



Student Voices

in Higher Education

Powered by  explorance



Driving Engagement: Ulster University's Holistic Approach with Blue and MLY

Ursula McTaggart, Senior Lecturer



Context

- Largest University in Northern Ireland
- Approx 35K students – home and collaborative provision
- 3 different campus locations in NI – numerous locations globally
- 4 faculties



Background

- Moved from annual subject monitoring/revalidation to risk based continuous enhancement model
- Student Voice as one of the drivers for change
- QAA Review
- Learning Enhancement Investment
- Old inhouse survey system – low engagement





Student Voices 2024

Attended Student Voices in London (April)

John & Chris came to Belfast - demo with working group (June)

System Requirements/ Data Processing Agreements –BLUE and MLY

Procurement - contract signed December 2024

Where we started

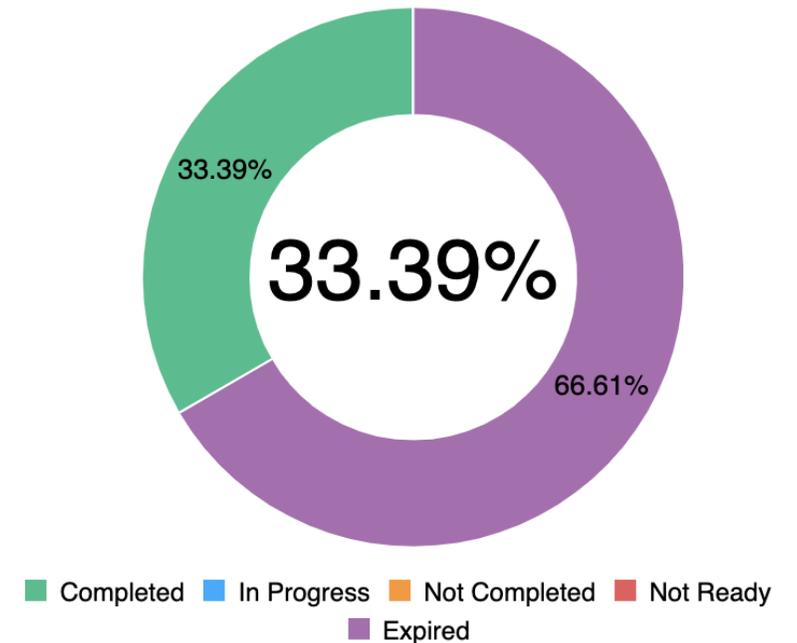
Student Voice Working Group

- All faculties, Student Union & main professional services included
- Updated questions with student friendly language
- Regular slot to update Institutional Learning & Teaching Committee (buy-in)
- Procurement Process - Universities' Software Framework
- Weekly meetings with Explorance for implementation
- Branding, promotional material, quick guides

Pilot

- Pilot with CEBE Faculty – 31st March
- 6063 Students (including partner students)
- 279 Modules
- 357 Staff
- Retained existing questions
- 33.39% engagement rate
- 9.03% engagement rate in old system

Overall Response Status i ▼



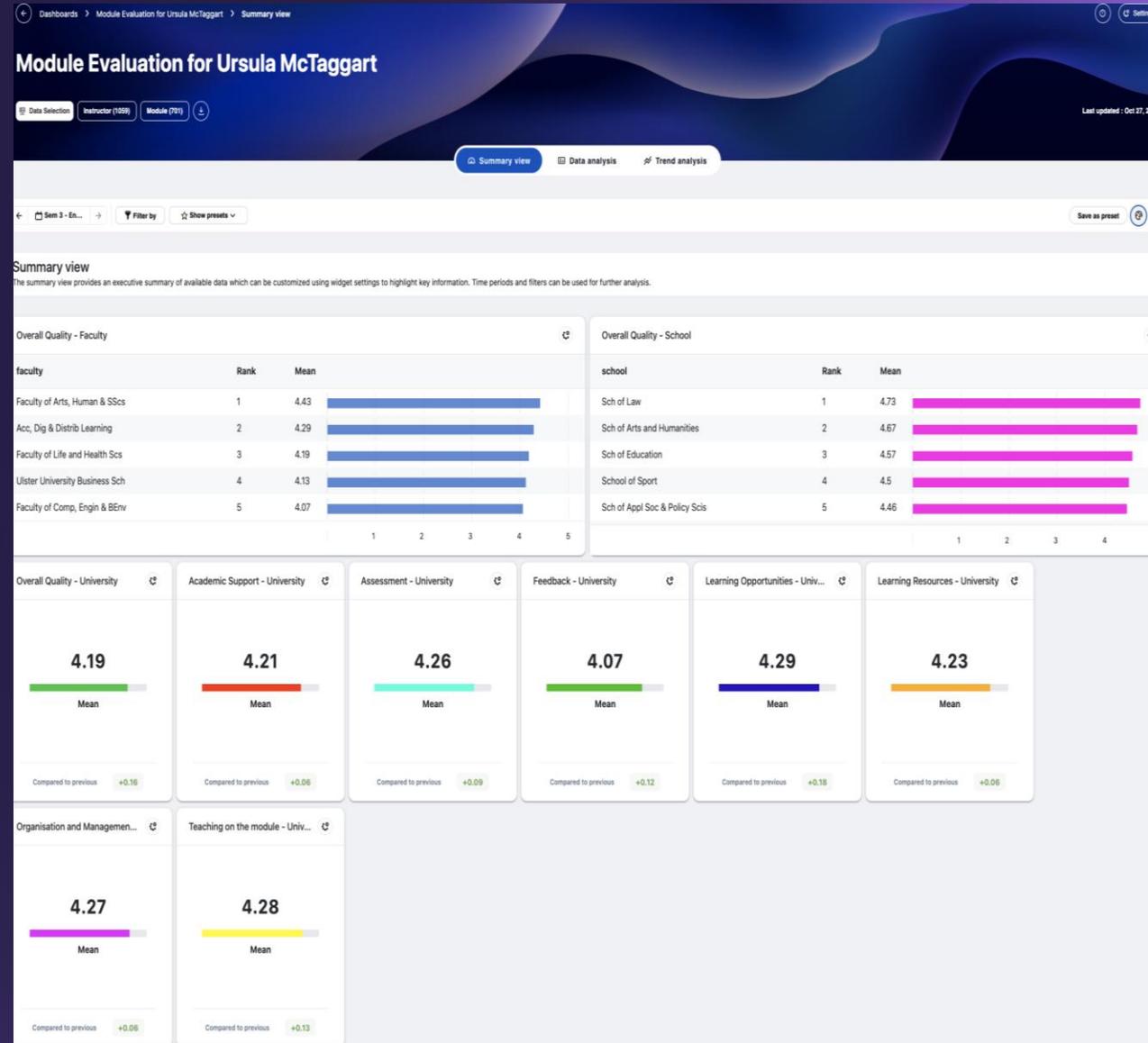
Pilot

Survey closed 2nd May - On 5th May we:

- Analysis reports to all teaching staff
- School Level & Faculty Level reports
- SLT - Aggregated reports
- Dashboard Access

MLY

- Analysed 9992 comments in minutes
- 5515 topic sentiments
- 3403 recommendations
 - 1374 -do more
 - 741 -start doing
- 30 alerts



Promotion to Staff

- Regular updates through L&T committees - no shocks!
- 27 presentations at Faculty L&T meetings and events
- Working group faculty rep presenting updates at local level
- Open invites to view demo
- Co-Design Workshops to design new questions
- Internal news articles
- Staff emails encouraging in-class completion
- Quick Guide Resources
- Thank you emails from PVC

BOOSTING ENGAGEMENT WITH MODULE SURVEYS

Student voice is central to building a high-quality curriculum. When students feel heard, they are more likely to participate in shaping their education – leading to stronger engagement, satisfaction, and outcomes.

