

Toolkit 1



## Telling your QS Stars story:

A practical guide to using QS Stars ratings to build your reputation and boost your brand

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# Telling your QS Stars story:

A practical guide to using QS Stars ratings to build your reputation and boost your brand



Unleash the transformative power of QS Stars and elevate your institution’s reputation with this practical guide. Learn how to leverage your QS Star ratings as a powerful marketing tool to showcase your strengths, attract top talent, and achieve your strategic goals. Let your institution shine with the recognition it deserves.

In this guide, we’ll explore:

- What QS Stars is
- How QS Stars can be used as a marketing tool to improve your institution’s reputation

- The benefits of QS Stars for different institutions and audiences
- Crafting the right message to tell your unique QS Stars story

For a detailed exploration of effective channels and promotional techniques, download our companion guide on maximising your QS Stars visibility.





## What is QS Stars?

QS Stars is a globally recognised university rating system, and the most comprehensive mark of higher education excellence. Through independent and in-depth evaluations across dozens of performance indicators and at least nine categories – covering all the components that make a world-class university – QS Stars helps prospective students identify their best-fit universities based on their interests, priorities and career aspirations.

With ratings from 0 to 5+ Stars overall and 0 to 5 Stars in individual categories, QS Stars has already enabled more than 700 universities in 70+ countries to spotlight their strengths, identify growth opportunities and build their institutional reputation, outcomes and cohort.

QS Stars can help you:

- Guide strategic planning
- Elevate your reputation and performance
- Enhance your student experience
- Achieve your student recruitment goals
- Uplift the overall quality of the higher education sector



## Why does your institution need QS Stars?

QS Stars are the only ratings of their kind. Going beyond the scope of traditional university rankings, QS Stars assesses an institution's qualities across a wide range of key performance indicators. This allows for a more comprehensive and balanced analysis of each university's strengths and areas for improvement.

QS Stars can help boost your reputation and strategic position by:

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**Gaining a deeper understanding of your institution:** Identify unique qualities, strategic goals, and areas for improvement.

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**Developing a compelling brand narrative:** Craft a clear message highlighting your strengths and values.

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**Communicating your offerings effectively:** Showcase the quality of your programmes to attract stakeholders.

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## Benefits tailored to your strategic goals

While traditional rankings may focus on a single score, QS Stars provides a more nuanced picture. Here are just some of the ways it can benefit universities at any stage:

### Maintaining a leading reputation

- Strengthen your position by showcasing detailed evidence of your strengths.
- Highlight niche areas of excellence to stand out amongst top institutions.
- Identify areas for continued investment to maintain competitiveness.

### Enhancing reputation and competitiveness

- Use QS Stars to showcase exceptional initiatives and specialised programmes.
- Develop a strategic brand narrative that emphasises your unique value proposition.
- Demonstrate programme quality in areas valued by prospective students.

### Improving standing and impact

- Leverage the QS reputation to gain credibility and global recognition.
- Communicate the breadth and depth of your educational offerings.
- Establish clear and measurable improvement goals based on QS Stars feedback.
- Identify potential collaborators who share your institution's strengths and values.



## Communication strategy:

### Explaining QS Stars to your audiences

The beauty of QS Stars lies in its universal appeal. It offers value to everyone involved, from enquirers and applicants to your university's executive team.

Every university is different, so use these explanations as a starting point, incorporating your institution's unique value proposition into your own messaging.

But explaining QS Stars to both external and internal audiences can sometimes be challenging. Here are some of the ways you can describe the overall benefits to each stakeholder.



