

# What works when introducing an institutional learning analytics platform?

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## Introduction

The University of Bedfordshire has been using **STREAM** (known as MyEngagement) in the Faculty of Health and Social Science (HSS) since Academic Year 2022/23. This pilot was funded by Health Education England as part of a project to support nursing student retention.

In June 2023, we decided to expand use of MyEngagement to include all four of the University's faculties. The University of Bedfordshire had four overarching strategic objectives for introducing MyEngagement:

1. Identify students at risk of withdrawal
2. Inform the targeting of support for students at risk of withdrawal
3. Streamline Personal Academic Tutor interaction and referral recording system
4. Enhancing our B3 metrics to deliver successful outcomes for all students.

For this case study we reflected on the 2023/24 Academic Year, considering what expedited our MyEngagement implementation and exploring aspects we might approach differently in the future. Based on this, we share ten recommendations for others who are in the early stages of planning to introduce a new learning analytics system.



## **Recommendation 1: Ensure strong investment from senior leadership**

Significant investment is needed to successfully embed and utilise a learning analytics platform. In addition to the system purchase, there is a need to make the case for financial investment in associated staffing as well as dedicating substantial time to updating related institutional policies and practices. To drive such changes, it is essential that a senior leader is at the helm of a learning analytics project. Our Registrar and University Secretary acted as MyEngagement Project Sponsor. Specific examples of work that our project sponsor led included making business cases for investment to the Vice Chancellor's Executive Team as well as the development of a new Student Success through Engagement Policy which outlines the University's approach to attendance monitoring.

## **Recommendation 2: Appoint a teaching-and-learning-focused business owner**

The Academy for Learning and Teaching Excellence is the business owner of MyEngagement at the University of Bedfordshire. This role involves monitoring data feeds, providing training and guides for users, and developing reports for users/colleagues to better support student learning with data-driven insights. Positioning MyEngagement within a teaching and learning unit (like the Academy) ensures a consistent focus on intended pedagogical outcomes in terms of supporting student success. This helps to mitigate the risk of learning analytics becoming a purely IT project, rather than a technology-enabled driver for changing teaching and learning in practice.

## **Recommendation 3: Recruit a Learning Analytics Business Manager**

To help us realise our learning analytics aspirations, the University of Bedfordshire introduced the new role of Learning Analytics Business Manager. This post holder has dedicated responsibility for the operations of MyEngagement and is based in the Digital Learning Team in the Academy. We have found that since appointing this post, the rollout of MyEngagement expedited significantly.

Throughout the project, the importance of mitigating against single points of failure has become very apparent and as such we have trained a range of staff to be able to support the operational use of MyEngagement. By positioning the Academy as MyEngagement business owner we have been able to incorporate MyEngagement system support within our existing portfolio of Digital Learning Systems (BlackBoard – the institutional Virtual Learning Environment, Turnitin, Panopto etc). Digital Learning Officers (existing staff), based in the Digital Learning Team to support use of digital learning platforms, saw their remit expanded to include MyEngagement, working closely with the Learning Analytics Business Manager.

## **Recommendation 4: Engage key stakeholders in strategic and operational planning**

The success of MyEngagement is dependent on staff within faculties and professional services adopting and buying in to new ways of working. It is imperative to ensure that these groups are well represented when making decisions about how MyEngagement will be introduced and used. Accordingly, we established a Learning Analytics Project Board which includes representation from ICT, Academy for Learning and Teaching Excellence, Faculty Champions, Internal Communications, Student Support teams along with members of Kortext as product supplier.

Establishing a Project Board serves to ensure all key stakeholders are aware of how the project is progressing. It also facilitates opportunities to discuss and collectively agree new ways of working that support the use of MyEngagement.

To define business processes, outside of the Project Board the Learning Analytics Business Manager has needed to work particularly closely with:

1. An **Academic Lead** to develop proposed ways of integrating MyEngagement into Personal Academic Tutoring. Such proposals have then been discussed at the Project Board so that wider stakeholders have had the opportunity to provide feedback.
2. **Support team leaders** to define appropriate parameters for using the system. Representatives from Kortext have supported us in these discussions through sharing their experiences of how other student support teams at other institutions are using the system. Issues around confidentiality impact on recording student contact were a particular area of concern, requiring careful consideration.

