

Early Alert Reporting in Dublin Business School

This institutional approach...

...is based in Dublin
Business School.

...was developed in-house.

...focuses on the
generation of early-alert
data reports in real-time
from multiple sources
across the institution.

...involved extensive
cross-institutional
collaboration and
consultation.

Identified Need

Prior to implementing this early-alert system, students deemed at risk of non-completion were normally identified at exam boards. It often proved to be the case that such students had low levels of engagement since the start of the module. However, identifying students' difficulties at this late stage often meant it was too late to work with the students to develop effective strategies for planning repeat assessments. A Student Engagement Officer role was created to address this issue, but ensuring that this person had sufficient meaningful data in time to make effective interventions proved challenging. Data flags such as VLE activity and on-site attendance were found to be useful but, because such measures did not capture the full nature and scope of student engagement, they did not always help to identify students who were in academic difficulty.

Solution

To address these issues, a comprehensive early-alert reporting system was piloted in the academic year 2017/18 and is now in place for the academic year 2018/19. Each report draws from several databases and brings the data into a single report which can be interrogated according to student, year and programme. Fields (along with demographic data) include MOODLE engagement data, attendance data, fees paid, disability, credits enrolled current year, credits completed previous year, credits completed current year, average mark previous year, number of continuous assessment submissions and number of books borrowed from the library. A comparison with peer-group averages is also included for the majority of these fields. This provides a much more comprehensive data picture than has previously been available. The data is also available in real-time and allows reports to be produced as needed.



Enablers and Challenges

From the outset, there was support from senior management and programme leaders. Having access to onsite developers with the requisite expertise in drawing data from multiple sources was critical, as were good relations between operational and IT staff, which ensured that the development was always informed by operational needs. Success also depended on the project team having the time to reflect fully on what was needed and to plan and test accordingly. Achieving engagement from some staff was a challenge, as was identifying the best data flags. Reviewing the literature and referencing the resources in the National Forum's Online Resource for Learning Analytics (ORLA) were key here. Competing institutional priorities also had to be balanced effectively.

Advice

The advice from the project team for others interested in developing an in-house early-alert system is to begin by fully reviewing what data is currently available and how it can be best accessed. Identifying missing data is another critical step. Finally, they advise adopting a collaborative, consultative approach with stakeholders throughout the institution to ensure that the development meets a broad range of institutional needs. This process is also the key to encouraging engagement from staff and proactively addressing any concerns they may have about moving to a data-enabled approach to supporting students.

Further Information

Lee Richardson (lee.richardson@dbs.ie)

Sarah Sharkey (sarah.sharkey@dbs.ie)