StREAM
by Kortext

Using Student Engagement Analytics to deliver a personalised experience and impact future continuation

Case Study
October 2023

Key information

- StREAM was initially introduced to the Health and Social Sciences Faculty via Health Education England funding
- Full university academic roll out planned for 2023/2024
- Core use case is to support student continuation

In this case study, **Dr Caroline Reid, Associate Dean in the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences at the University of Bedfordshire (UoB)** shares the University's approach to using student engagement analytics to take real-time action to support student continuation and progression. Caroline further considers how Bedfordshire have maximised staff engagement with student engagement analytics platform – **StREAM**.

Introduction

The Faculty of Health and Social Sciences (HSS) at the University of Bedfordshire was initially funded in its use of StREAM by Health Education England (HEE) as part of a project to support student nurse attrition. Their StREAM project aligned closely to another HEE project that Bedfordshire were involved with, namely the RePAIR (Reducing Pre-registration Attrition and Improving Retention) project. Together, these projects helped the University to explore ways to develop more targeted and supported interventions for those students who needed them most.

The University of Bedfordshire has a student demographic which is diverse, with most students being mature learners, first in family to university and students who are from the local community or commuter students. Many have experienced multiple challenges before coming to university and need additional support to reach their full potential and to thrive in Higher Education.

A faculty-based, yet strategically aligned, deployment of StREAM

Alongside the introduction of StREAM, the University were also seeking to develop the role and purpose of Personal Academic Tutors (PATs), an action that was foregrounded in the University's Access and Participation Plan, a document which also referenced the role and use of learner analytics within the institution.

Together, these factors formed the context within which HSS positioned the StREAM project to embed a scaffold to develop resilience across the three different academic levels for pre-qualifying NMC courses. Year 1 focused on student transition into higher education and developing a dual professional identity (both as student and nurse). Year 2 sought to develop students' emotional insight and coping with the emotional labour of caring within nursing and midwifery and their final year of study concentrated on preparing students for entering the professional world, looking at their self-efficacy and resilience.

An applied deployment

Although there is a range of core functionality within StREAM, each client deploys the platform differently depending on multiple factors typically detailed in their strategic plans or in their institutional Access and Participation Plans seeking to address awarding gaps between different groups of students.

To this end, it was important to Caroline that staff were able to access all relevant student information within StREAM, not just those that they had direct responsibility for as PATs. Decisions were driven by working collaboratively to develop a clear understanding of the role and purpose of PATs, agreeing what they need to know and articulating what they wanted/needed StREAM to do. Primarily, their focus was on 'identifying students at risk' – those who were in danger of not continuing with their studies or not succeeding.

> *'The primary focus for StREAM for Personal Academic Tutors is on identifying students at risk so we can easily pin point who is in danger of not continuing with their studies'.*
>
> **Dr Caroline Reid**

As a result of this approach, the initial deployment of StREAM at Bedfordshire is both very applied and 'bottom up' in nature, rather than thinking about the bigger themes and trends within the data.

The exception to this is for Interventions and Referrals for students needing additional support, where the options available are detailed by specific academic skill to make it obvious where the student need and therefore the demand for support lies. Caroline recognises that further use of StREAM data for the identification of themes and trends to support planning and resource allocation activity is a future piece of work for the University as they seek to deploy StREAM across the entire University for the 2023-2024 academic year.

Maximising staff engagement with StREAM by Kortext

When deploying StREAM, Caroline strategically had a weather eye on the future role of analytics within the University of Bedfordshire given the centrality of analytics and personal academic tutoring within the Access and Participation Plan. It was thus important to demonstrate meaningfully to staff how the use of engagement data to support student success would help the university achieve its goals and targets, and provide a direct line of sight between those targets and the roles and responsibilities of staff in pastoral support roles. Demonstrating this connection has been accomplished in multiple ways.

Roles and responsibilities

Revising the university's approach to personal tutoring alongside the StREAM implementation has enabled the University to think clearly about how PATs should be using the data insights within StREAM within the broader ecosystem of student support across the institution. A comprehensive programme of training was implemented after an introduction and demonstration of StREAM at a Faculty development day exploring 'Engagement for Enhancement', designed with the aim of making previously inaccessible data available to Faculty colleagues.

Self-identifying enthusiasts and the creation of new roles

Self-identifying enthusiasts – a phrase coined by Caroline as an extension of the 'champion' role that is often used when introducing new software or ways of working – have been instrumental in the softer, informal peer support between staff colleagues that take place on a daily basis.