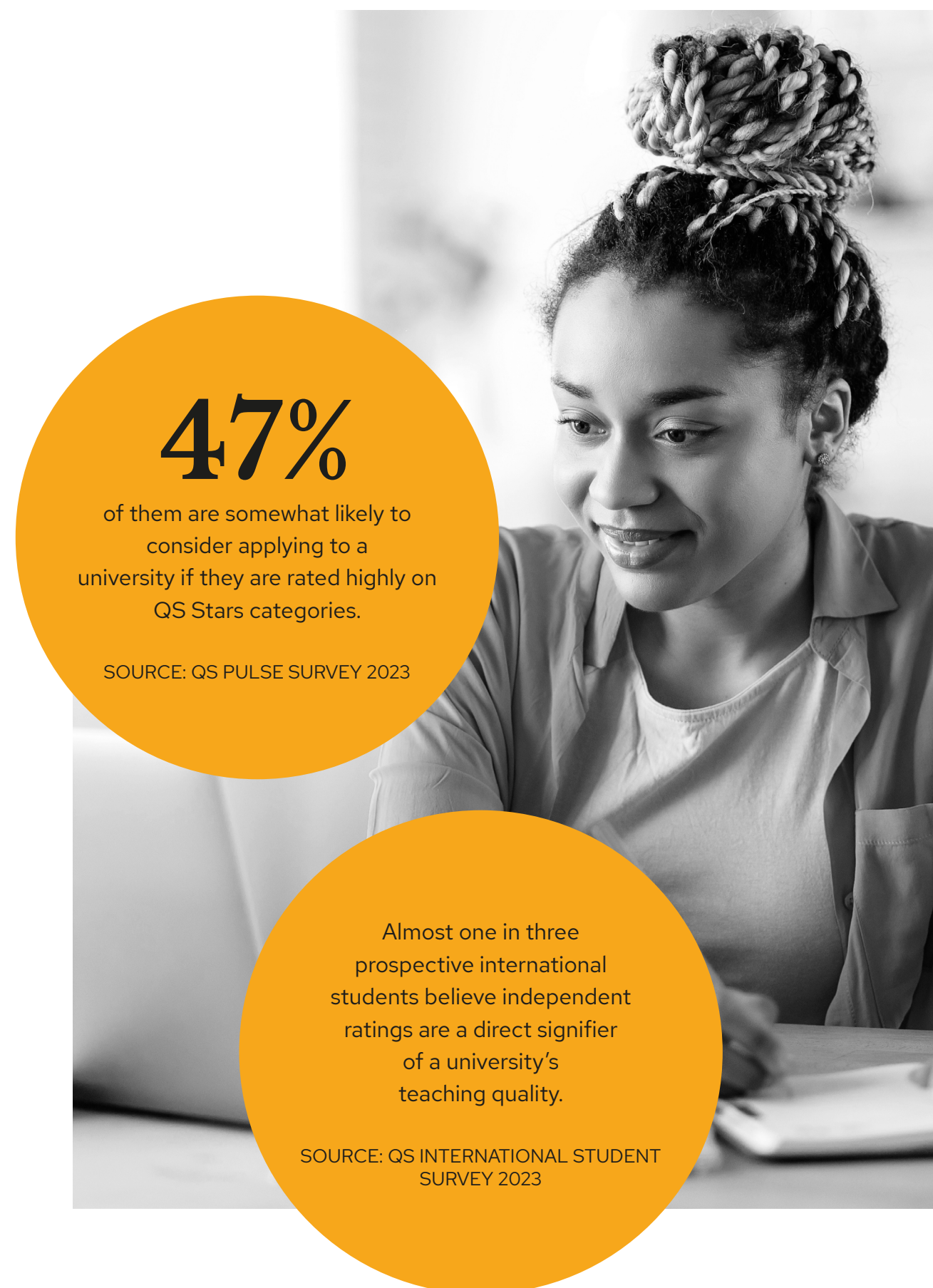


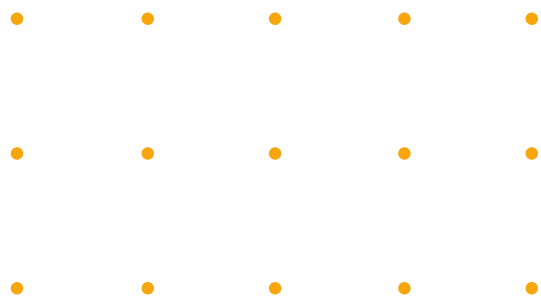
# Why QS Stars matters to...

## Prospective students

With responses from more than 115,000 prospective students – making it the largest of its kind – the QS International Student Survey (ISS) has been guiding higher education decision-making for over a decade. Thanks to these insights, we're able to understand exactly what students want.

- Find the right university based on your priorities – see each university's strengths across areas like facilities, employability, and inclusiveness.
- Make an informed decision – with scores on 50+ indicators, get the full picture of each university, balancing rankings with richer qualitative and quantitative information from QS Stars.
- Easily understand – ratings measure universities against comprehensive benchmarks of quality and performance.
- Match your interests – see detailed breakdowns of universities' performance in your chosen subject area.
- Be confident you made the right call – QS Stars ratings reduce risk and reassure you that the university aligns with your goals and excels in your field.
- Focus on fit, not fame – find well-rated universities matched to your priorities, not just big names, and uncover 'hidden gem' universities tailored to what matters most to you.





