higher education.**"[6]

- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

1. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jan/28/cardiff-university-cut-staff-drop-subjects-including-nursing-and-music
2. https://news.sky.com/story/university-of-dundee-to-cut-over-600-jobs-to-plug-35m-deficit-13326384
3. https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10037/
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6. https://www.qaa.ac.uk//en/the-quality-code/characteristics-statements/micro-credentials

Transforming Credentialling into a Revenue Opportunity

While initial degree certificates are included in tuition fees, charging for additional copies — such as replacement certificates for graduates — remains an underused revenue opportunity for many universities.

Credentialling doesn't have to be a cost centre. With the right digital infrastructure, universities can reduce overhead, improve service, and generate new revenue. Many institutions handle 1,000–2,000 replacement certificate and transcript requests each year — with typical fees ranging from £15 to £50 per document. This can **unlock up to £200,000–£250,000 in annual cost recovery** for larger institutions.

Charging for duplicate certificates, alumni transcripts, or offering lifetime access through a subscription-style model can bring in steady income without adding strain on staff or students. These flexible models also **align with the rising demand for short courses, micro-credentials, and digital badges linked to lifelong learning.**

Most UK universities today rely on **pay-as-you-go** (PAYG) or **per-order** pricing — meaning students pay for each individual copy they need, not a lifetime subscription. Parchment Digitary Services makes it easy to get started, integrating with your payment systems and supporting models from PAYG to hybrid pricing. **This helps you recover costs, boost operational efficiency, and capture long-term value** from an essential service you already provide.

While today's fees are mainly charged for printed documents, the same models work even better when credentials are digital: students still pay for replacement copies, secure verification, or lifetime access — but enjoy instant delivery and greater convenience.

UK Snapshot: Typical Credential Fees

Across the UK, many universities already recover costs by charging for replacement certificates, official transcripts, certified copies, and confirmation letters. Here's what students pay today:

University	Credential Type	Format	Fee	Processing Time	Payment Model
Aston University	Replacement Degree Certificate	Print	£50	14-21 days	Per order (single transaction)
University of Cambridge	Ornate Alternative Degree Certificate	Print	£55	Up to 3 months	Per order (single transaction)
University of Kent	Ornate Transcript	Print	£10 per copy	30 working days	Pay-as-you-go (per copy)
University of Oxford	Replacement Degree Certificate	Print	£50	~3 weeks	Per order (single transaction)
University of Exeter	Certified Copy of Transcript	Digital/PFD	£12-£27	Up to 3 weeks	Pay-as-you-go + delivery charges
University of York	Academic Transcript	Digital	£10-£15 per copy	6-8 weeks	Pay-as-you-go (per copy)
University of Edinburgh	Official Transcript (digital)	Digital	Free (self-serve)	Instant	Free for students, self-service access
University of Sussex	Verification Letter	PDF/email	£5-15	10 working days	Per order (single transaction)

The vast majority of UK universities still rely heavily on paper-based certificates and transcripts, which means long processing times, high postage costs, and more risk of fraud. Modernising credentialling with a secure digital system like Parchment Digitary Services can help institutions deliver the same value more efficiently, without losing revenue potential.

Typical UK Credential Fee Ranges

Degree certificates: £35–£50 (up to £75+ for premium)

Official transcripts: £15–£20 per copy

Certified copies: £7–£10 each

Verification or confirmation letters: Free–£15 each

Processing times: 2–8 weeks for print — digital is instant with Parchment Digitary Services.

*These ranges reflect typical published fees, based on data from more than 20 UK universities' public websites (Spring 2025).

Balancing Student Expectations and Institutional Realities

Charging for credentials is sensitive, as graduates expect them to be covered by tuition, and student unions may oppose extra fees. Still, **universities must balance student expectations with financial realities** as tuition fees stretch less far and international applications fall.[7]

Flexible Credentialling Models That Work

Most UK universities already use a hybrid credentialling model in practice: students receive their original degree certificate and final transcript as part of their tuition package, then pay on a pay-as-you-go basis for any replacements, additional copies, or premium services such as certified copies, courier delivery, or priority processing.