In response to Faculty feedback, Caroline has also worked with StREAM to develop more granular resources to support staff with different user roles within StREAM. Moreover, a new role – the Continuation and Success Lead – has been introduced to sit alongside that of Programme Leader, particularly on larger programmes, to provide an additional layer of support, information, advice and guidance to staff.

Wrap-around policy and process

Possibly the most significant factor impacting staff engagement with StREAM has been the extent to which Caroline has successfully embedded use of the platform and the insights it contains, within the wider University ecosystem of support. Agenda items at key Faculty meetings to monitor quality and course enhancement are actively and deliberately informed by the StREAM Insights reports, with a tailored reporting and distribution schedule, aligned again to roles and responsibilities. Conversations thus centre around the identification of students at risk, exploring their attendance behaviours and the identification of engagement patterns across multiple units of study.

> 'The data you see today in StREAM is next year's continuation data'.
>
> **Dr Caroline Reid**

The link to the University's responsibilities under the Office for Students registration Condition B3 – to deliver successful outcomes for all students – is also explicit. Making it clear that the near real-time data in StREAM is the basis for next year's continuation report is enabling staff to see that what they do 'now' will impact next year's data.

Engagement data in StREAM is considered by UoB Exam Boards, meaning that opportunities to discuss themes and issues around student engagement and the broader question of 'risk' is openly part of progression decision-making. Use of the Insight reports is still developing, but

intentionally distributing them on a weekly or monthly basis (depending on the data and the responsibilities of the recipients) with a clear expectation of follow-up action, is further embedding institutional use of data as a core function within the academic and pastoral role.

A level of oversight of staff engagement is also present, not least because of the requirement on the University to report to OfS in terms of progression against APP objectives. This approach further enables the University to target any staff developmental activity.

Interestingly, insights from StREAM are also countering some oft-quoted, but perhaps unfounded assumptions by staff e.g. that students are struggling to progress due to low entry qualifications or because they joined the University through clearing.

Introducing and positioning StREAM for students

The use of student engagement analytics has also been integrated into student-facing activity. Unlike their previous use of analytics software, StREAM has been made available to students at the University of Bedfordshire and is embedded within transition activity. Messaging around how the University is using data that already exists to make it easier for students to see how their engagement compares with others on their course, have access to a bigger picture (data from multiple sources, displayed over time) and can be more easily referred on those things they need support with, have all landed well within the student body. Changes to some of the terminology in StREAM are further
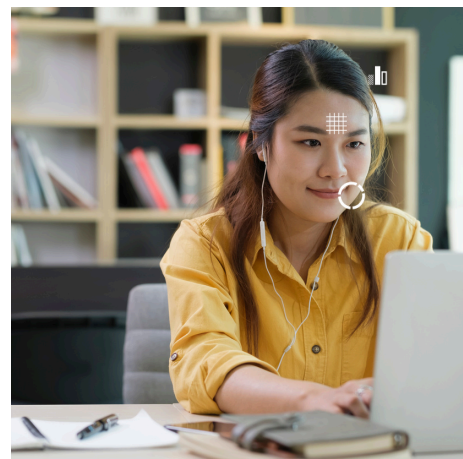
supporting student engagement. Repositioning 'partial' engagement as 'average' engagement is helping to overcome what was being viewed as a 'deficit' approach to engagement.

Existing students are provided with a bespoke introduction to StREAM whereas new students are introduced as part of the 'Begin@Beds' welcome and transition activity, aligned to engagement, support and success. The sessions explore the role of the PAT and how the PAT can support student engagement. Students are introduced to StREAM via an introductory video, platform demonstration and links to student-facing resources . Where registration is taking a little longer than normal (e.g. where a student has an outstanding DBC check), the welcome and transition information – including the introduction to StREAM - is provided outside of University systems to ensure that no student misses out.

Conclusions

Caroline's approach is clear: successful deployment of analytics requires engagement from all stakeholders to help deeply embed agreed changes to the university's approach to student support. The depth of embedding within process and policy at Bedfordshire is not only considerable in nature, but is also strongly aligned to policy requirements and processes that support progression, attainment, feedback from the National Student Survey and mapped to the University's Teaching Excellence Framework submission. No matter which way staff turn, no matter their role and responsibilities, or the committees or groups they are part of, HSS colleagues will come into contact with StREAM either via use of the platform itself or reports based on the data it contains.