## Prospective faculty and staff

The annual QS Academic Reputation Survey helps inform our understanding of reputation, through the eyes of more than 75,000 academics, researchers and educators around the world.

- Proof of quality research – ratings validate excellence in research output and scholarly work at this institution.
- Showcase strengths – use granular department ratings to demonstrate quality and facilities to candidates.
- Inform planning – breakdowns clearly showcase overall institutional strengths and specific areas needing improvement.
- Reassuring objectivity – external rigorous evaluation confirms this is a supportive academic environment.
- Track progress over time – benchmark institutional performance on teaching, research and other factors year-over-year.

## International collaborators and partner institutions

- Identify partners – detailed breakdowns help discover compatible peer institutions globally for research, student exchanges and other collaborations.
- Global credibility and quality assurance – an external rating from a globally recognised agency provides additional credibility and endorsement of overall quality to potential international partners.
- In-depth benchmarking – a wider range of standardised indicators enables comparison and insight into operational practices at peer institutions abroad.

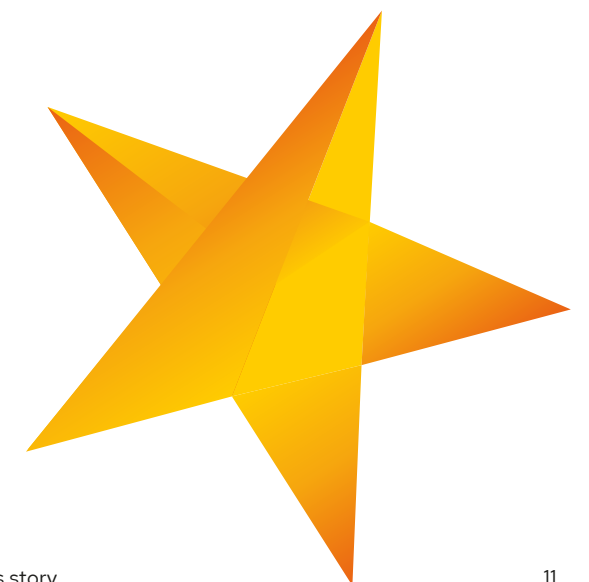
## Corporate partners

Through our annual Global Employer Survey of over 100,000 employers, we gain valuable insights into how university reputations and graduate employability influence the changing workforce. Targeted survey questions reveal evolving employer needs and expectations.

- Source work-ready talent – strong employability ratings endorse graduates' job readiness and possession of in-demand skills.
- Skills assurance – QS Stars ratings offer insight into an institution's ability to develop critical discipline-specific and soft skills in students.
- Shared mission – collaborate with highly-rated institutions to meet demand for qualified, employment-ready graduates.

## Alumni

- Ongoing excellence – regular rating updates showcase sustained progress since graduating.
- Feel proud – strong results in key areas demonstrate the quality and growing reputation of your degree.
- Career credibility – high graduate employment and partnership ratings validate and reinforce the credibility of your qualifications with employers.
- Spotlight strengths – use demonstrated excellence in specific areas as talking points when networking and promoting your institution.





## Government and accreditors

- Raise national competitiveness – improving institutional ratings nationally benefits a country’s educational competitiveness and graduate outcomes.
- Alignment with national objectives – detailed dataset helps institutions strategically align with and deliver on national education quality standards and policy goals.
- Inform oversight and policy – granular data on 50+ indicators is a valuable additive dataset enabling more comprehensive regulatory oversight and sector governance.
- Sector benchmarking – standardised ratings facilitate comparison on hard-to-measure educational and social impact factors enabling gap and opportunity analysis.
- Spotlight strengths – use demonstrated excellence in specific areas as talking points when networking and promoting your institution.

## Media

- Statistics and stories – ratings provide facts and anecdotes that media can incorporate into coverage about an institution and the higher education landscape.
- Methodology – the rigorous and multilayered QS Stars evaluation methodology underpins the credibility of the system and its ratings for each university.
- Holistic view – QS Stars ratings assess a wider range of university activities than rankings alone, allowing more well-rounded coverage.

## Schools and counsellors

- Guide decisions – ratings offer quantitative evidence across many areas that counsellors consider when advising university applications, complementing subjective judgment.
- Relevance – a broad range of indicators allows fine-tuned alignment with diverse student goals and interests.
- Reduce uncertainty – validation through external ratings offers reassuring proof that marketing claims ring true.