This balanced approach keeps credentialling fair and transparent for students while helping institutions recover costs and ease operational pressures.

With the right digital infrastructure, universities can optimise this model even further — automating payments, integrating secure delivery, and introducing innovative options such as a lifetime or annual "Alumni Prime" membership. This concept, inspired by subscription models like Amazon Prime, could give graduates ongoing digital access or bundled discounts while maintaining a simple PAYG structure for each credential they order.

Honest Dialogue Drives Credentialling Success

Clear, honest communication with students and unions is essential — and many universities already do this well by explaining why credential fees exist and what value they deliver.

Highlighting the costs of secure processing, fast digital access, and fraud prevention helps students understand that these small fees support better service for everyone.

This transparency builds trust, reduces confusion, and shows that institutions are balancing fairness with sustainability — all supported by flexible, student-friendly systems like Parchment Digitary Services.

7 https://www.ft.com/content/a824d650-af6b-4cb3-91fe-f6870b448429

Rethinking Access: The Lifetime Subscription Model

The Office for Students warns that "bold and transformative" action is needed to address financial sustainability for institutions in the coming years[8]. As universities look for smarter, student-centred credentialling strategies, a lifetime or annual subscription model could offer an innovative way forward.

Inspired by subscription models like Amazon Prime, this concept would give graduates ongoing digital access to their credentials — ideal for employment, visa, or postgraduate applications — without creating extra work for university staff. Unlike ad hoc requests for replacements, students can self-serve whenever they need their official documents.

Lifelong Access, Lasting Value

By offering unlimited access through a secure learner wallet, institutions can enhance the alumni experience while generating predictable, sustainable revenue. It's a win-win: graduates enjoy the convenience they expect, and universities strengthen long-term engagement with their alumni community.

With Parchment Digitary Services, graduates also benefit from **Curated Learner Profiles** — unique to our solution. This enables learners to create and share bespoke profiles for employers, further study, or lifelong learning opportunities — empowering learners to present their achievements in the way that best supports their goals.

Fully integrated with existing payment systems and configurable to institutional policies, this model offers maximum flexibility. Institutions could trial it alongside their existing pay-as-you-go structure and tailor pricing, access rules, and communications to fit their needs.

While not yet widely used in higher education, a lifetime credential subscription model could help:

Improve cost recovery

Reduce administrative overhead

Support lifelong learner relationships in a digital-first world

8   https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/bold-and-transformative-action-needed-to-address -financial-sustainability-ofs/#

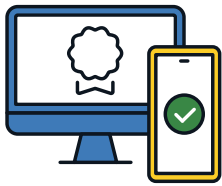# Dublin Business School's Credentialling Transformation with Parchment

Dublin Business School (DBS) is a prime example of this transformation. By moving from manual, paper-based processes to secure digital credentialling with Parchment Digitary Services, DBS cut admin time by 90%, eliminated postage delays, and helped meet students' needs for official transcripts and certificates on demand.

Discover how DBS maximises the value of its credentialling process with Parchment Digitary Services:

The Challenge

Credentialling was a growing pain point at DBS — manual processes drained staff time, postage delays frustrated students, and lost documents raised serious fraud risks and high costs. Eight staff members spent a full week issuing credentials each cycle.

The Solution

By integrating Parchment Digitary Services with its Student Information System (SIS), DBS transformed a time-consuming credentialling process into a fast, secure, and seamless experience. Learners can now access transcripts, certificates, and visa letters instantly through their digital learner wallet.

The Results

- 90% reduction in administrative workload.
- Zero transcript complaints in the latest cycle.
- Scalable without additional staff.
- Significant drop in fraud and undeliverable documents.

A smarter credentialling strategy has equipped Dublin Business School to cut costs, boost efficiency, and empower students on their lifelong learning journey — all with faster, more scalable results.

> **Parchment Digitary Services has allowed us to issue credentials to all students at every stage, in a really efficient manner. It has made our life so much easier."**
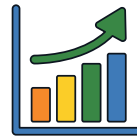>
> **- Darragh Breathnach, COO & Registrar, Dublin Business School**
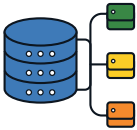
A Roadmap for Successful Credentialling

A credential management system ready to meet your institution's goals should include:

Secure digital issuance and verification protect student data and maintain trust.