## Recommendation 5: Integrate learning analytics into strategic planning

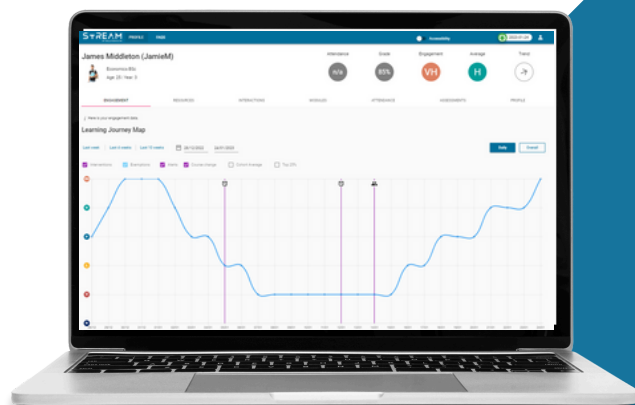
The University of Bedfordshire included the introduction, progressive expansion, and evaluation of MyEngagement in our new Access and Participation Plan (APP). Embedding MyEngagement into the APP and related theories of change is critical in terms of ensuring that the project is fully aligned to institutional strategic objectives. Likewise, the APP provides a valuable vehicle to support long-term implementation planning. The University's Teaching Evaluation and Enhancement Team (also based in our Academy) are working very closely with the Learning Analytics Business Manager to develop robust plans to evaluate the impact of learning analytics on student outcomes.

## Recommendation 6: Facilitate technical owner, business owner and product supplier collaboration

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Team are technical owners of MyEngagement. This includes initial system configuration, creating data feeds, uploading historic data and technical consultancy. A system developer with data architecture expertise within ICT supported the technical configuration.

The data feed mapping exercise that was undertaken for the HSS pilot had to be revised to facilitate wider rollout. This was because of changes to the configuration of student records system. It would have been valuable to have facilitated closer working between technical and student records stakeholders from the outset to ensure that original mapping pre-empted these changes.

it was incredibly helpful to arrange regular meetings between Kortext, ICT and the Learning Analytics Business Manager. These provided opportunities to work collaboratively to improve the current dashboard and to tailor those improvements to better fit some of the University of Bedfordshire's more esoteric requirements.



*“MyEngagement is central to our commitment to our students and their success. We want each and every one of our students to achieve their goals and MyEngagement allows us to monitor our students’ progress so that we can provide the right support at the point where it is needed most. We see it as a vital tool in improving our overall student retention”*

**Ruth Bourne,**  
Registrar and University Secretary, The University of Bedfordshire.



## Recommendation 7: Phase the introduction of data feeds

Introducing a learning analytics platform is not a small undertaking, so adopting a phased approach is essential. We originally hoped to launch MyEngagement in January 2024 but pushed this back to September 2024 to more appropriately configure the necessary data feeds in line with our operational requirements.

The data feed phases that we have ingested to date are:

**Phase 1:** Learning resources (including virtual learning environment (VLE) log-in / course access in VLE / viewing of scheduled session recordings via VLE / borrowing of physical books).

**Phase 2:** Students’ assessment grades.

**Phase 3:** Physical presence (study space swipes - students ID cards being recorded on campus - through manual tap-ins in teaching rooms, via sensors and turnstiles).

Our planned future developments include:

**Phase 4:** Attendance monitoring (timed to integrate with the introduction of a new timetabling system). These timetabled events, registered to each student, would be surfaced on the Attendance tab of MyEngagement to support their learning and to give the student an insight into their own learning patterns. As the attendance data is notoriously complex, we have chosen not to include attendance in student Engagement scores.

**Phase 5:** Student support (including status of applications for assessment deadline extensions due to mitigating circumstances / eligibility for reasonable adjustments).

It is important to anticipate if additional or new staffing will be needed to support incremental rollout. For example, our new Attendance Manager, based in the Academic Registry, is working with our faculty teams to identify those students who have poor attendance and reaching out to try to re-engage students. This post will be critical in terms of successfully implementing phase 4.

## Recommendation 8: Utilise faculty expertise to scale

Having the opportunity to undertake a pilot with one faculty was both valuable and challenging. When we launched **StREAM** in HSS we had a limited infrastructure in place to support the system and were institutionally immature in terms of our understanding of how to best use and support learning analytics. Colleagues in HSS acting as institutional MyEngagement pioneers significantly helped the University to define subsequent learning analytics strategic direction and action planning.