## Parents and guardians


- Quality focus – granular ratings provide multifaceted evidence of an institution’s commitment to delivering a high-quality student experience.
- Inform judgment – quantitative indicators help shape parent perceptions beyond marketing materials and campus tours.

## Internal stakeholder communication

Understanding why a good QS Stars rating matters isn’t just for external audiences. Sharing its benefits with current faculty, staff, and students fosters pride, aligns with strategic goals, and guides improvement. Tailored messages to each group – research for faculty, student success for students, etc. – fuel buy-in and make everyone champions of your university’s excellence. Clear communication, from town halls to social media, ensures everyone understands how they contribute and celebrates your collective achievement. By embracing the QS Stars rating together, you’ll build a stronger, more vibrant university community.

Here, you’ll find examples of how to explain QS Stars to internal stakeholders. Use these as a guideline and remember to tailor your explanations with real-world examples of your institution’s unique value proposition.





“We are particularly pleased to have students writing to tell us that one of the reasons they chose Lancaster University was because of our 5 QS Star rating”

**BEN MATTHEWS**, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

## Why QS Stars matters to...

### University leadership

- Strategic insights – detailed breakdowns identify focus areas and allow comparison against competitor institutions’ ratings in each category.
- Recruitment and partnership asset – leverage institutional and programme-specific ratings in marketing materials to attract top student and faculty talent and partners.
- External validation – rigorous methodology and analysis by a globally recognised agency provides an objective endorsement of overall institutional quality and strategic direction.
- Roadmap to improvement – highlights weaker areas for targeted improvement initiatives.
- Aid crucial decisions – a standardised data set of 50+ indicators delivers unbiased information to guide operational and resource allocation choices.

### Current students

- Confirmation of a quality choice – strong ratings in areas directly impacting students endorse the standards and excellence of education at the institution.
- Confidence in investment – good results from QS Stars’ rigorous analysis confirms they chose a high-quality institution that delivers on its promises.
- Validation of progress – dynamic ratings that improve year-over-year demonstrate their institution is actively maintaining and improving standards.

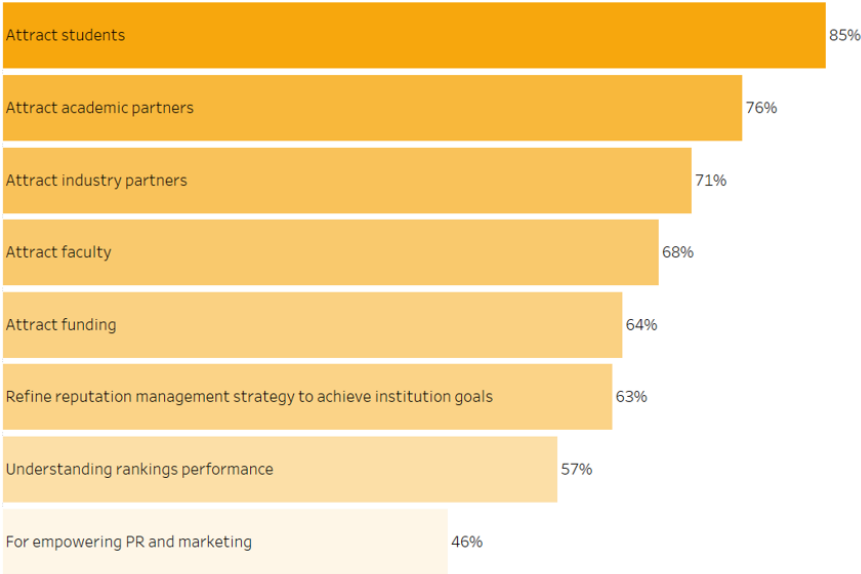
### Current faculty and staff

- Professional validation – high ratings recognise your work and contributions, attracting talented peers and collaborators.
- Improved environment – strong ratings may lead to investments in facilities, resources, and support services, benefitting everyone.
- Greater career satisfaction – knowing you contribute to a top institution enhances pride and opens doors to new opportunities.
- Dynamic community – improved reputation attracts top talent, creating a more vibrant and enriching academic environment.
- Shared success – participation in improvement initiatives fosters ownership and builds a stronger university for all.



