

CASE STUDY



Standardising module and programme feedback surveys at The University of Sheffield with Explorance Blue

About the University of Sheffield

The University of Sheffield is a research university with a global reputation and is renowned for the excellence, impact and distinctiveness of its research-led learning and teaching. It is a member of the Russell Group, one of the UK's 24 leading universities for research and teaching. Over 30,000 students from 150 countries study at Sheffield, including approximately 16,000 UK (home) students completing undergraduate programmes.



CHALLENGE

Multiple, and inconsistent, approaches to survey management

In 2019, The University of Sheffield took the strategic decision to standardise the process of module and programme feedback survey management and reporting through a single platform. To support this, it sought to procure and implement an institution-wide capability that provides a framework for effective survey feedback and reporting. The University wanted to bring greater consistency across multiple departments.

"We had many different ways of doing the same thing across over 40 departments, including pen-and-paper and home-built systems, all of which were workload intensive," recalled Dan Morton, Surveys and Data Insight Analyst in the University's Performance and Data Evaluation Team. "This made gathering centralised data difficult, and we were not pulling that together at an institutional level. Consistency in approach was a key challenge. We wanted to ensure that we are capturing and effectively responding to student voice."

A tender for a module and programme survey tool was issued, and Explorance was awarded the contract after a mini-competition under the APUC Framework Agreement for Student Module Evaluation Systems and Associated Services.

SOLUTION

A consistent yet flexible survey platform, providing meaningful data

Using Explorance Blue, the University has made significant progress in moving to a standardised institution-wide process of module and programme feedback surveys, supported at executive level by Vice-President for Education Professor Mary Vincent, and Deputy Vice-President Professor Matt Marshall, who has a remit for digital education.

“Over the last five years we have gone from multiple ways of running surveys to one consistent way, gathering meaningful data across the whole institution, which has also brought simplicity from a student perspective,” Dan explained. “Our approach to programme surveys has also developed. Blue has enabled us to be flexible and do things in different ways, so we are also looking at module results through a programme lens, which has simplified the process further.”

Tom Foster, Product Manager (Online Digital Education) in IT Services, commented: “My interest is seeing how our various student-facing platforms work together to provide a consistent high-quality student experience. In the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) we want their journey to be as seamless as possible, with the right structures and right information. The University of Sheffield has a number of different disciplines, programme durations, and start and finish dates – but Blue gives us the flexibility to respond to different

situations. It supports a consistent student experience, so our surveys look and feel the same, and regardless of the discipline/module being studied students are familiar with how the system works.”

With Blue now firmly embedded into the University's VLE there have been a number of direct benefits. “We know that the prompt to complete surveys is helpful,” Dan said: “You can see the click throughs from students, and we know that the pop-up in the VLE is important for survey completion.”

Tom observed: “A key outcome is that closing the feedback loop is now the same in every course and we're able to present this to students via the VLE. This shows transparency from a university point of view, they can see how peers have done it and how that has improved things for them, and that their voice is valued. This is just one aspect of our commitment to providing an outstanding student experience at Sheffield, something that is consistently recognised in national and international university rankings and awards. Through the data integrity gateway, and improved analytics, we have also gone from no reporting to having a range of reporting formats and dashboards.”

OUTCOME

Standardising all aspects of surveys for a consistent student experience

In 2024, The University of Sheffield agreed a new three-year partnership with Explorance to continue a collaboration which has successfully standardised the process of module and programme feedback survey management institutionally.

Tom stated: “It has been a genuine partnership with Explorance – they are really interested in the successful deployment of Blue, which doesn't always come through so clearly with other vendors.”

Dan also reflected on the “very positive relationship” with Explorance and outlined next steps. “We have genuine conversations with the team on improvements, they are always receptive to developments, and we feel comfortable talking to them,” he said. “Our objectives are to continue the progress that we have made, with specific forthcoming goals on the development of enhanced reporting dashboards and exploring Blue's functionalities in use cases beyond module and programme surveys.”