Bridging the gap: how academic success coaches and tutors are supporting student retention with Kortext stream at the University of Bedfordshire

Overview

- Bedfordshire introduced Kortext stream in 2021 to support student nurse retention.
- Since then, stream has been deployed institution-wide to improve student retention.
- Near real-time engagement data enables early identification of at-risk students.
- Adopting stream aligned with Bedfordshire's revised approach to student support.

The challenge

- Lower student retention, particularly for foundation and level 4 students, with early disengagement potentially leading to withdrawal.
- Existing challenges effectively addressing courses with low continuation, high resit rates or persistent engagement concerns.
- The increasing level of support required by first generation students entering a widening participation university.
- Different cultural academic norms, resulting in challenges for international students to navigate university processes and expectations.

> **People that didn't come from the university struggled initially to work out how, who, what people do in the university ... we have a lot of international students who don't understand the processes and the implications, so they get hassled for not attending.**
>
> Patricia Kuevi, Academic Success Tutor

University of Bedfordshire

Kortext stream
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Bedfordshire's approach

- Bedfordshire introduced two new roles to provide an additional layer of support: Academic Success Tutors and Coaches (ASTs and ASCs).
- Both are responsible for a wide range of student support activities. ASTs also teach timetabled workshops, while ASCs focus on relationship building.
- Data from stream enables staff to nuance their conversations with students and understand how they're engaging beyond in-person attendance.
- A community of practice for ASTs, ASCs, Learning Development and Academic Librarian teams was established to promote information sharing.

> In our roles as coaches ... we tell the students to come to us with everything. So you find that they do come to us with personal stuff. Yes, we will signpost them, but they feel comfortable coming to us first because we tell them these things could be barriers to their success – they come to us with everything.
>
> **Emma Emmanuel, Academic Success Coach**

Kortext stream
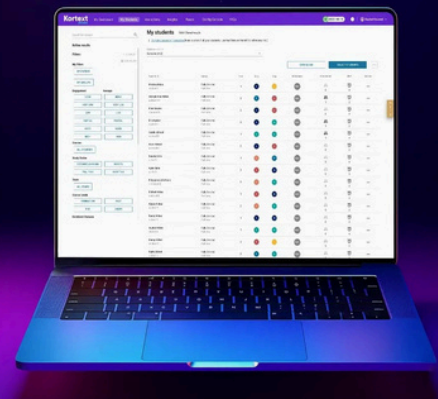
Impact

Enhanced student support

Over the past academic year, ASTs and ACTs - aided by stream - supported 1600+ students, in addition to the support provided by Personal Academic Tutors and other university support services.

Improved success rates

Since this new support approach was deployed, assessment first-time pass rates have increased and resit rates have decreased in all target areas, with improvements seen in all faculty areas of the university.

Increased student autonomy

All support team members encourage students to access their own engagement data on stream. This information has allowed students to recognise for themselves the power of early engagement and they've been keen to share this realisation with their peers.

More effective processes

Since adopting stream, the university has implemented policy changes and moved away from processes managed by spreadsheet. Further, improved data sharing has enabled holistic support mechanisms and made closing the loop on actions much simpler.

> We use stream every day … If we call a student, meet a student, email a student, we try and log it straight away and then we'll go back in and add comments to our interactions as it develops. And we do referrals to the Wellbeing Team, Counselling, Learning Development – it's really useful and it's instantaneous. You can see that they've picked it up.
>
> **Elizabeth Stewart, Academic Success Tutor**

University of Bedfordshire

Kortext stream

Student success stories

> I've had a few students who are retaking a year. This sounds a bit odd because it's a negative in people's eyes, but you can really see in some of the students that they have a different attitude when they come back for that second year. This year we've seen them getting alongside other at-risk students saying 'you need to see Jackie, because she'll really help you and you need to start early because that's what I didn't do last year'. In our two-hour workshops, you can hear these conversations going on and you're so happy, you want to put the conversations on a big poster to say please tell everybody that!'

Jackie Vickers, Academic Success Tutor

> I had a student that I was supporting from semester one who was not attending. We found out that he was homeless and he was actually living in Sheffield in a homeless shelter. At that point I thought 'how is this going to work? Is it going to work?' But through consistency and just keeping in contact with him and his actual dedication to be here, he came down. He got in touch with our teams to sort out his finances and he's now attending and actually doing pretty well. He would have been a student that potentially wouldn't have been here and he's actually a good student. I wasn't that optimistic about it, but it worked out in the end.

Jerone Turlunch, Academic Success Coach

> I've worked with a student who takes a while to process information, whose confidence was extremely low. And then through conversations, in community, through communication with WhatsApp, texting, being on Teams, having meetings, sharing screens and just, you know, showing students how they can do things better. When you've been a student and you can walk in their shoes and you can share your story with them, it makes a difference to them and you can notice that difference when you're working with them on Teams. For example, when you say 'oh, you need to make a change there' and you tell them how to make that change and then suddenly you see them working on the other side of the screen without you having to give them the next prompt. It is, for me, so refreshing to be able to do that. Perseverance and patience are key.

Teresa Bennett, Academic Success Tutor