Q5

Why is it important for your institution to track and assess its recognition for excellence? (Select all that apply)



Q13

By rank band -In which of these areas does institution's reputation have the greatest impact? (Rank the options from 1-most to 12-least by drag and drop)

	Top 50	Top 200	201 - 500	501 - 1000	1001+
Attracting students	1	2	2	2	5
Rankings outcomes	2	1	1	1	1
Collaboration with industry	3	4	3	3	2
Attracting research partners	4	3	4	4	3
Perceived education quality	5	5	8	6	6
Gaining research grants	6	6	5	5	4
Attracting faculty	7	7	6	7	8
Attracting funding	8	8	7	8	7
Enrollments	9	9	9	9	9
Alumni engagement	10	10	10	10	10
Community outreach projects	11	11	11	11	11

Communication strategy:

Telling your unique QS Stars story

Everyone’s QS Stars story is different. The way you tell yours has the power to transform your university’s image – however you want to be seen.

stakeholders, boost your reputation and attract the best talent, you need a compelling narrative that showcases your institution’s unique strengths and achievements.

While your QS Stars rating is a valuable indicator of your institution’s quality, it’s just one part of the story. To truly engage your



# Use QS Stars as a catalyst for deeper conversations

Celebrating your QS Star achievements sparks joy, builds momentum, and reinforces a positive culture. But it doesn't stop there. To truly leverage your successes and sustain momentum, use your QS Stars as catalysts for deeper conversations long after the celebrations have died down.

This means delving deeper into the initiatives, people, and hard work behind your achievements, as well as the ongoing impact your new ratings will have. Frame your QS Star stories not as definitive statements, but as conversation starters. Share the challenges you're addressing, the ambitious goals you're pursuing, and the exciting opportunities for collaboration that lie ahead. By inviting stakeholders to engage and contribute to your journey, you can transform your QS Star successes into a springboard for even greater growth.

# Align your values with your achievements

Crafting a truly authentic and resonant story involves integrating your QS Stars rating with your university's overarching mission and values. Your rating isn't just a number or a quick win; it's a reflection of your institution's ongoing dedication to providing a world-class educational experience.

Showcasing how your QS Stars achievements align with your values will not only reinforce your brand identity but also attract and connect with students, staff, and partnerships that support your vision.



# Tailor your messaging

Different stakeholders, different platforms, different messages. As with any campaign, tailoring your QS Stars messaging is key.

Here's an example of how you could adapt a story about QS Stars ratings in Environmental engagement and Entrepreneurship for two very different stakeholders.

## Prospective students



UNIVERSITY

**Dream it, build it**

See how graduate Sarah's engineering skills help farmers to thrive. Find your purpose at our university, rated 5 QS Stars for Environmental impact and Entrepreneurship.





## Industry partners



UNIVERSITY

**Sustainable solutions for tomorrow's workforce**

Meet Sarah, an engineering graduate using her ingenuity and her degree to help farmers to thrive. Her story is just one example of how our 5 QS Star ratings for environmental engagement and entrepreneurship equip graduates with the skills and mindset to tackle big, real-world challenges.

