



# Joining the dots around student support

## Case Study

March 2024



## Introduction

The University of Law (ULaw) is one of the longest-established specialist providers of legal education in the UK, alongside offering a wide range of professional courses including law, business, policing, criminology, psychology, computer science and education.

With campuses in London, Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Manchester and Nottingham, and an international presence in Hong Kong, the University prides itself on being accessible to all and promoting widening participation in higher education.

With an overall 5-star rating from QS in the World University Rankings, 5 stars in Teaching, Employability and Online Learning, and ranked in the Top 20 for Teaching among English Universities in the 2023 National Student Survey (NSS), this is a university that is making visible impacts on student learning and outcomes.

A key contributor to their success is how ULaw is using student engagement data to initiate, drive and embed improvements to learning, teaching and the provision of student support. The University use the **STREAM** by Kortext student engagement analytics platform, to gather data on how students are participating in academically purposeful activities and then use that data to generate insights about student behaviours. In turn, those insights are informing executive and management decision-making processes around the allocation and effectiveness of student support initiatives and the extent of use and adoption of StREAM.

Through a series of case studies, we are exploring how ULaw are using student engagement data to drive strategic transformation agendas around student support, how they are valuing and promoting student engagement through investment in a team of Student Journey Advisers and enabling academic staff to better coach and mentor their students to academic success.

This second case study shares how the team of Student Journey Advisers (SJAs) at ULaw, headed by Billy Reed, are using StREAM to further student engagement as part of their new concierge-style service focusing on student support and retention.



## A holistic approach to student support

*'Students may never come across our service or they might utilise it regularly, but we need to be able to utilise systems that enable us to look holistically at the student's journey. It's not just about how they're getting on academically or how they're getting on pastorally. There has to be a merging of the two and I think that's what is critical to us at ULaw and why StREAM plays a key role in that.'*

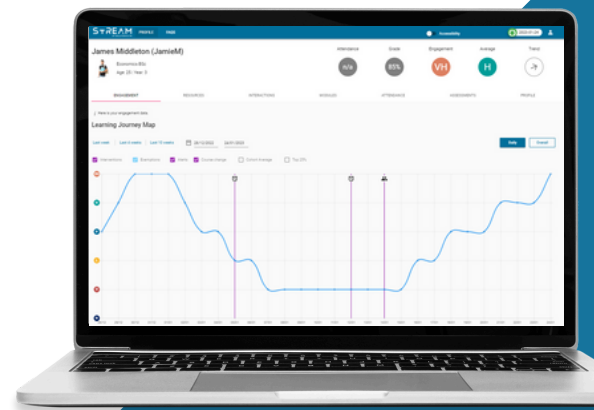
**Billy Reed**

Head of Student Journey, The University of Law

The Student Journey Advisor team at ULaw is one part of a three-legged approach to student support. The other two legs are the Academic Coach and the student themselves. Each of the Advisors is allocated a group of up to 500 students, ideally attached to one cohort, but grouped together where the programme size makes amalgamation into course 'families' necessary. A relevant level of subject-knowledge and grounding can nevertheless be obtained. This approach enables the team to build relationships with their cohorts and develop a level of expertise in respect of the academic programmes or subject areas that make it easier to identify typical patterns of engagement and thus surface any atypical engagement activity or dramatic changes in engagement. This approach is designed to address some of the complexities arising from the organisational structure of ULaw itself. The University is a diverse organisation, with multiple campuses across the UK and abroad and doesn't comprise Faculties or Schools as you might expect. Rather the campuses themselves are the primary organisational unit, facilitated with a large staff body.

Given this structure, getting to grips with what is happening for each student across their entire university experience is tricky. In their experience, students tend to operate on the basis that once they've shared something with 'the University' then 'the University' – in all its many guises, will know everything of relevance because the knowledge will have been effectively shared internally.

StREAM is key to that knowledge-sharing piece. In a nutshell, the ability to leave notes about conversations or interventions with a student is the primary mechanism by which staff are updated about what is happening with each and every student. By ensuring that significant factors that impact the student journey are recorded transparently within StREAM, ULaw are seeking to prevent students from having to repeat the same story multiple times. Understanding can be more readily acquired, relevant supportive action initiated, and students can better navigate the complexities of multiple university systems and teams where an effective level of internal data-sharing is in operation.



## An approach that is both proactive and reactive in nature

Reactive use of StREAM by the SJA team is largely as you might expect – the team responds to emails from students requesting to change their status in the organisation and this is recorded within the platform.

More significantly, the team is expected to engage regularly with StREAM in a proactive manner. The team reviews student engagement data and any associated notes (the ULaw term for a StREAM 'interaction') to get a sense of their journey, the relationship with their Academic Coach and their engagement behaviours – particularly how engaged they are compared to the rest of their cohort. StREAM is used to record any information that could be relevant to the Academic Coach to pick up any academic-related matters.