Colleagues in HSS have demonstrated that once a Notification workflow has been developed and launched on MyEngagement to automatically sending prompts for action when university-defined criteria around engagement are met, additional maintenance work such as implementing 'Bulk Exemptions' for students on Placement are required. These seasonal maintenance tasks are required to avoid inadvertently emailing/notifying students who are away from the university as part of the Placement.

For more information about the HSS pilot read Caroline Reid's (Associate Dean for Student Experience) [case study](#).

## Recommendation 9: Gradually introduce staff to learning analytics data

During Academic Year 2023/24 we introduced a new data report for academic staff which included engagement information (VLE use, on campus presence and logins to our student record system portal). While this was not as sophisticated as MyEngagement, this interim measure allowed staff to build their confidence in using engagement data to understand student behaviours and to proactively anticipate their needs.

The Learning Analytics Business Manager, with support of Digital Learning Officers, delivered MyEngagement training sessions for academic staff. Where possible we would recommend delivering such sessions on a school-by-school basis, providing opportunities for academic staff to provide feedback. Through liaising with Associate Deans and Heads of School, the Learning Analytics Business Manager integrated training sessions into existing departmental staff meetings, either on campus or via Teams.

The Personal Academic Tutoring (PAT) Policy has been updated to integrate the use of MyEngagement. Likewise, our CPD for PATs has been enhanced, to reinforce the importance of using MyEngagement when delivering PAT sessions.

## Recommendation 10: Adopt an incremental communications plan

Introducing MyEngagement is a process rather than an event. It is therefore essential to establish a communication plan that will serve to prepare the University community for the introduction of a learning analytics platform. We provided incremental updates charting our progress using a range of different communication methods – in an attempt to engage as many members of the community as possible. The following summarises how we promoted MyEngagement to staff and students during academic year 2023/24:

### Staff

- [StREAM](#) keynote at [2023 Learning and Teaching Excellence Conference](#).
- [Project website](#) launched and shared with academic staff.
- StREAM by Kortext provided early demos of the test system for key stakeholders.
- Staff intranet messages.
- Senior Leadership Team bulletin updates.
- In-person staff roadshows supported by StREAM by Kortext staff on-site.
- Online conversation cafes.
- Staff newsletter articles.
- MyEngagement was included in our 'Learning to Learn' new student induction guidance for course teams to support their planning for 2024/25.



## Students

- MyBedsLife (student app) messaging and content.
- Virtual Learning Environment messaging.
- Digital signage around campuses.
- 'Tap-in' reminders to support collection of swipes data.
- New student welcome newsletter.
- Monthly newsletter updates.

To intensify communications to students at the time of the launch, we plan to recruit graduates from our Graduate Advancement Placement programme to help us to introduce MyEngagement to new and existing students at the start of academic year 2024/25. This will be through a combination of pop-up stands across our campuses and attending scheduled sessions to speak to students.

*"An institution wide approach is crucial to support the introduction of learning analytics. Collaboration between academic staff and multiple professional service teams is essential in order to successfully convert vision and aspirations into workable day-to-day practices".*

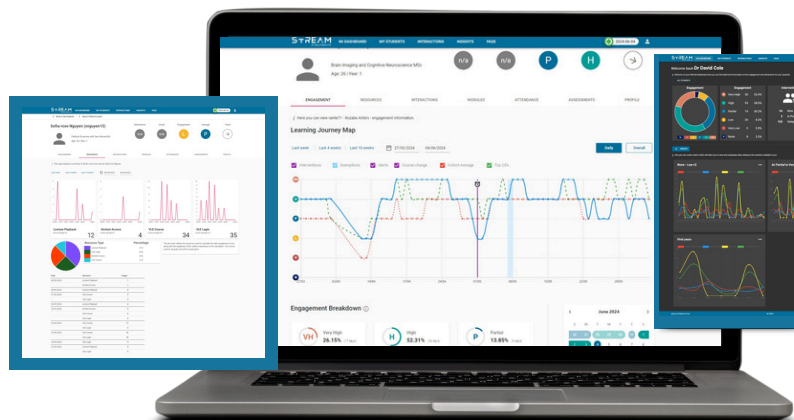
**Dr Steve Briggs,**

Director of Learning and Teaching Excellence, The University of Bedfordshire.



## Further reflections to follow

We plan to author two more case studies to chart our learning analytics journey. The second will share reflections of the launch of MyEngagement (anticipated to be at the start of 2025). Our third case study will be produced at the end of academic year 2024/25 and share reflections on our first full year of using MyEngagement across the University of Bedfordshire.



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