★★★★★  
QS  
RATED EXCELLENT

## Highlight shining examples

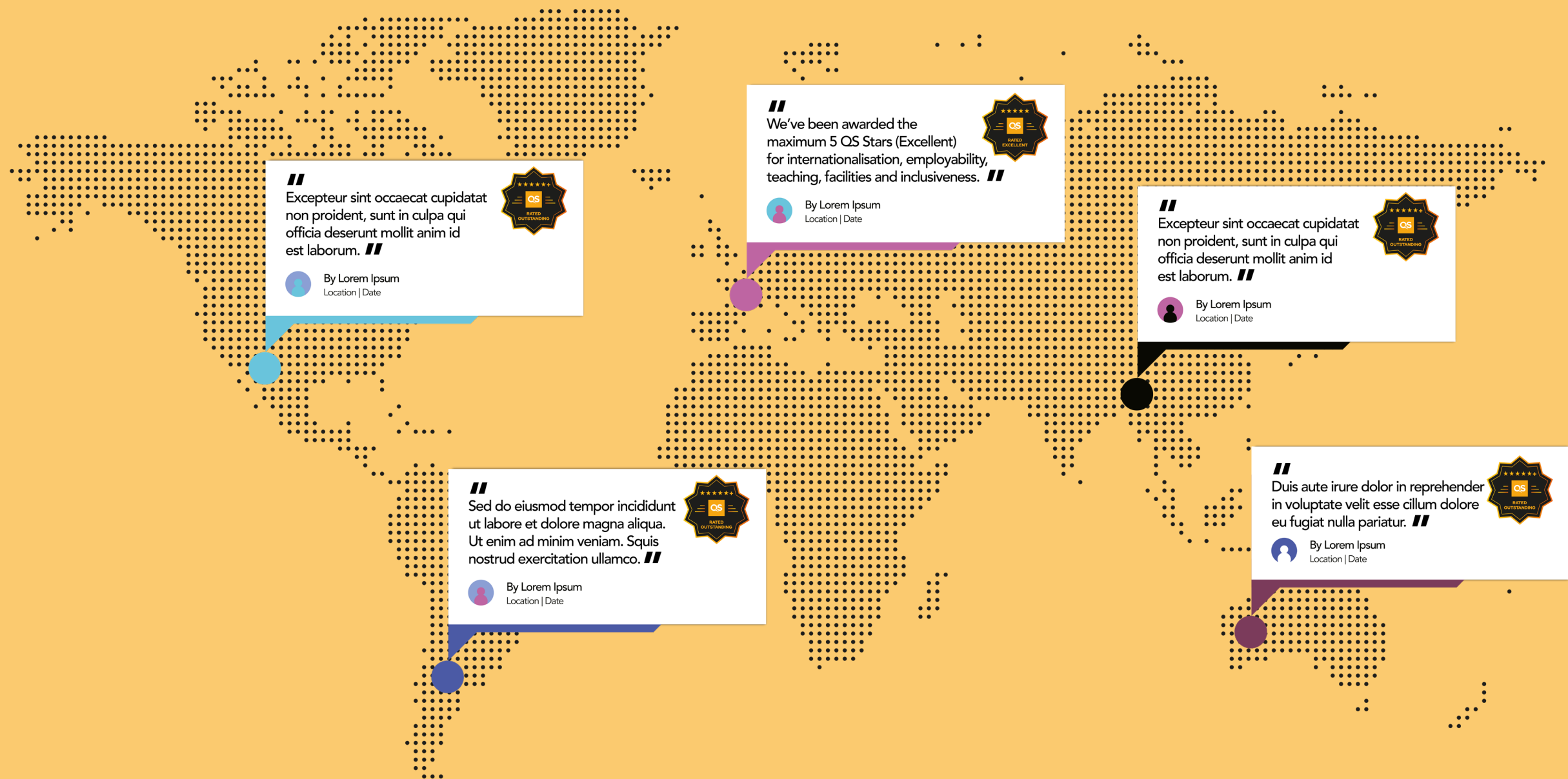
Use real-life examples to illustrate the everyday impact your ratings have. Share stories of how your faculty are making groundbreaking discoveries, how your alumni are thriving in their careers, and how your campus life is fostering a vibrant and inclusive community. In essence, demonstrate how those 5 QS Stars manifest in genuine value creation, life-changing opportunities, and societal impact every single day.



UNIVERSITY

**IMPACT MAKERS**  
webinar series

★★★★★  
QS  
RATED EXCELLENT



## Embrace visual storytelling

In today's digital world, visuals are more powerful and versatile than ever. Use images, photos, videos, infographics and interactive tools to bring your QS Stars story to life. These visual elements can capture attention, illustrate key information, convey emotion and atmosphere, and create a more memorable and impactful narrative.



## Empower your advocates

When asked what were most important when making decisions about their studies...

**53%**

of international students said the ability to connect with existing international students to ask questions.

**51%**

said information about teachings staffs' experience and qualifications.

**43%**

said stories about current and former international students.

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SOURCE: QS INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2023

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Your students, faculty, and alumni are your biggest brand ambassadors. Tap into their insights and experiences to share their stories of success and how your QS Stars rating has impacted their lives. Their authentic voices will add layers of credibility and relatability to your narrative.

### Current students

Showcasing current students isn't just about testimonials – it's about bringing the QS Stars criteria to life. Use real student stories to illustrate how your university's strengths, as reflected in your QS Stars rating, positively impact the student experience.

- Student ambassador schemes
- Ask a student online chat
- Student social takeovers
- A day in the life of videos
- Current student Q&A/panel sessions
- Encourage them to engage and share with their networks

### Faculty and staff

Position faculty and staff profiles as a direct representation of the academic excellence underpinning your QS Stars rating. Highlight that the qualifications and experiences of faculty members contribute significantly to the university's high standing in the QS Stars evaluation.

- Video interviews
- Staff profiles and spotlights
- Student recruitment events
- Webinars
- Sharing their work and articles
- Encourage them to engage and share with their professional and academic networks

Alumni

Present alumni success stories as a testament to the long-term impact of the university’s strengths, as acknowledged by its QS Stars rating. Emphasise that the university doesn’t just provide education but sets the stage for lifelong success.