At Ulster, module surveys are delivered through the **Explorance Blue** system, which enables students to provide structured feedback on their learning experience. The system collects both quantitative data and open-text comments, offering valuable insight into what is working well and where improvements can be made.

This guide provides practical steps to help staff champion student voice and improve response rates for module surveys – ensuring that feedback is not only collected but acted upon in meaningful ways.



Why Student Voice Matters

- **Enhances teaching:** Feedback identifies what's working in a module and what could improve.
- **Builds trust:** Students feel valued when their views are acknowledged and acted upon.
- **Improves outcomes:** Student voice supports motivation, belonging, and academic success.
- **Informs curriculum:** Feedback can help shape more relevant, inclusive learning experiences.

Listening is important—but showing students what you've done with their feedback is even more powerful.

What Can You Do?

- Make student feedback part of your programme/module continuous enhancement cycle.
- Encourage ongoing dialogue, not just one-off surveys.
- Collaborate with student reps to promote a shared responsibility for enhancing the module
- Work with your Learning Enhancement Faculty Team to explore strategies that suit your teaching context

Survey Schedule

Students will be prompted to complete a Mid-Module Survey in Week 6 of the semester and an End of Module Survey in Week 11 of the semester. They will receive an email inviting them to participate and they will see a pop up on screen every time they log into Blackboard.

Reflective Prompts for Staff

- Have I clearly explained the purpose of feedback to students?
- Am I showing students how their feedback leads to change?
- Do I provide regular opportunities for students to share their views?

Check out our website for more resources and toolkits, or ask your Learning Enhancement Faculty team for more information.

This guide was created by Ursula McTaggart, Centre for Quality Enhancement, Learning Enhancement Directorate.

Top Tips to Increase Engagement

Talk About the Survey Early – Start at Induction!

Introducing the survey during module induction sets the tone for an open and inclusive learning culture. Here's how:

- Include a slide in your induction presentation explaining what the survey is, when it happens, and why it matters.
- Share examples of past changes you've made based on student feedback.
- Explain the feedback cycle and how you plan to close the loop.
- Reassure students that feedback is anonymous and welcome.
- Invite student reps to speak about the impact of feedback and their role in communicating student views.

“Last year students asked for more guidance on assessments, so we added an additional assessment briefing video and a live Q&A session.”

Make Time in Class

- You will be notified via email when the survey is open to students.
- Set aside 5–10 minutes for students to complete the survey during a timetabled class.
- Encourage students to use their phones or laptops to access the link.
- Add the QR code sent via email to your slide deck.
- Let them know their voice matters and their responses help improve the module.

Promote It More Than Once

- Use class time, Blackboard announcements or emails to remind students that the survey is open.
- Ask course reps or peer mentors to help spread the word.

Be Honest and Encouraging

- Invite constructive criticism and remind students of the value of both positive and negative feedback.
- Avoid framing the survey as a formality - highlight real impact.

Communicate the Impact

- Use "You Said, We Did" visuals in lectures, or via announcements on Blackboard.
- Acknowledge what can't be changed and explain why.
- Reinforce positive feedback as well as areas for improvement.

Promotion to Students

- Digital Screens
- Portal Banners
- Social media campaigns
- Email invites and reminders to participate
- QR codes to use in class
- Incentive Vouchers
- Focus on importance of feedback
- SU - Professional Language



**HAVE
YOUR
SAY**

**Module Survey
Feedback**

ulster.ac.uk/haveyoursay

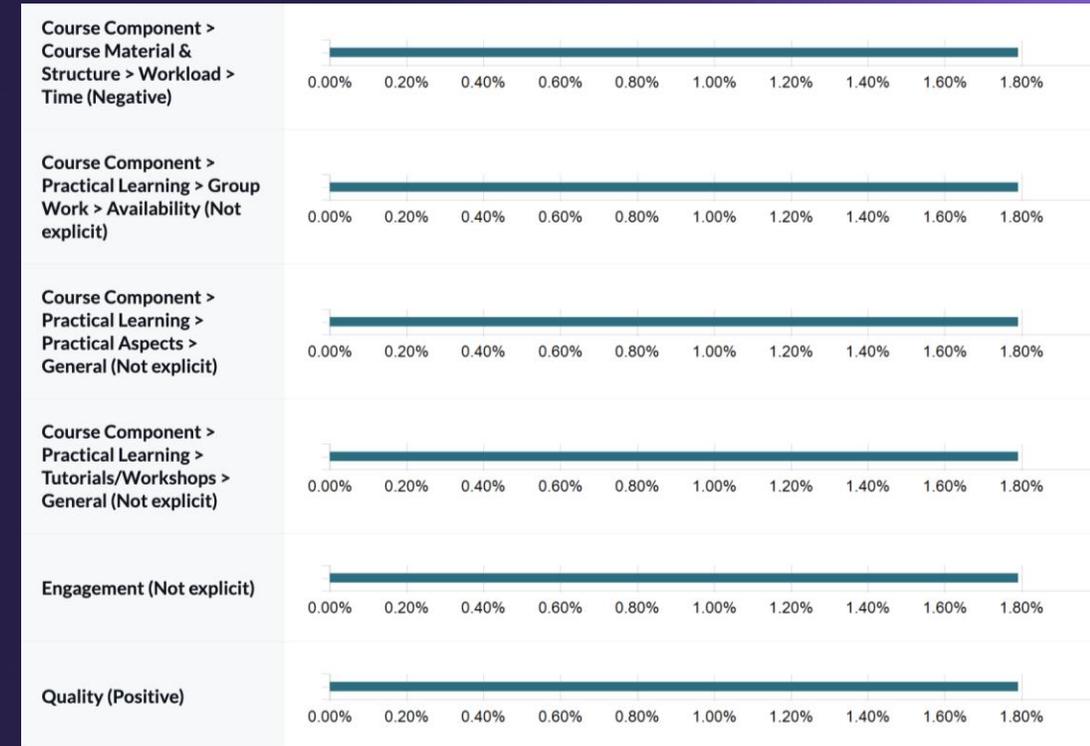
Semester 1 2025

PILOT: Mid-Module Survey Week CEBE Faculty

- 5045 students
- 6656 Qualitative comments
- 28.92% Engagement Rate
- Integrated MLY analysis into reports

FULL IMPLEMENTATION: - Week 11

- New Questions – NSS Themed
- 66,705 invites
- 1252 modules
- 31,367 Qualitative comments
- 27.03% Engagement Rate
- Individual & Aggregated Dashboards



Content > Helpfulness Workload > Time
 Group Work > Availability Quality
 Course in General > Structuredness
 Practical Aspects > General
 Course in General > Engagement
 Engagement Workload > Quantity
 Tutorials/Workshops > General

What do we do with all this data?

