
London South Bank University

Piloting the digital experience insights service

(January 2019)

Demonstrating impact and identifying areas for development



"The initial impact has been to identify key areas for broader discussion about how we develop institutionally. The insights survey has given us data to inform the development of our digital strategy and infrastructure."

Project lead: Marc Griffith, head of digitally enhanced learning, London South Bank University

Project aims: developing the digital strategy

As head of digitally enhanced learning, Marc's role involves developing the digital strategy and infrastructure at London South Bank University (LSBU). With little previous data available on how students felt about the digital

provision or any specific support requirements, Marc and colleagues were keen to take part in the 2017-18 student digital experience insights pilot (previously known as the student digital experience tracker) to gather reliable data and build up a broad evidence base upon which development and investment decisions could be made.

The fact that the survey provided national and sector benchmarking and would highlight successes as well as areas for development was also attractive. The intention was that the data would contribute to the wider discourse about the role of digital in the overall student experience at LSBU. The hope was that benchmarking data would also provide an indication of the current situation at LSBU and address any misconceptions of being 'behind' others in the sector.

LSBU established a small working group involving the head of digitally enhanced learning, a member of staff from the library and learning resources team and the vice president of LSBU student union (academic).

A total of 895 student responses was received from a population of approximately 17,000 (5.26% response rate).

Strategies for engaging students

Like others, LSBU found identifying a time that didn't clash with other surveys or significant student activities to be challenging. The survey was launched in the lead up to Christmas when less teaching was taking place and the aim was to target as broad a population as possible.

The community support from other institutions involved in the pilot was helpful and some shared the promotional materials they had created, helping LSBU to get up and running quickly. The working group used a variety of channels to engage students including: posters in the library, emails, electronic notices, social media and also ensured academic staff were aware of the initiative so they could promote it directly to their students during module delivery. The students' union were proactive in using their social media channels and, because the library was being heavily used at the time of launch, the staff there directly encouraged the students to participate.

A prize draw of a Kindle device was offered as an incentive.

Data analysis process

The interval between the decision to take part in the pilot and implementation was short and so customisation was limited to identifying responses from specific schools, age groups and different genders. The university has large numbers of mature learners in some cohorts so understanding the impact of age on the student digital experience is of interest (51% of learners are aged over 25).

A high level analysis of the data was conducted in the summer of 2018 and work is underway to drill down further to see what else the data reveals. Data from module evaluation questionnaires (MEQs) which include questions about the virtual learning environment (VLE) and how it is being used, also feeds into the data analysis processes along with other annual monitoring data. Mapping across multiple data sources will help LSBU to identify patterns. The business intelligence team at LSBU are working with the project team to analyse the data which is

also valuable to them and produced a comprehensive report. The data set achieved is representative it is of the wider **student demographics at LSBU** at LSBU.

The PowerPoint template created by the insights service helped the project team present the data back to key stakeholders.

Key findings

- » 46% of students felt well prepared for a digital workplace. While this compares favourably with the national benchmark of 41%, preparing students for employment is a key driver for the university who were named 'University of the Year for Graduate Employment' in both 2018 and 2019 (The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide)
- » Students rated the overall quality of digital teaching and learning on courses as 69% with notable variations across schools and a tendency for satisfaction to decrease slightly from year one to year three. Additional analysis of the data is being conducted to shed further light and inform appropriate responses
- » Question 5 asked students to give an example of a digital tool or app that they found useful for learning. Analysis of the responses shows that a high incidence of content focused digital tools such as YouTube, Google and Lynda.com were cited. The university currently invests quite a lot of time on content creation and this data may indicate that a shift to content curation may be better use of finite resources
- » 55% of learners agreed that the VLE was well designed. Again, this is slightly higher than the national benchmark of 50% but the information gained is helpful when planning platform improvements

A surprise finding was that smartphone usage was less than anticipated (76% at LSBU/80% national benchmark data). Further investigation is underway to find out whether this is age, discipline or cohort related.

Acting on the findings

The data gathered from the survey is being used to support and drive development of an institution-wide digital strategy for LSBU that looks holistically at the overall digital environment and identifies areas for prioritisation.

"The survey has been helpful in bringing together technology-enhanced learning and IT perspectives. The data and student concerns about infrastructure issues have helped everyone to see the need for a cohesive approach if we are to fulfil our digital ambitions."

Project lead: Marc Griffith, head of digitally enhanced learning, London South Bank University

Some of the actions already underway include:

- » Discussions relating to use of lecture capture have been going on for some time at LSBU so it was interesting that when asked what would improve their digital experience, students responded strongly that they would like to see improvements to the VLE, including use of lecture capture. This encouraged LSBU to pilot lecture capture. The project was rolled out to the first cohort of staff in semester one of the 2018-19 academic year and a second cohort will be joining the pilot in semester two, beginning in February 2019. It is too early to report on the impact but staff feedback has generally been very positive. Recorded activities such as assignment briefings have been popular with students and statistics show 'persistent' use of these, perhaps with students revisiting the recordings to check their understanding of the tasks. There are plans to further embed lecture capture in curriculum activities during the second phase of the pilot.
- » The development of a new VLE interface for the 2018-19 academic year and a new module template was also informed by the survey results which highlighted a lack of consistency across modules. The aim is to develop more innovative use, moving beyond transactional activities such as access to resources, administration functions, submission of course work and providing feedback
- » The survey results have also helped to focus discussion and development around tools used within LSBU's digital ecosystem. The aim is to incorporate more industry standard tools such as Microsoft OneNote and Teams. This helps to ensure that students feel digitally ready and able to use applications such as those within the Microsoft Office 365 suite as they enter the work place rather than those they may not use outside of their study environment.
- » The findings have been reported to the student experience committee. The working group decided that the student union would take this to the committee in recognition of the valuable input, engagement and drive they have made and with a view to continuing this going forward
- » The findings have also been reported to the university quality committee to ensure that areas identified for development are addressed from both an educational and infrastructure perspective
- » Support for 'bring your own device' (BYOD) is also being developed

Tips for others/lessons learned

- » Allow yourself time to plan – a four to six week lead-in is a good estimate
- » Think closely about what you want to do with the data and how you will manage and resource the analysis process. LSBU were fortunate to have the support of the university business intelligence unit
- » Establish a steering group and ensure you collaborate with both students and library staff. Student involvement is very important – the way the student union communicates with students is different; library staff work directly with students and can promote the survey and encourage participants to take part

Next steps

The data from the survey is being used to contribute to the broader corporate plan which includes a drive to make more use of digital technologies. For future insights surveys, the project team would like to customise the survey further to explore and compare the experiences of students on different campuses. LSBU hope to use the insights survey again next year and to use the data to monitor progress internally as well as against national benchmarking data.

"This is a mechanism that can help us demonstrate where we are having an impact and where else we may need to input effort. This is important when resources are scarce. We need to make sure that the things we are allocating our resources to are having an impact."

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