

CASE STUDY



Durham University Drives Innovative Student-Centric Approach with Explorance Blue

About Durham University

Durham University, established in 1832, is a prestigious institution located in Durham, England. Renowned for its academic excellence, is a QS Top 100 school offering a diverse range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs. With a total enrollment exceeding 20,000 students, Durham fosters a vibrant and intellectually stimulating learning environment.



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CHALLENGE

A Reassessment of the University MEQ Process

In 2017, Durham University introduced a new policy that recognised the centrality of MEQs in relation to student satisfaction, engagement, and staff progression. It utilised Explorance Blue to run four cycles of MEQs across undergraduate and postgraduate modules, later progressing into the evaluation of teaching staff. Having originally purchased Explorance Blue for five years, Durham sought to benefit from a centralised system, automated processes reducing administration burden, and automatic report delivery.

However, due to resource restrictions and other limitations, the use of Explorance Blue was inefficient and its features were not implemented to their full potential. In 2021, the University began reassessing the MEQ process, working with Explorance to reimplement the evaluation process to better align practice with policy.

SOLUTION

Greater Flexibility and Expanded Survey Potential

The MEQ service was re-launched in May 2023 as the University re-formatted its software requirements that enabled automatic sync between Durham data and Explorance Blue. To this end, they also purchased Explorance's Data Integrity Gateway (DIG), the Blue Dashboard, and a hosted test server. The project was initially led by Donna Hay, Durham's Deputy Director of Careers and Enterprise.

"Working with Explorance, we have developed a stronger foundation that will allow Durham to implement the policy that has been active since 2017, while giving the University flexibility to expand our survey potential beyond MEQs in the future," Donna said.

"The University believes that everyone will benefit from an organization-wide platform; it will enable Durham to remain current and relevant, support key institutional activities around the student voice, and increase business resilience by not being reliant on a single point of success."

"Explorance are the experts in this space, and we worked on a collaborative endeavour to achieve the best possible outcome and set up for a sustainable future," Donna added. "It was a partnership rather than anything transactional. They were also very flexible, considerate and responsive. Through Explorance, we also connected with other institutions in the sector."

OUTCOME

A Wider Cultural Approach to Listening to the Student Voice

Dr Andy Shuttleworth, Education Policy Officer in the University's Academic Quality Service, now leading the MEQ service, agreed. "Explorance has been open, honest, and very helpful," he said. "The Explorance user community as a whole is very well engaged and offers a great way to learn from each other. Learning from others got us to where we are today, and we want to share that experience with others to show that this has been a positive move."

"Response rates are important, as the breadth of the student body is the target, rather than a small number," Andy explained. "We want to achieve a genuinely broad representation of how the University strategy is being taken to by students. In the future, there is a commitment to improve by figuring out what is important to students. We want to ensure the academic pedagogy is sound and specific to the course, that module leaders recognize and adapt to change, and that MEQs allow us to see what is happening."

"While aligning our MEQ questions to the NSS, we use Explorance's Question Personalisation functionality to help departments address what they want. There is also something about the economic value of money. That students contribute to the institution, their feedback is seen and heard, and their voice allows the process to improve."

Dr. Andy Burn, Senior Education Policy Officer in the Academic Quality Service, added: "When I reflect on the 'before and after,' the shift we have made as a university has been huge. Structurally, we worked with Explorance for five years and gradually recognised that MEQ should sit with what is now our office."

"Operationally, before Explorance Blue, MEQs were devolved to departments with individual systems, with some using paper. We now constantly communicate with students through their modules as part of a wider cultural approach to listening throughout the course. Staff have an education toolkit to capture feedback throughout the module, building engagement with those all-important MEQs. Explorance Blue is a recognised part of that toolkit."



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