- Staff close feedback loop – 2 weeks
- CAQE - Continuous Assurance of Quality Enhancement
- Programme level data interrogated: Progression, non-continuation, Award, NSS, PTES, RAR's, WP
- Compared against University data indicators
- High failing modules - module level feedback
- Analysed 165,807 MLY Comments
- MLY themes inform Learning Enhancement action plans – Group Work, Assessment & Feedback, Large Group Teaching



Advice

- Get buy-in from SLT
- Pick a team with influence
- Data person needs to be an integral part of planning and implementation
- Find a way to speak at every L&T meeting/event
- Don't miss your weekly Explorance meeting
- Go big with your pilot

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**“It always seems
impossible until
it’s done.”**

NELSON MANDELA

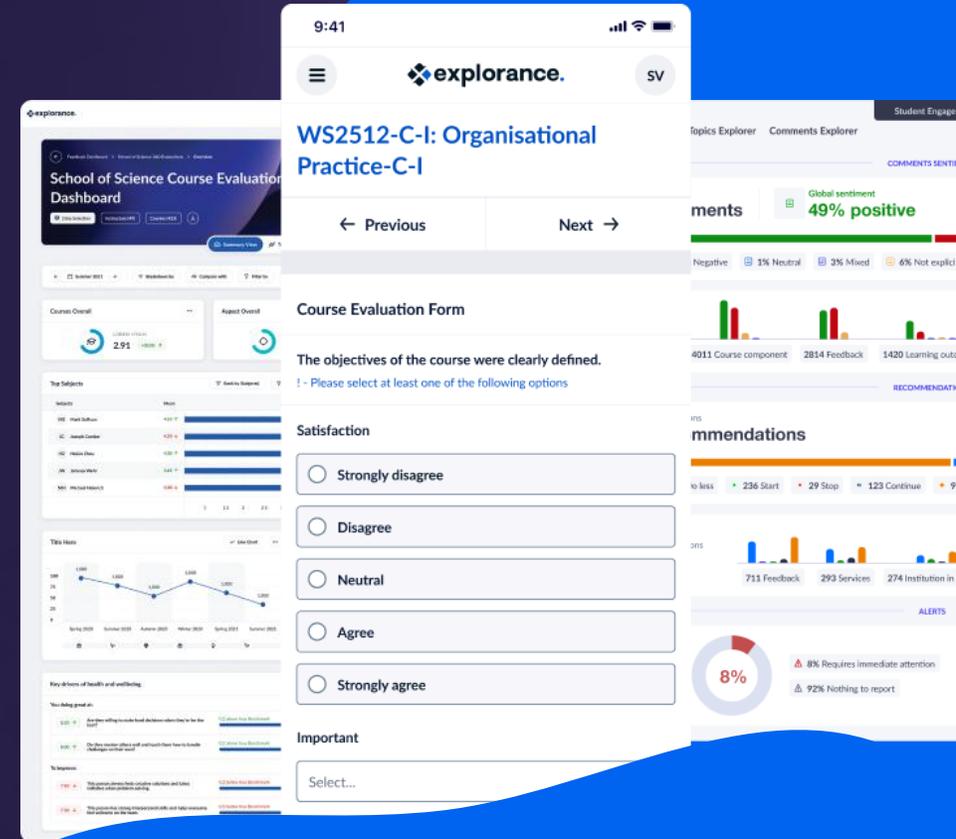
Next-Generation Feedback Analytics

 blue

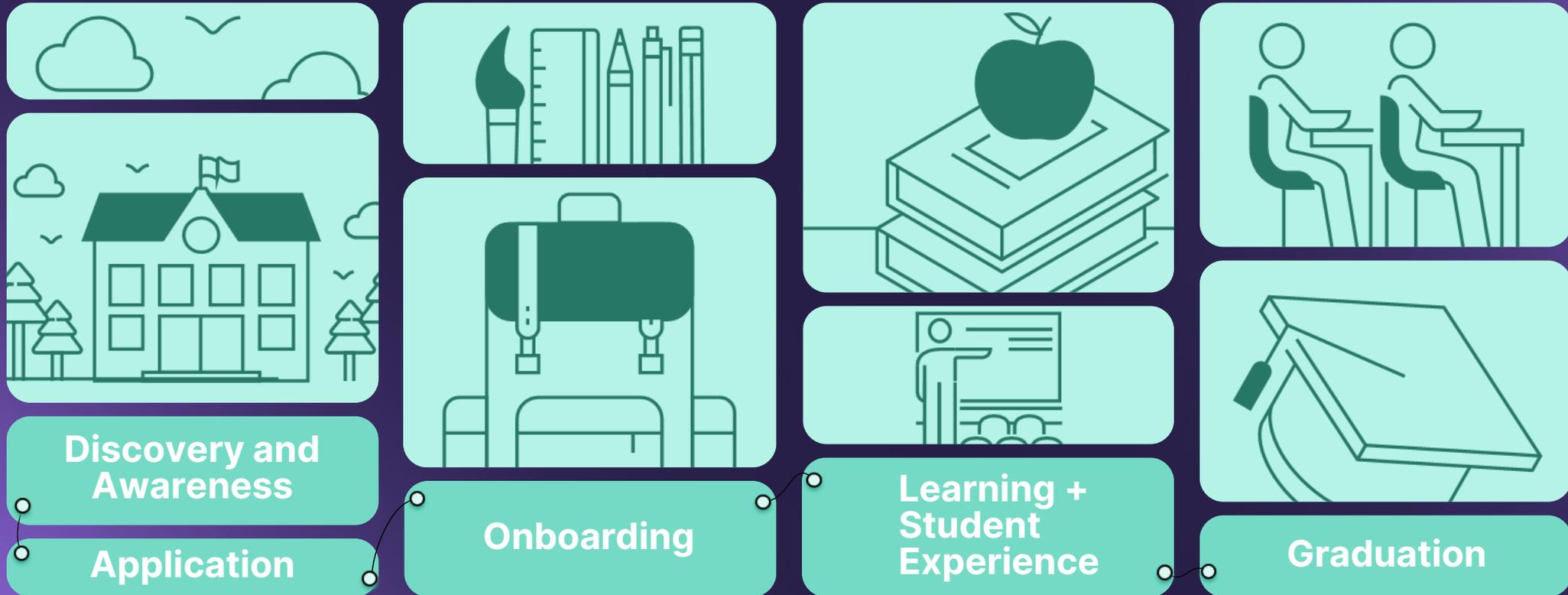
Explorance Blue™
Feedback Analytics Platform

