STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING POLICY GUIDANCE:

DEVELOPING DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT DATA

This paper provides some recommendations around generating and analysing engagement data within the Learning Platform Suite, to help identify areas where lack of engagement could indicate possible retention concerns as referred to in the Student Engagement in Learning Policy.

TYPES OF DATA

There are two distinct types of data that can be recorded with the Learning Platform Suite (LPS). The most direct is activity logging – most systems now capture logs on access times etc. This can be useful in identifying how often students are accessing online materials, but further engagement cannot be assumed from this data – just because someone has clicked on a link that opens a PDF file, that doesn't mean they have read it. The other type of data is engagement data – this helps to identify understanding, not just access, so is often more relevant when trying to identify students who may be in danger of dropping out. For example, a (lack of) contribution to a discussion forum can provide visibility around the student's engagement and their understanding of content.

INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following sources of data are based around the core Blackboard areas that all modules have available. They are available at a module level only (i.e. it is not possible to run these across an entire programme as one activity).

1 – REPORTING ON LEARNER ACTIVITIES

Data Type : Automatic Activity Logging
Staff can use the Blackboard Performance Dashboard to run reports on learner activity, such as how long it has been since the learner has last accessed the Blackboard module, or how long they have spent within Blackboard.
Benefits : Can provide an idea of individual and class average activity within Blackboard, which can indicate that inactive or low-activity students (or those with excessively high activity against the class average) could perhaps be more at risk of failure.
Disadvantages : Data can be open to interpretation – for example, someone who is reported as spending 2 hours on Blackboard may be engaged in other activity with Blackboard just in the background.

2 – LEARNER-BASED ACTIVITY TRACKING

Data Type : Manual Activity Logging
Items created within Blackboard (e.g. uploaded files, links to videos etc) can be marked for "learner review". This means that students get an option to mark each item as having been undertaken. This can then be reported on by staff.
Benefits : More active approach – learners have to undertake to mark the item as having been undertaken, so have to be engaging with Blackboard at some level.
Disadvantages : Items can be marked as reviewed regardless of whether the work has been undertaken or not. Adds an extra step when setting up each item of content to be included in reporting results.

3 - EARLY FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Data Type : Engagement Data
Use the Blackboard quiz tool to set up short, early quizzes to formatively assess understanding. For example, setting a short 3-5 question quiz on the week's topic, with automated marking and feedback options can signpost students who may not be successfully engaging with the module. This can also be useful to highlight such issues to the students themselves, through well-selected feedback.

Benefits : Staff can get a better view on their students' engagement and understanding, while students can benefit from confirming their knowledge of current topics. Active approach – students are required to access the assessment via Blackboard, providing opportunity for data to be recorded and analysed. Quizzes can be copied from one module instance to another, removing the need for regular re-development of quizzes, beyond usual content updates. Variety of different question types can keep learners engaged, as well as providing different formative assessment opportunities.

Disadvantages : Initial learning curve to set up quizzes. Additional level of work to set up each quiz, although this will reduce rapidly once the staff member becomes more familiar with the tool.

4 – ONLINE DISCUSSION TO ENCOURAGE PEER SUPPORT

Data Type : Engagement Data

Use Blackboard discussion forums to generate Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). Students are encouraged to post questions on the FAQ, and to respond to their peers' questions. Tutors will engage to answer questions where necessary.

Benefits : Can provide peer support which can resolve issues and assist students in feeling less isolated. Allows staff to see where particular issues may be arising. Can potentially allow staff to become silent moderators, minimising staff effort.

Disadvantages : Only works if there is good engagement, otherwise more staff time required in order to both moderate and answer most/all questions.

A video explaining these recommendations to staff, and giving a demonstration of how to engage with the recommendations has been created by LTE and is available at http://bit.ly/2DA86c3