



University of West London deploys SEAtS Student Engagement & Retention Software

Based in the heart of one of the UK's most successful business regions, the University of West London (UWL) has a range of diverse and highly qualified staff, with a wealth of experience in their respective disciplines, and strong connections with key industries. The University has acquired a remarkable reputation for high-quality education linked to employment. UWL has one of the best employability rates in the country, with 95% of students in work within six months of graduating. Located in West London and Reading, UWL was rated as the 'No.1 Best Modern University in London' by The Guardian in 2013. In 2013, UWL began an ambitious project to implement a ground-breaking new student attendance monitoring system to not only track student attendance but also to improve overall student engagement.

Overview

The Challenge

The University of West London (UWL) sought an innovative automated system to monitor and report on student attendance and engagement in order to support student welfare and academic success, as well as to more easily demonstrate compliance with the UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) requirements for international students.

The Solution

After researching the market for suitable software solutions, they partnered with SEAtS Software to develop and implement a Student Engagement and Attendance (SEAtS) system.

The Benefits

The SEAtS system has enabled delivery of strengthened student retention and improved compliance reporting. It enables more accurate real time monitoring and has reduced administration and improved transparency for pastoral care.

Background to Requirements

With a growing and diverse international student population, UWL required a system to support the implementation of its formal engagement and attendance policy.

This would improve the processes and data underpinning compliance with UKVI requirements associated with UWL's Tier 4 Highly Trusted Status, which enables the University to sponsor and teach international students.

In addition, UWL recognised the close link between student engagement and attendance with academic performance and student welfare. Improved attendance and early detection of potential issues, with pro-active pastoral intervention, benefits both students and the University.

Processes & Systems in Place

In common with practice across the sector, UWL had several ways of collecting attendance data. Presence on the campus was recorded via access control systems at entrance and exit points. However, actual attendance in class was recorded using a mix of manual paper based systems, online registers and a basic swipe recoding system for some students' attendance.

These processes were deemed no longer suitable as:

- ✦ the dependence on manual intervention and re-keying of data made them prone to error.
- ✦ due to the fragmented nature of the information gathered, reports required significant manual analysis and thus were time consuming to generate and so were often out of date
- ✦ the variable approach absorbed valuable teaching and management time with minimal quantifiable benefit.
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Designing a System to Achieve Objectives

UWL needed a robust system to collect attendance data from 12,000 students attending almost 200 teaching classrooms and theatres across each of its three main sites.

The solution needed to:

- Improve achievement by increasing student attendance.
- Improve retention by strengthening engagement through improved pastoral care, reducing the risk of students leaving their courses.
- Reduce the administrative overhead of recording, monitoring and following up on attendance, with minimum disruption to the student and lecturer in the classroom.
- Support compliance for monitoring student attendance for UKVI for International students in a seamless and integrated way for all students.
- Provide a better picture of room utilisation for timetable optimisation for the facilities and scheduling teams, and for senior management to enable strategic investment planning.

The Solution

In 2013, UWL went to the market to identify suitable solutions. The SEAtS proposal stood out as a total package that would not only allow for accurate attendance recording in classes but also was sufficiently flexible to integrate with existing UWL data systems (timetabling and student records, for example) to provide real-time monitoring capability and rich reporting.

Adrian Ellison, Director of Information Technology at UWL, had this to say:

“ The project board were satisfied following a rigorous proof of concept with defined success criteria that SEAtS software could meet all of our objectives. SEAtS ticked all the boxes for the University. It integrated with all of our existing systems and security and was integrated with our Active Directory and SharePoint infrastructure. The touch terminals worked with our existing student MIFARE cards and worked over Power over Ethernet and wireless which reduced deployment timelines and installation costs. ”

Installing & Using the System

The project started in July 2013 and the first phase went live in September in time for the start of the academic year. 240 touch terminals were installed and connected in all teaching areas on campus.

Adrian Ellison said:

“ We spent the first semester working as a team to cleanse identified data issues in our source systems and to normalise and validate the output from SEAtS. The project has been a tremendous success and has given us enormously rich data on student attendance, module group preferences, teaching patterns and classroom utilisation. The data is now informing our student retention activities, facilities planning and pastoral initiatives. ”

The system provides a view of students, complete with photographs, who are expected in every class and then in real-time shows them swiping in and marked as ‘attended’. This removes the need to take local class registers. Students who are late are marked as such. Those that do not attend are shown as ‘absent’. Students who turn up at a session that they were not timetabled to attend are shown as ‘unexpected’. Teaching staff can correct any anomalies as well as transfer classes to alternative rooms should the need arise.

Reports are available to report on and monitor attendance by student, module, programme and School.

Automated alerts are sent to students who fail to attend a pre-determined number of sessions.

Professor Nick Braisby, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic and Student Experience) had this to say:

“ SEAtS has the power to transform the way in which institutions manage and promote student attendance. There is a considerable initial investment in terms of systems integration and development, but this should be repaid through significant improvements in student engagement and outcomes. ”

Key Benefits

According to UWL deploying the SEAtS system has delivered the following four key benefits;

- Improved student retention due to early warning of “at risk” students that has led to strengthening pastoral care.
- Better academic performance due to comprehensive engagement and attendance tracking of students.
- Formal compliance reporting processes for Tier 4 Visa and Immigration.
- Significant optimisation opportunities for UWL due to real time reporting and view of actual facilities usage.

ABOUT SEAtS

Pro-active Student Engagement & Analytics Software for Higher Education

We provide an innovative collaborative platform for students, academics and staff in order to focus efforts on achieving better student engagement, retention and overall experience, leading to improved academic achievement and outcomes. SEAtS analytical software monitors student engagement on your campus. It works by making sense of the volumes of data that are collected across your campus at every possible student touch-point every minute of every day. We look for the early warning signals in your data that alert you to the need for pro-active pastoral intervention. Effectively, prompting action and stopping student failure and attrition and re-focusing efforts towards positive outcomes.

Learn more about how SEAtS Solutions can assist you. Contact us for a product demo.

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