 mly

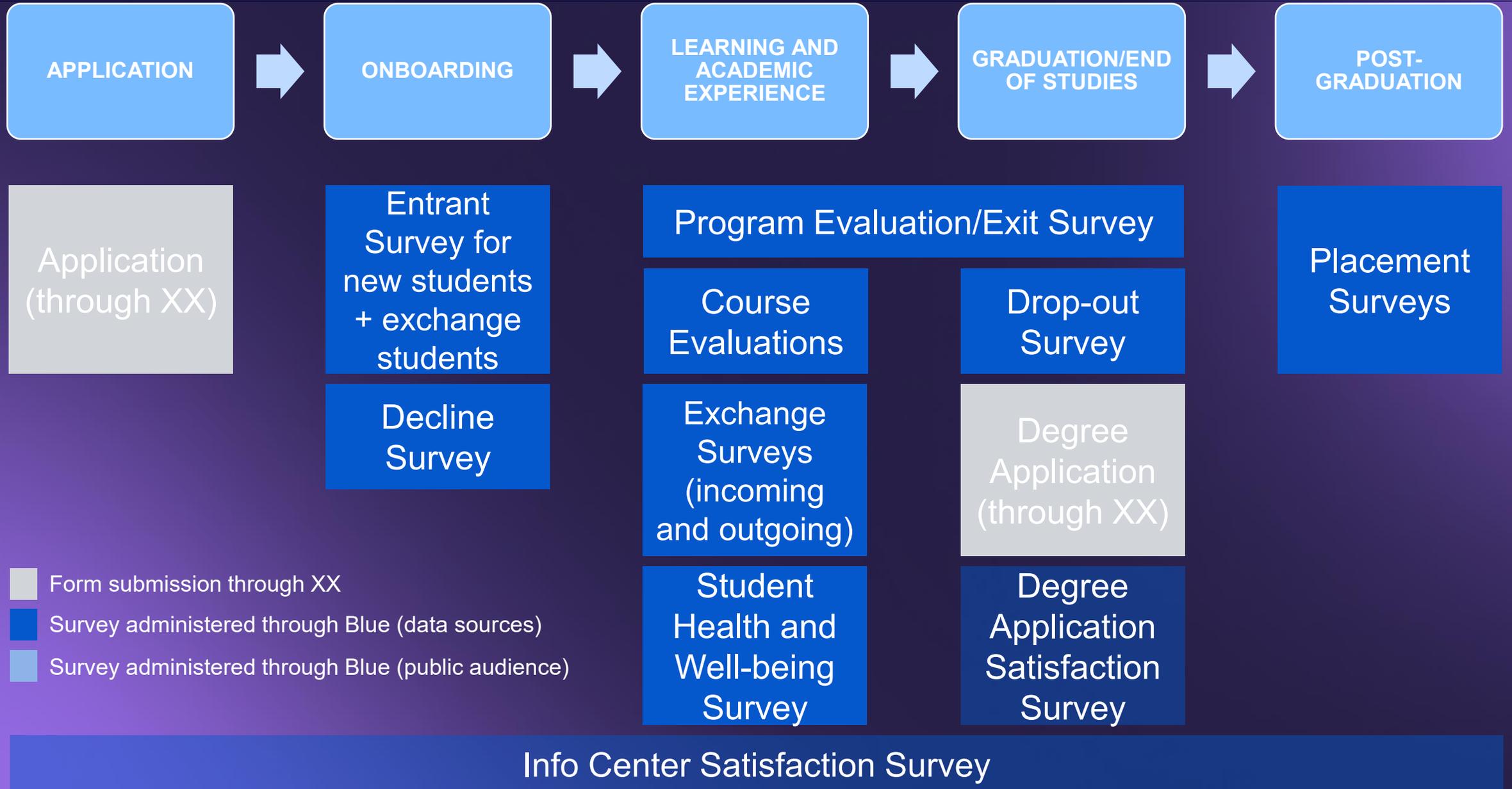
Explorance MLY™
AI-Powered Qualitative Analysis Solution



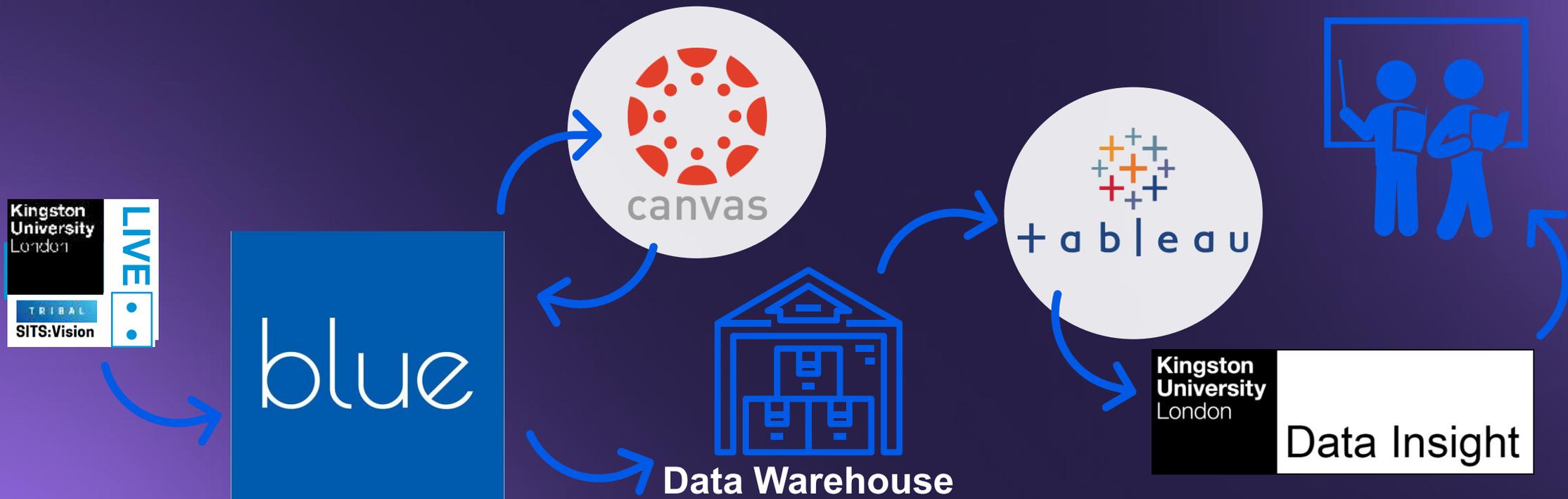
Explorance Mission



→ **STUDENT JOURNEY** →



Integration & Automation



Integrated in the Everyday

Blue Home

Centralised place where users can view all things related to Blue. Widget based screen with localised customisations.

LMS Integration

Pop-up reminders, course integration and course blocking for students. Survey management, reporting and live response rates for staff.

