

CUTTING THROUGH THE COMPLEXITY OF LEARNING ANALYTICS

How York St John University got measurable results within 6 months



Institution: York St John University

Student Population: 6,900

YSJU Mission: To inspire our students and staff to reach their full potential, advance knowledge, and make a positive contribution to the world.

YSJU Values: We are an inclusive, innovative, transformative and ambitious community with a strong sense of belonging.

Many institutions want nothing more than to have a Learning Analytics mindset embedded in their culture and processes.

Most also recognise the importance in the changing world of using their data to drive decisions and most importantly take action that supports their retention and progression targets. The key outcome – we can all agree - is always to provide an excellent teaching and learning experience to all students.

So what's stopping them?

Having experienced the adoption of Learning Analytics across a range of institutions, we now see the same obstacles arising time and time again, which prevent higher education institutions from getting off the blocks with Learning Analytics. Here are the main ones:

- Our data is not good enough for Learning Analytics
- Our current processes won't support Learning Analytics
- Our IT and technology functions are already full to capacity we can't give them anything else
- We've got other strategic priorities right now
- We are not ready for Learning Analytics
- Its too big a job for our institution...

So what is the solution?

The benefits and outcomes of implementing Learning Analytics are many and varied, which can often prevent progress when institutions attempt to design programmes that cover all bases. This creates confusion and stalls progress. York St John took a different approach, and this has enabled them to move forward at pace and with confidence.

A POWERFUL ENGAGEMENT TOOL

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It was easier to implement than I thought

Mark Mierzwinski,
Senior Lecturer,
Faculty of Health & Life Science

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When we started working with York St John, we knew from the outset the initiation of the Learning Analytics journey was going to be great. They tackled the whole process in exactly the right way, and whilst some of the blockers above did arise as considerations, they took a view that just getting going with something would enable them to learn and evolve. And - as a result of just doing something - they have already seen measurable results in their student retention and progression initiatives within 6 months.

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We are a progressive institution who wants to move forward with pace whilst ensuring the evidence is there to support our decisionmaking as we progress to the full implementation of Learning Analytics – so we decided to keep it focused and just get going.

Andrew Fern,
Director of Strategy & Planning

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So what did they do?

Firstly, York St John didn't try to solve every problem at once. They understood very quickly that if they tried to revolutionise their institution immediately that it would take too long and achieve too little to identify measurable benefits that prove value. York St John identified that by embarking on implementing the Learning Analytics technology with a problem statement in mind they would over the course of the process uncover the many and varied issues relating to implementing Learning and Analytics and be able to tackle them within the process roll out. This meant that they could initialise something and get result immediately rather than wait until all possible scenarios had been mapped out and hypothesised.

Developed a Pilot with focus...

Identifying retention and progression as a key issue to address, they picked two departments to run the pilot. One department that suffers from retention issues and one that doesn't in order to gain feedback from both on the pilot. This enabled them to focus all their attention on using our technology with one thing in mind.

Educated and trained tutors and staff prior to pilot

With retention and progression as the key focus, they implemented StREAM (we make this easy through our simple plug and play data approaches) and trained staff around the use of the system for support the Personal Academic Tutor network to provide a more structured and programmatic approach. Mark Mierzwinski at York St John also pointed out that the framing of the process was key to Academic buy-in, stressing the importance of the positive rhetoric around Learning Analytics and ensuring the training supports this message with authenticity.

A POWERFUL ENGAGEMENT TOOL

[StREAM] aided Personal Academic Tutors to quickly identify those students at risk quickly and efficiently

They used the technology!

The simplicity of the StREAM dashboard in terms of identifying students who need support is a key feature in this story. StREAM is the only software that will provide an Engagement score for an individual student immediately. It is this function that aided Personal Academic Tutors to quickly identify those students at risk quickly and efficiently, and ultimately engage them in meaningful conversations to support their learning.

The technology enabled the tutors to identify and prioritise the right students whilst also managing their time more effectively. The simplicity of the system and its dashboard meant that digesting information, setting appointments and recording information is simple and efficient.

Used StREAM as the impartial advisor

Data provided by the system enabled the personal academic tutors to frame conversations around actual data points; this meant that the students could be confident in the unbiased nature of the conversation.

Using the engagement score as an unbiased metric of recording behaviour, students would respond positively in the conversations. This meant student interventions and one to one engagement could be more focused on progression and attainment over managing negative emotion and defensiveness. It was also discovered that the data acted as a positive reinforcement to a student progressing well.

Reviewed the tangible outcomes

Throughout the pilot the staff logged and recorded information on the engagements with the student. The scheduling features also enabled them to manage their engagements in a more structured way, enabling the student-tutor relationship to become more routine specifically in the traditionally less structured Sports Science cohort.

The Teaching and Education cohort already adhered to a structured process of engagement as part of their delivery requirement, with the system facilitating the teaching staff to more effectively document the commentary around the existing engagement structure. By reviewing the data in the system it allowed the student teacher engagement to be more focused and joined up.

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The data provided positive re-enforcement when the student was engaged”

Mark Mierzwinski,
Senior Lecturer,
Faculty of Health & Life Science

A POWERFUL ENGAGEMENT TOOL



Moving forward York St John are looking at how engagement can be a more student lead initiative, using the StREAM software to empower the student with their own data

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The software created a talking point, around themselves and their studies.

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Ruth Matthewson,
Senior Lecturer,
School of Sport and Education

Results

York St John have seen immediate results on the retention metrics within the Sports Science cohort which has traditionally been more unpredictable in terms of its ability to retain and progress students. And whilst they will openly point out that there were a number of changes made across the cohort with Learning Analytics being one of a range of measures, the feedback from staff on the usage of the technology has been instrumental in the decision to progress to a full institutional roll out.

So what's next for York St John ...

Moving forward York St John are looking at how engagement can be a more student lead initiative, using the StREAM software to empower the student with their own data. They are about to embark on training the students on the system and evolving to the next stage of their Learning Analytics journey.

By following the Solutionpath recommended steps to onboarding and piloting Learning Analytics and Engagement, York St John has seen immediate results with its use in supporting a range of student retention initiatives within the Sports Science cohort.

The perfect landscape for getting started with Learning Analytics doesn't exist and never will. What was great about the way York St John have tackled the process, is they got started with a small manageable pilot and are already starting to see the benefits and evolve from there. They have a truly agile mindset, which is the best mindset to have when using technology to make change.

If you would like to hear more about how Solutionpath are helping universities make the most of their data, or would like a guided tour of the StREAM software, please do hesitate to contact us

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