

On-track: A Change Academy project investigating student attendance and engagement

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Introduction:

Lack of engagement has a negative effect on students and staff across the University and can result in students failing to complete their course. University of Westminster is losing money because of retention and there is a damaging effect on the reputation of the University in the NSS if students are not engaged; both of these factors impact recruitment. With the changing face and increased competition amongst Higher Education providers we need to be providing the best services and support to our students.

This Change Academy project has explored options for tracking students throughout their courses in order to flag those at risk of failure. If a student is not attending there may be economic, health, social or other demotivating factors.

Aim:

To explore tools for tracking student attendance, data from which could be used to identify students at risk of failing and help them back onto the path to success.

Current attendance monitoring in place at the University:

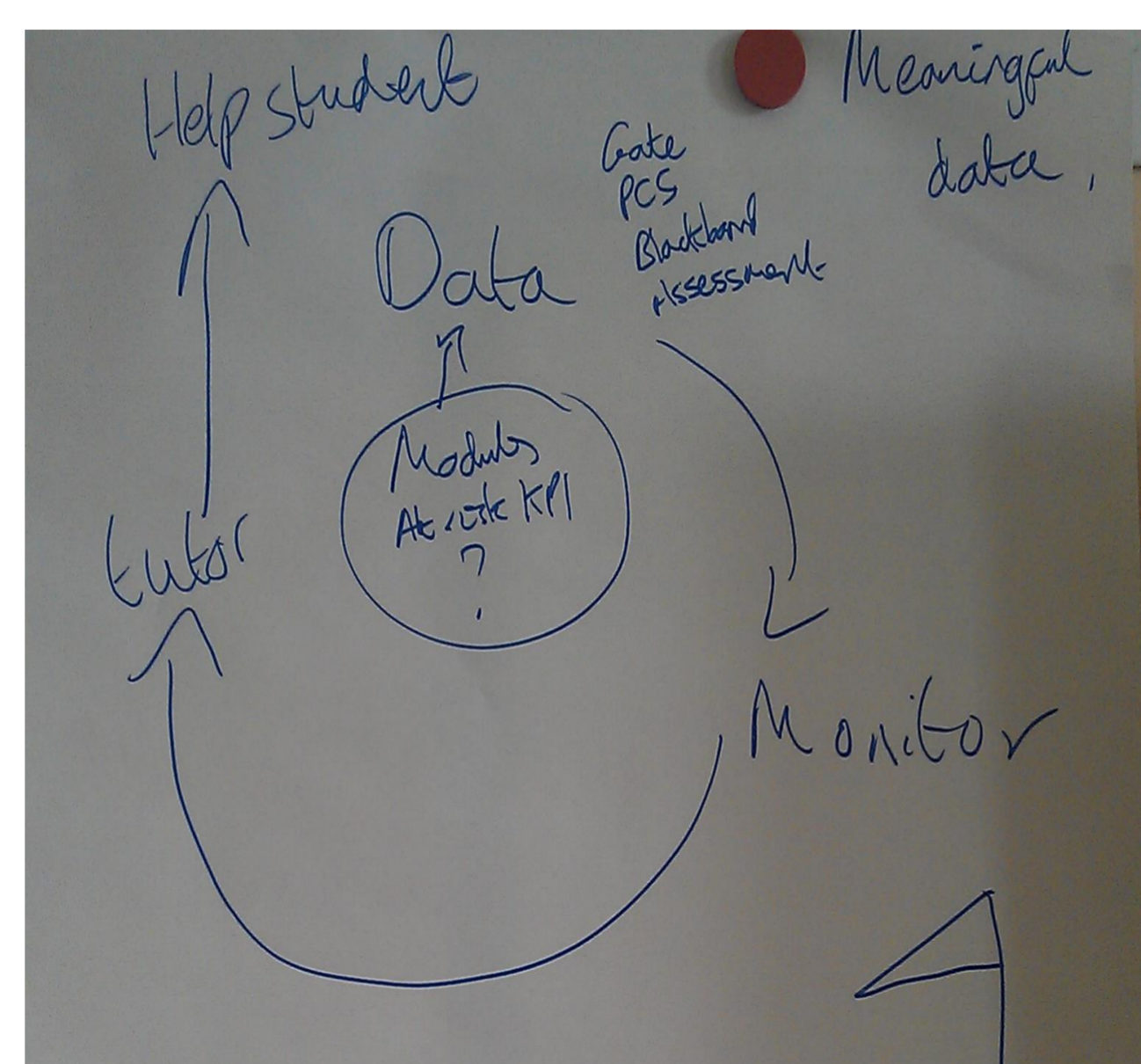
- finance records
- gate entry
- computer usage
- coursework submission
- limited Blackboard statistics
- login data on and off site
- attendance registers

Some of these methods of attendance monitoring are clunky and they are not integrated.

The major benefits identified from a streamlined tool to monitor student attendance would be to improve student progression, engagement, satisfaction and success. Risks were that of data protection, appearing too “Big Brother” and not enabling all learning styles.

Model for flagging students at risk:

data from finances, gate data, ISLS login, Blackboard usage, assessment submission could be monitored and gaps flagged. This could alert personal tutors who could direct the student to relevant student support services to help the student and get them back on track.



Timing of monitoring is important:

If a student decides shortly after enrollment that they do not wish to continue there is less of a financial impact for the student and for the University a withdrawal does not count in retention statistics.

Pedagogical data suggests that there are particular critical points in the academic year which influence a student’s decision to stay.

Beyond the first 3 weeks when students have decided whether or not to stay critical points for student drop-out of Mid-November, January and the May exam periods were identified and activities which could “Inspire” students proposed which might involve surgeries or additional tutoring support.

Options available to track students:

Software such as “Uni-nanny” and “CU@school”. In many institutes swipe card readers are in every lecture room, shown here at Anglia Ruskin University (upper quartile Guardian 2013 student satisfaction), this would be a multi-million pound investment to implement here at Westminster.



External influences on the project:

- UKBA
- student loans company
- Learning Futures

Future work and on going projects:

Large projects which are going on across the University which are addressing the issues of student attendance and engagement which we identified in the Change Academy project.

- iWestminster App
- SRS mobile and the updates to SITS and SRS
- Blackboard Analytics
- Online submission
- Timetabling project
- Learning Futures “Academic Support”

What are we doing now?

- Nick and Jenniner are part of a wider project looking at how attendance data and finance data can be captured and aligned with SRS and SITS.
- Anne Marie and David are involved in the Student Services review and Great Start.
- Caroline and Mark have fed information from the Change Academy project into the Blackboard Analytics consultation (organised by Gunter Saunders)
- Caroline is part of the Learning Futures, Academic Support team.

What are the benefits of Change Academy?

Change academy has enabled us to develop a team from student support services, ISLS and academics to work together towards finding a solution to student attendance which has a wide impact on the University.

It has provided space to explore ideas, find out about initiatives across the University and to meet colleagues from other parts of the University.

Summary:

This project highlighted an important concern about student attendance and engagement necessary to ensure success. Many other factors externally and internally driven have overtaken this project.