Email Notifications

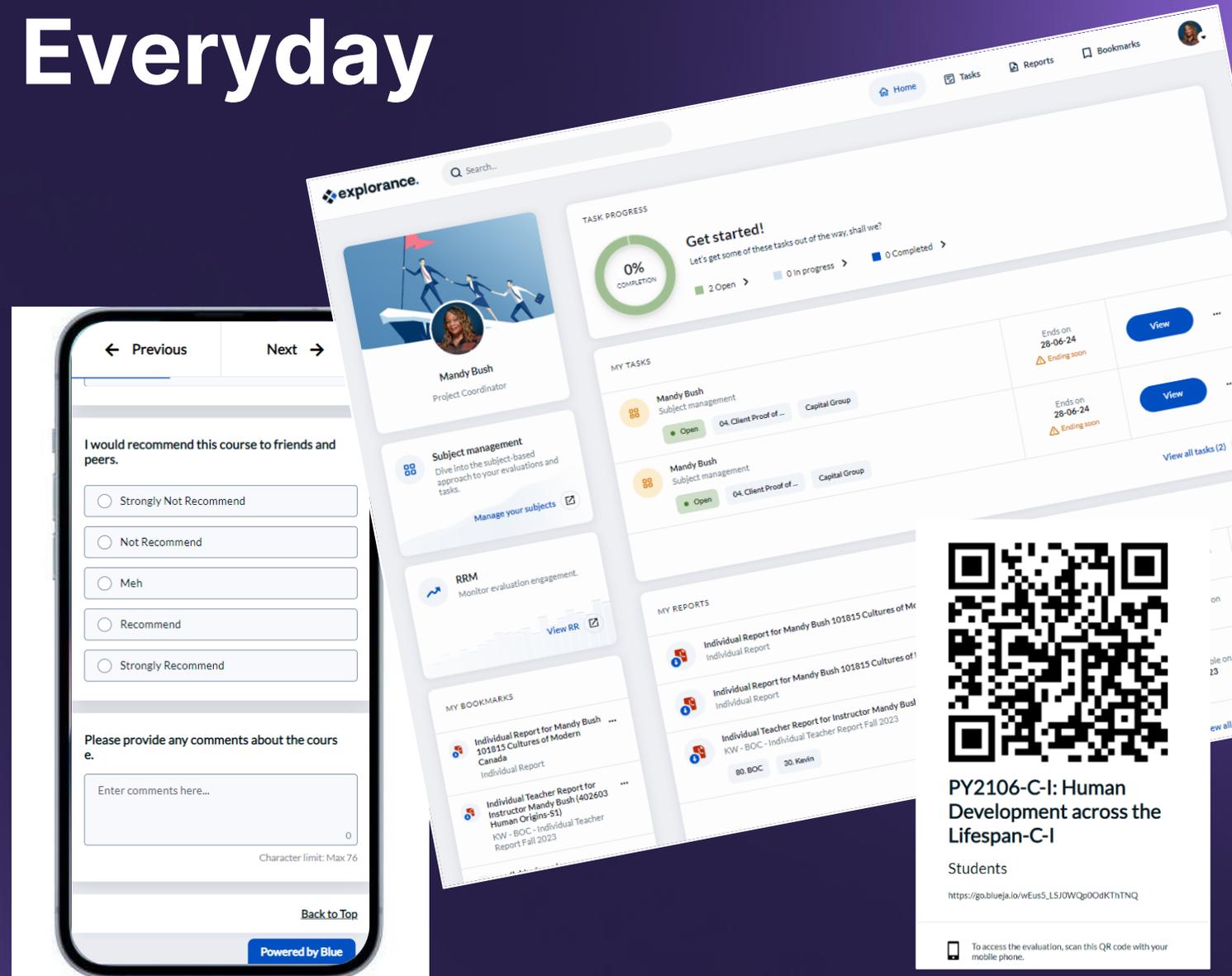
Fully personalized email invitations and email reminders. Emails automatically sent based on flexible schedule.

QR Codes

Easy access to surveys on any device for quick completion, including in class activity.

Mobile App Integration

Web service integration with a student facing mobile app, making surveys easily accessible and using mobile notifications.



PY2106-C-I: Human Development across the Lifespan-C-I

Students

https://go.blueja.io/w/Eus5_LSJ0WQp00dKThTNQ

To access the evaluation, scan this QR code with your mobile phone.

Powerful Institution-Wide Reporting and Analytics

Dynamic Access

Enable access to data and insights at all institutional levels using dynamic report access based on teaching roles and institutional hierarchy.

Smart Report Distribution

Create automated, scheduled, and customizable reports to automatically deliver tailored results for specific stakeholders.

Data Aggregation & Disaggregation

Slice and dice through results by using key student and institutional demographics.

Data Analysis

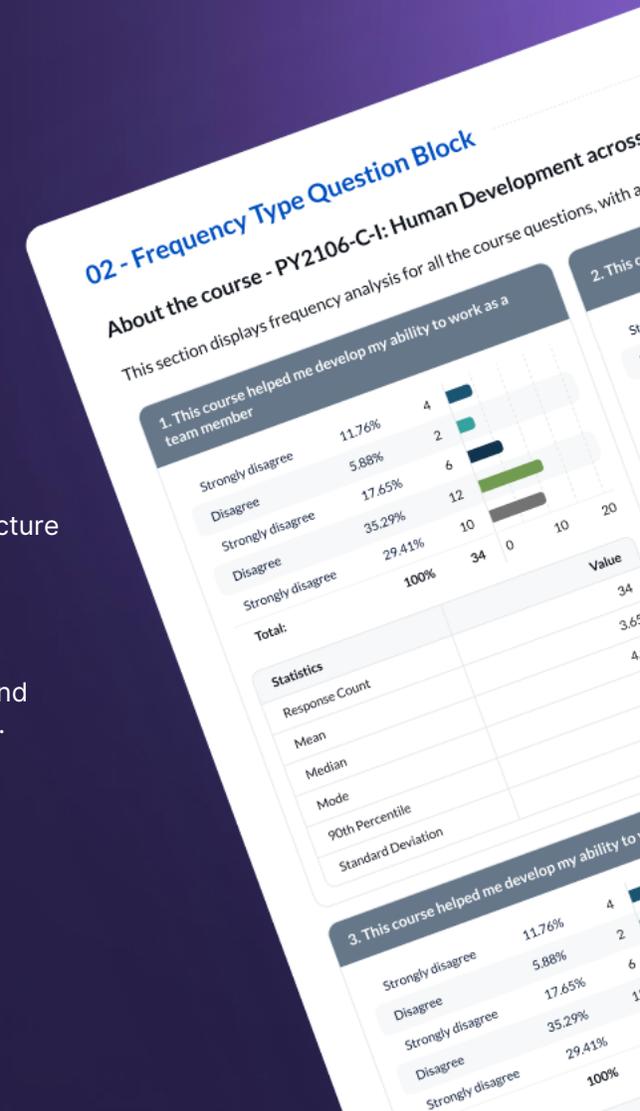
Benchmark survey results to perform cross-tabulation or time trend analysis and actively monitor the evolution of improvement.

Qualitative Analysis

Analyze qualitative feedback for a more complete picture of the student learning experience.

Personalization

Customize reports to include institutional branding and utilize diverse visual representations to present data.



Closing the Feedback Loop

Improved Student Engagement

When feedback is acknowledged and acted upon, students are more likely to feel valued and engaged in the learning process.

Enhanced Teaching Effectiveness

Teachers can identify areas for improvement based on student feedback and make necessary adjustments to their teaching methods, materials, or classroom activities.