- Case studies
- Video interviews
- Q&A sessions
- Networking events
- Alumni ambassadors scheme

Corporate partners

Illustrate how collaborations with corporate partners not only enhance the university’s practical offerings but also contribute to the specific criteria evaluated by QS Stars. Position these partnerships as strategic moves that align with the university’s commitment to excellence, as recognised by its QS Stars rating.

- Panel discussions
- Networking events
- Case studies and testimonials



What next?

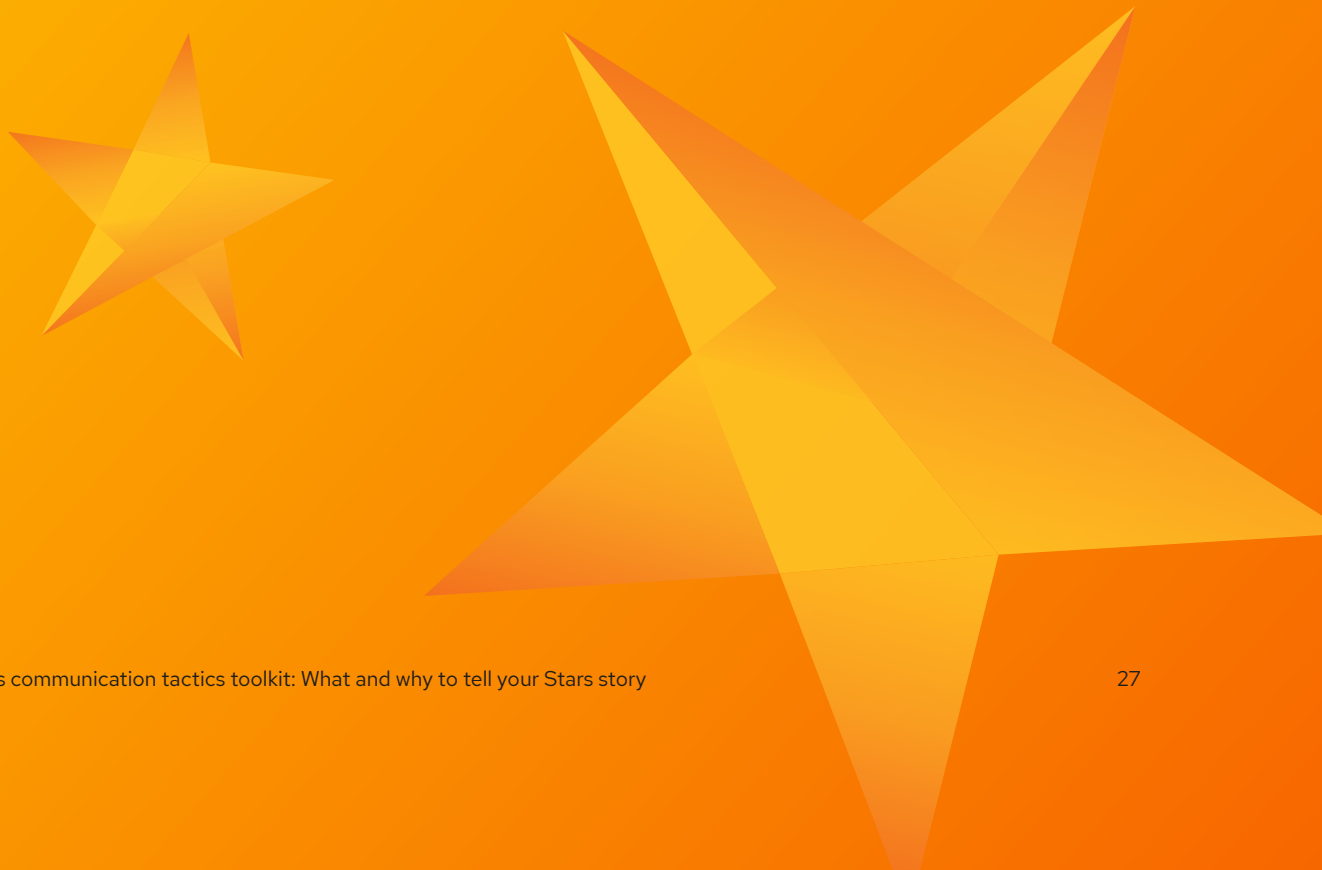
You now have the tools to craft a compelling QS Stars narrative. But don’t stop there.