Flexibility lets you start small, scale over time, and adapt as demand grows.

Integration with your SIS or LMS streamlines workflows and reduces errors.

Compatibility with existing payment systems makes it easy to implement revenue-generating models.

Support for transcripts, certificates, badges, and letters to meet evolving learner needs.

Intuitive design for staff and students ensures a smooth, user-friendly experience.

From Setup to Success: Implementation That Delivers

Choosing the right platform is step one, but successful implementation is key to maximising its value. Follow these practices to get the most out of your investment:

1 **Plan with Purpose:** Start with clear goals — whether it's saving costs, boosting efficiency, or improving the student experience — and roll out in stages for smoother adoption.

2 **Bring Stakeholders Onboard:** Involve registrar, IT, finance, compliance, and alumni teams early to build alignment and avoid roadblocks down the line.

3 **Train for Success:** Provide tailored, role-specific training so staff feel confident and supported from day one.

4 **Get the Data Right:** Ensure seamless SIS integration and clean, accurate data to keep processes running smoothly.

5 **Keep Improving:** Use analytics and feedback to fine-tune workflows and policies as your needs grow and change.

The Parchment Digitary Services Advantage

Parchment Digitary Services helps institutions rethink credentialling as a strategic asset. By combining secure digital delivery with flexible integration and scalable revenue options, the platform streamlines operations, enhances the student experience, and positions universities for long-term success.

What sets Parchment Digitary Services apart?

1   **Flexible Revenue Models**
Choosing the right platform is step one, but successful implementation is key to maximising its value. Follow these practices to get the most out of your investment:

2   **Secure and Automated Credential Issuance**
Easily issue digital transcripts, letters, and badges with automated delivery that boosts speed, reduces staff workload, and cuts administrative costs.

3   **Seamless Integration**
Connect easily with your SIS and payment infrastructure to automate credential issuance and ensure smooth, scalable operations.

4   **Improved Student Experience**
Give learners instant, secure access to transcripts, badges, and letters through digital wallets — no delays or lost documents, just a better experience.

5   **Fraud Reduction and Compliance**
Advanced security features and encryption protect credentials, reduce fraud risks, and ensure compliance with regulatory standards.

6   **Trusted by Global Institutions**
From Europe to Australia, leading universities rely on Parchment to reduce admin workload, cut print costs, and ensure compliance — while supporting lifelong learner mobility.

7   **Enhanced Alumni Engagement and Learner Mobility**
Provide secure, instant digital access to credentials via learner wallets, fostering lifelong connections and supporting global mobility.
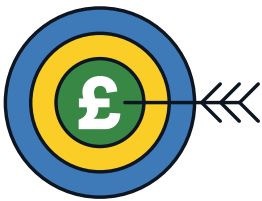
> **The main benefit is that documents used to take a minimum of a week to reach the destination. With Parchment Digitary Services, it's instant."**
>
> **- Maha Mostafa, Manager of Registrar Operations at the American University in Cairo**

Elevate Your Credentialling Strategy

Credentialling doesn't have to be a cost sink or an administrative burden. With the right strategy — and the right partner — it becomes a scalable, secure service that supports student success and institutional sustainability.

Parchment Digitary Services transforms credentialling into a streamlined, future-ready process that:

Drives efficiency

Reduces costs

Unlocks new value

Book a demo to see how Parchment Digitary Services can make your credentialling process faster, simpler, and more impactful.

Sources

1   https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jan/28/cardiff-university-cut-staff-drop-subjects-including-nursing-and-music

2   https://news.sky.com/story/university-of-dundee-to-cut-over-600-jobs-to-plug-35m-deficit-13326384

3   https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10037/

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7   https://www.ft.com/content/a824d650-af6b-4cb3-91fe-f6870b448429

8   https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/bold-and-transformative-action-needed-to-address-financial-sustainability-ofs/#