Better Decision Making

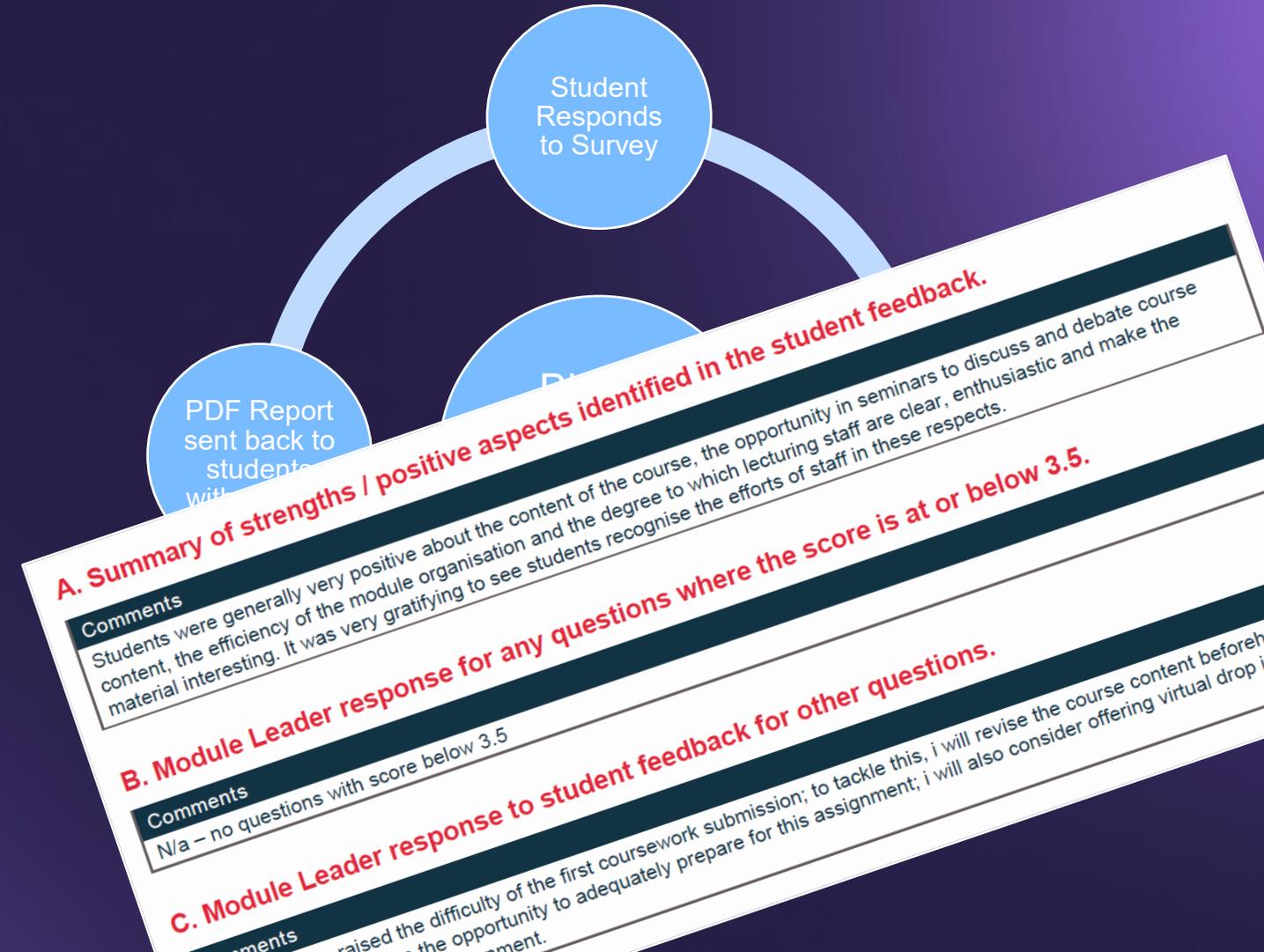
By making changes based on feedback results, institutions and departments can make more informed decisions teaching strategies.

Enhanced Learning Experience

Ensures that students' concerns and suggestions are considered, leading to improvements in the learning environment and course content.

Increased Student Satisfaction

When students see that their input leads to concrete changes, it boosts their satisfaction with the course or programme. This can also contribute to higher retention rates and more positive outcomes for educational institutions.



Blue Dashboard

Insight Discovery

Leverage dynamic and intuitive widgets for quick insight discovery from a summary view or drill-down for granular analysis.

Dynamic Access

Enable access to data and insights for all internal stakeholders through individual and aggregate-level dashboards.

Data Aggregation

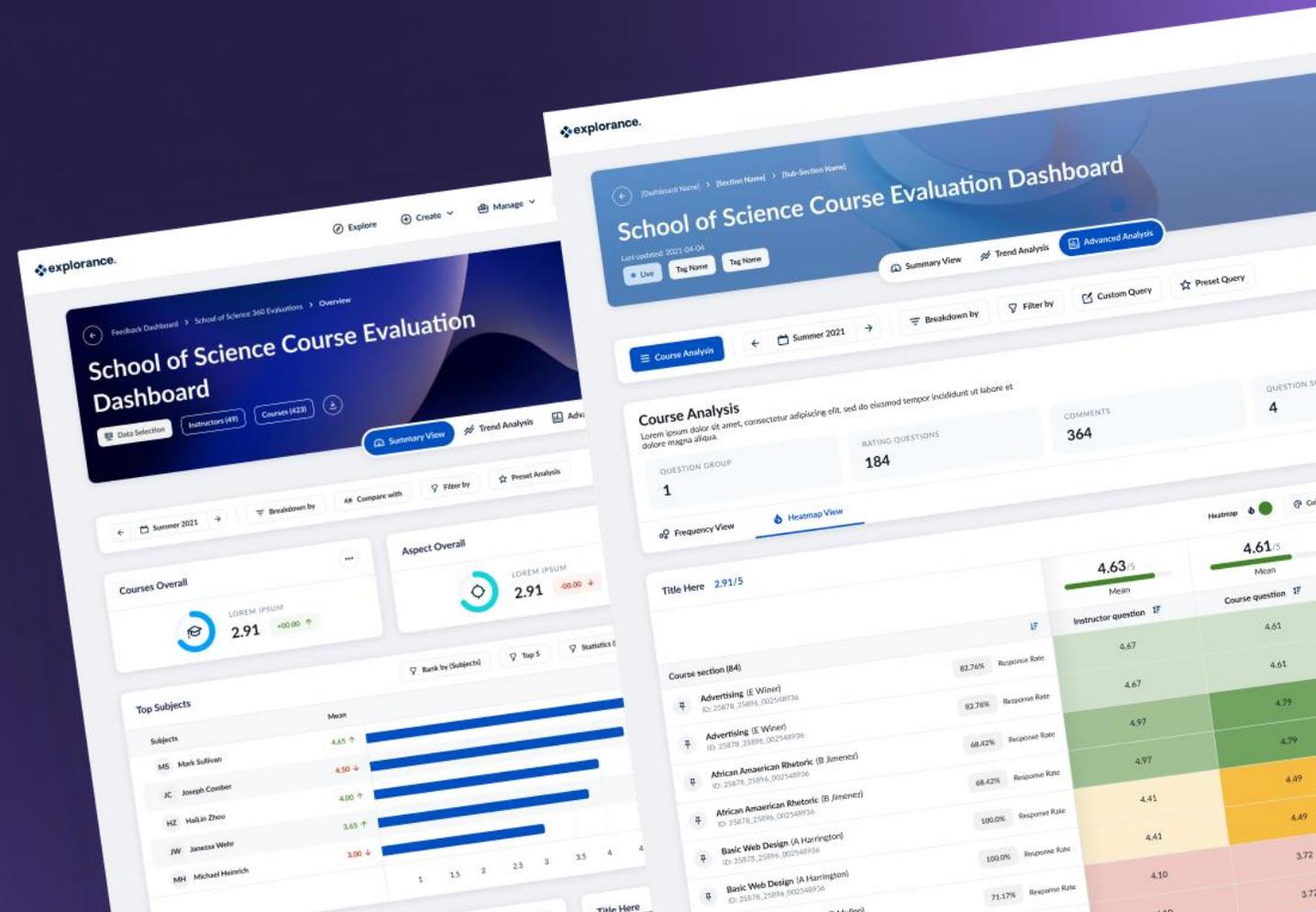
Streamline key student and institutional demographics from existing IT systems to slice and dice through evaluation results.