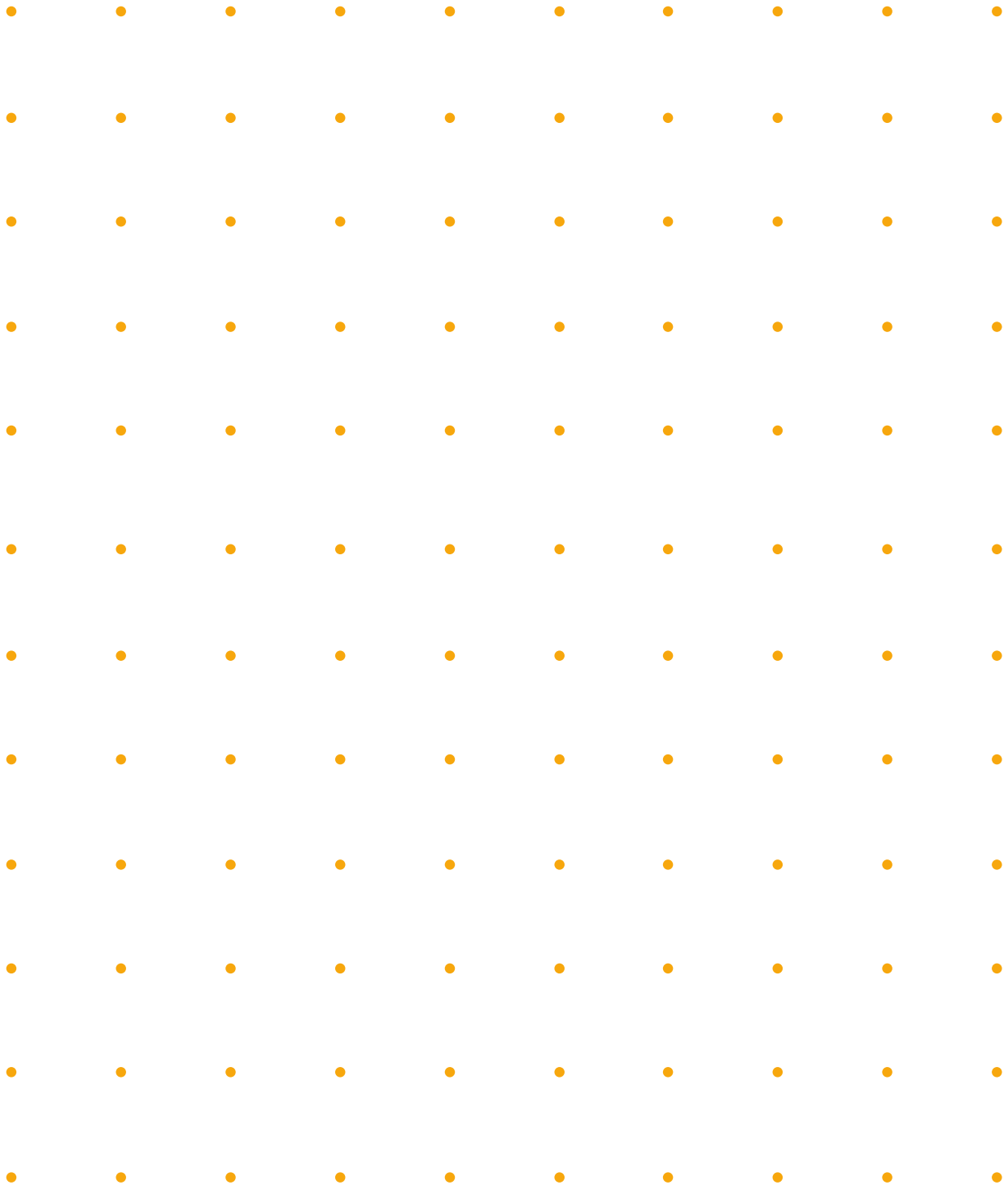
Reach the right people and amplify your impact with our companion guide: Maximising your QS Stars visibility: Channels, platforms and techniques.

Learn how best to showcase your success using effective platforms, engaging tactics, and data-driven insights, and then track the results. With strategic communication and monitoring, your QS Stars narrative can drive awareness, shape perception, and boost engagement across your community.

Let’s keep the conversation going

We’re here to support you on your QS Stars journey, every step of the way. Our team is happy to answer any questions you have and brainstorm ideas tailored to your institution’s specific needs and goals.





Contact us at  
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