Outside of academic issues, the SJAs are the first port of call for all other matters, from operational and administrative matters such as timetabling queries or responding to scholarship support enquiries, through to more significant activity such as routing students to specialist support teams.

## Short-term solutions, rather than long-term impact

The SJA team also use StREAM to support the implementation of a new engagement monitoring process developed by the Head of the SJA team, Billy Reed.

Student intakes at ULaw are multiple and staggered across the course of an academic year, making it hard to implement a standardised approach to alerting and interventions based on the academic year cycle. At any given moment in time, some students will just be enrolling and getting to grips with their programme of study, others will be a few months in, while still others will be getting ready to graduate.

A broader perspective around student engagement is therefore in operation, built on a rolling 14-day cycle. Across this two-week period, students may be alerted where their engagement falls into the modal 'None' or 'Very Low' categories with supportive messaging to encourage behavioural change in terms of engagement or attendance. The size of the online campus, means that the broad engagement lens, is more helpful and valuable, than the narrow lens of attendance.

Students receiving two or more engagement alerts within a month are captured on an intervention report pulled from within StREAM and reviewed by the SJAs who go on to proactively reach out to the students via a supportive phone call or email. At this second stage of the process (stage 1 being the alerts themselves), the value of the SJAs becomes evident. They can assess the severity of the situation and triage accordingly. Initiating action at this point helps the team to work with their student cohort to get upstream of any issues that could potentially impact future engagement and success, dealing with the issue as close to the event as possible and helping the students get back on track.

The final stage of the escalation process is where students don't re-engage with their studies based on a review of their engagement over the initial 4-week period where the alerts were triggered, and the two weeks subsequently where the SJA team has reached out to and met with the student. Over this time, peaks and troughs in engagement activity become visible irrespective of the complexities arising from the university's structure, from having a largely post-graduate student body, from delivery patterns that include part-time and weekend delivery and from the multiple student intakes over the academic year.

The escalation is addressed at Campus-level when, by this point, there has been around six weeks where a student has been in the 'none' or 'very low' engagement category. Programme Support Leads are tasked with contacting the students. Unlike the remote-based SJA team, PSLs are campus-based and are likely to have a level of relationship with the student either having taught them or simply met them while on campus. The resulting discussion typically results in re-engagement by the student or implementation of the provisions of the University Support to Study policy. These options are only really invoked where, despite multiple opportunities for the student to respond to the two StREAM alerts, the phone call, and two emails from the SJAs, there has been no response from the student.

Importantly, escalations are not implemented through the Academic Coaches. In this way, the Coaches are able to focus their input to the student on academic-related matters, whereas engagement monitoring through the SJAs and the PSLs is about recognising any challenges to participation in their studies and effectively identifying and working with the right people to provide the right support.

## Evaluating effectiveness

*I'm sure there is going to be a real difference in the student body and the cohorts, particularly between what an undergraduate needs versus a post-graduate. I think we should be able to draw that out with data rather than just anecdotal opinions. Of course, anecdotal information is important, and this is why the knowledge and views of the SJAs is vital, but we need to supplement that with the data.*

### **Billy Reed**

Head of Student Journey, The University of Law



Over the last academic year, Billy's team have been in contact with over 6,000 students, which is just over a third of their entire student body. Moreover, the majority of those conversations and interventions have been with postgraduate taught students. But the typical age of a ULaw student is 28-29, so the students are more likely to be studying a postgraduate course anyway. What this means in practice therefore, isn't clear. Is this a trend? Is it a one-off? Is there something peculiar about the way the PGT courses are designed and delivered that is impacting engagement? Is it simply a reflection of the fact that more PG students is likely to result in more interventions with PG students? Are those interventions unique or is there a core group of students receiving multiple interventions? Billy is keen to move beyond apparent correlations in the data and to better understand the root causes that impact engagement.

He's also keen to know how effective the different stages of the staged engagement monitoring process are. For example, what is the impact on engagement of a first alert? A second alert? A phone call or email? Is it only when the PSL or the Campus Team are brought in and the student meets them face-to-face that they realise the seriousness of their disengagement?

Given the imperative to address attainment gaps for different student cohorts, Billy also plans to delve deeper into the data at cohort level to understand where the challenges lie and determine the most effective types of outreach activity to support successful student outcomes.



*'My hopes? I want to get to a point where all relevant contextual data is visible in StREAM, where patterns are captured and where our teams are able to deliver a far more contextualised proactive service. Joining all the dots is where I want to be at some stage. That's the dream.'*

### **Billy Reed**

Head of Student Journey, The University of Law

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