Time Trend Analysis

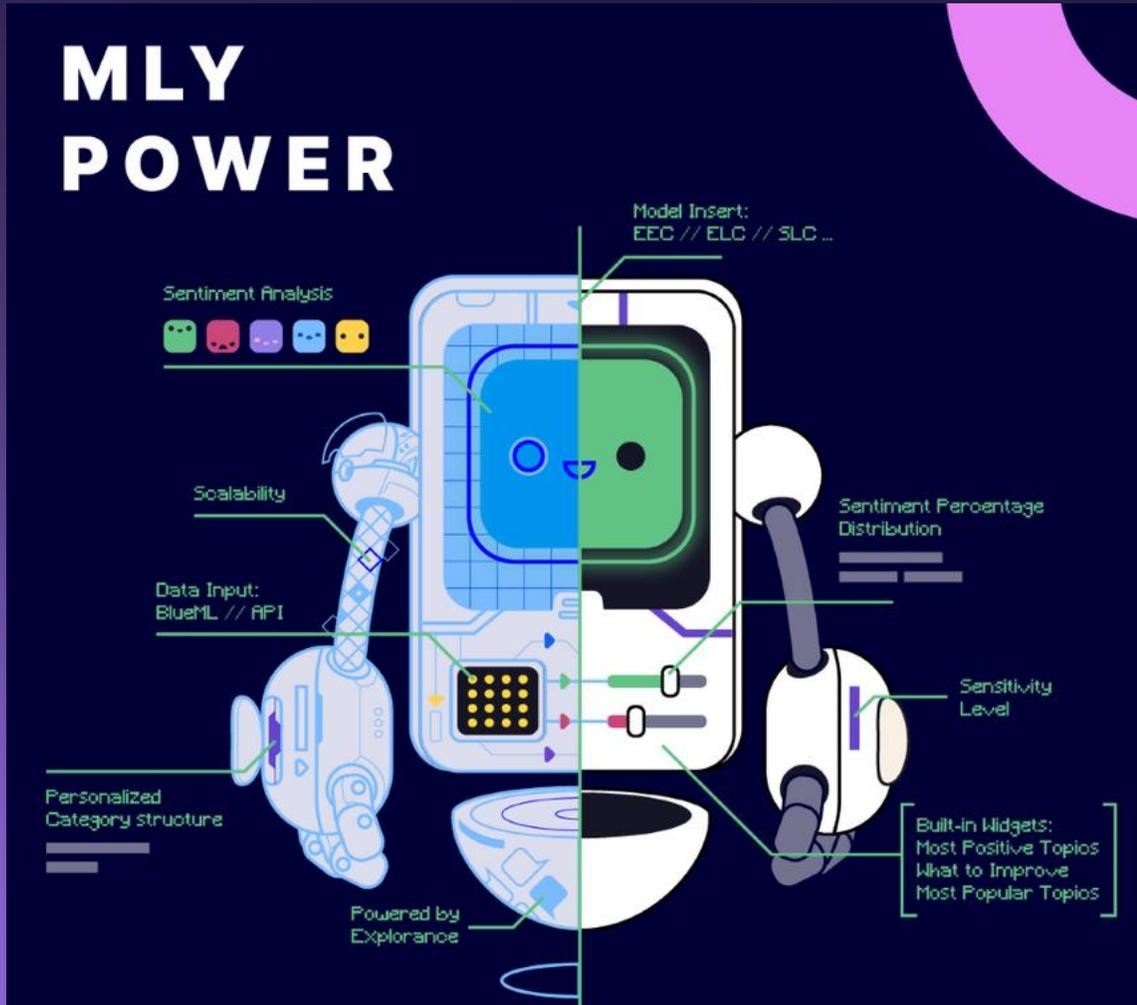
Perform time trend analysis across evaluation projects to gain valuable insights into the evolution of key metrics and program performance trends.

Data Visualization

Quickly identify areas of improvement with engaging data visualizations such as heat maps and scatter plots.



Get to Know AI



- Polarity/Sentiment Analysis
- Topic Categorisation
- Recommendations
- Alerts

Unlimited Model Variation

Summary Overview Widgets **Topic explorer** Comment explorer

Add filters Topics Sentiments Recommendations

Topics	Comments ↓	Insights	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Mixed	Not explicit	Sentiments
Comments on Staff	1175	2602	2100	486	0	0	16	80.71%
Learning Resources	985	1467	994	426	0	0	47	67.76%
Organisation and M...	439	728	405	290	0	0	33	55.63%
Assessment and Fee...	412	670	206	453	0	0	11	67.61%
Teaching on Course	221	253	156	91	0	0	6	61.66%
Student Wellbeing	108	108	0	108	0	0	0	100%
Mode of Learning	90	98	25	73	0	0	0	74.49%
Learning Opportunit...	20							
Total	2416							

National Student Survey

Course Evaluations

PTES/PRES

Institutional Topics

??? and teaching staff were always friendly and helpful. Clinical skills teaching and simulation were very good. It was good to have a lot of time to apply teaching to real life situations.

Comments on Staff • Persons • Professor/Instructor • Helpfulness & Support
 Comments on Staff • Persons • Professor/Instructor • Agreeableness/Approach
 Learning Resources • Practical Learning • Practical Aspects • General
 Comments on Staff • Persons • Professor/Instructor • Temperament
 Comments on Staff • Persons • Staff General • Helpfulness & Support
 Comments on Staff • Persons • Staff General • Temperament

6 0%

Case based learning. Early clinical exposure and placements from Year 1. Dissection. Opportunities to explore different parts of Wales on place supportive staff. Self-directed learning. This gave us more flexibility and a better work-life balance. Well-being days - 4 days a year of holiday less students on placement.

Organisation and Management • Administrative Elements • Services • Health/Wellbeing Service • Availability
 Organisation and Management • Administrative Elements • Services • Health/Wellbeing Service • Helpfulness & Support
 Comments on Staff • Persons • Advisors/Counselors • Helpfulness & Support
 Organisation and Management • Administrative Elements • Systems/Procedures • Helpfulness & Support
 Comments on Staff • Persons • Staff General • Helpfulness & Support
 Comments on Staff • Persons • Staff General • Temperament

6 0%

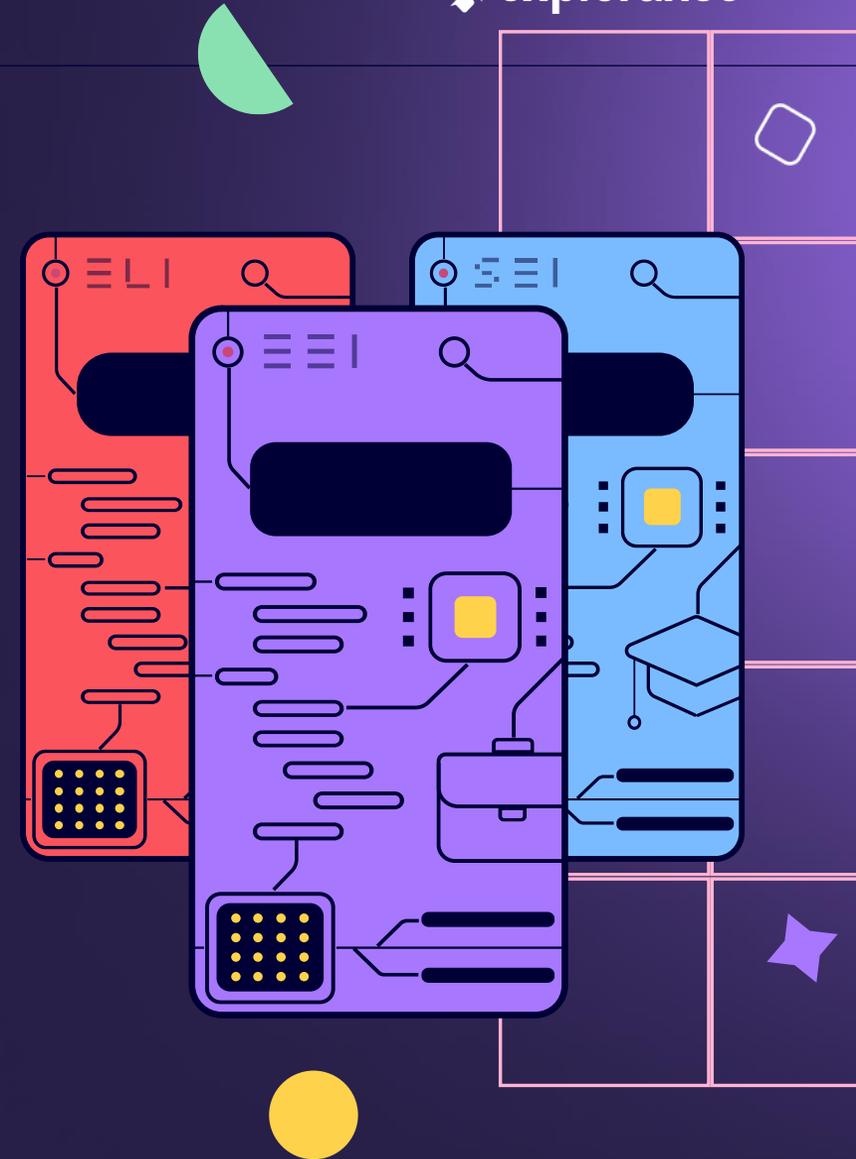
Staff are very approachable and friendly generally. Specifically, the clinical skills team is excellent. It is an aspect of my medical training I feel I have effective training and support, with excellent resources available (clinical skills lab) to practise my skills in my own time.

Organisation and Management • Administrative Elements • Services • Health/Wellbeing Service • Availability
 Organisation and Management • Administrative Elements • Services • Health/Wellbeing Service • Helpfulness & Support
 Learning Resources • Practical Learning • Labs • Helpfulness & Support
 Comments on Staff • Persons • Staff General • Quality
 Comments on Staff • Persons • Staff General • Helpfulness & Support
 Comments on Staff • Persons • Staff General • Temperament



Key Features

- ✓ **Swift Analysis**
- ✓ **Immediate Analysis Summary**
- ✓ **Graphical Executive Overview**
- ✓ **Widget Based Dashboard**
- ✓ **Automated Tagging/Coding**
- ✓ **Alert Detection and Scoring**
- ✓ **Redaction Engine**
- ✓ **Bulk Sharing with Control**
- ✓ **Embedded within Blue Reporting**



Utilising an LLM for Data Sharing

- ✓ Quick Summary of Data
- ✓ Full Model Coverage
- ✓ Personalised to Viewer
- ✓ Ideal for non-data experts
- ✓ Part of interactive dashboard
- ✓ No manual work required
- ✓ No unsightly spreadsheets

The screenshot displays the 'Student Learning Comments' dashboard. At the top, there are navigation tabs: Summary, Overview, Widgets, Topic Explorer, Comment Explorer, and Redaction Workspace. A 'Hello Chris!' greeting is followed by a 'Printable version' link. The main content area provides a summary of the analysis, highlighting a mix of valuable learning experiences and areas for improvement. Below this, there are three sections: 'Alerts', 'Recommendations', and 'Your strengths'. Each section includes a 'Most critical insights' header and a list of specific concerns or suggestions with brief descriptions.

Student Learning Comments

Summary Overview Widgets Topic Explorer Comment Explorer Redaction Workspace

Hello Chris! [Printable version](#)

Here is a summary of your analysis.

The feedback highlights a mix of valuable learning experiences and areas for improvement within the course structure. Many appreciate the diverse learning materials and the instructors' helpfulness, which greatly enhanced their understanding of research methodologies and engagement through forums. However, there are notable concerns regarding organization and communication. Students expressed frustration with outdated course materials, unclear assignment instructions, and a lack of timely feedback, which hindered their progress. Additionally, last-minute changes and insufficient communication about critical assessments created unnecessary stress. Overall, while the course offers a solid foundation, there's a clear call for improved organization and more transparent communication from instructors to enhance the learning experience.

Most critical insights Alerts

General Concern

The comments reveal a significant concern regarding the learning environment and teaching practices within the course, highlighting issues such as favoritism, lack of support, and inadequate communication from instructors. For example, students expressed frustration over professors being disrespectful or dismissive, with one comment specifically mentioning a lack of clear instructions and confusion caused by excessive assignments. Overall, the atmosphere described suggests a negative experience that hinders student success and engagement.

Inappropriate Language

The comments indicate a presence of inappropriate language through the expression of frustration and negativity in the second comment, which uses phrases like "they don't do shit" to convey disdain for campus navigation efforts. This showcases a overall positive sentiment surrounding other comments about the supportive nature of the

Mental Wellbeing

The comments suggest a significant concern regarding mental wellbeing, particularly amor. For instance, one comment highlights the need for increased empathy and understanding of struggles. Additionally, there is a call for institutional support measures, such as emotional associated with remote learning.

Most critical insights Recommendations

Do less

Expenses

The recommendations from the comments highlight a clear need for a reduction in tuition facing due to the pandemic. Several individuals have expressed that a decrease in fees would who are struggling during this time. Therefore, it's evident that implementing a tuition fee

Start

Administrative Elements > Financial Aid

The comments highlight a strong consensus on the need for enhanced financial support for include offering bursaries or vouchers to assist international students and those in need, as stress. Additionally, the suggestion to resume in-person classes once a week is seen as a wa through financial aid initiatives. Overall, we should focus on implementing these financial a

Start

Services > Availability

Key recommendations from the comments highlight the need for enhanced accessibility to strong call for the provision of necessary resources to facilitate quarantine effectively. Add accounts would significantly alleviate financial pressure on students who require frequent. strict safety measures is suggested to support well-being as people adjust after extended p to resume biometrics processing and for the opening of VFS offices, particularly for intern learning. Lastly, allowing travel to Canada for students who have been waiting since early 2

Most critical insights Areas for improvement

Remote Learning > Difficulty

To enhance the remote learning experience, we need to address the significant challenges highlighted by users. First and foremost, we should simplify the curriculum to make it more manageable compared to traditional classroom settings. Additionally, we must find ways to engage students more effectively to combat the difficulties of maintaining interest and motivation during online sessions. It's also crucial to provide robust support for both instructors and learners, as many find teaching and learning online to be particularly demanding. Overall, streamlining coursework, enhancing engagement strategies, and bolstering support systems will likely improve the remote learning experience for everyone involved.

Grading > Availability

To improve the situation regarding grading and availability, we need to address several key issues highlighted in the comments. First, there's a significant lack of communication about performance, with no grades posted for tests or assignments, leaving students unsure about their progress. We must prioritize timely grading for all submissions and ensure that rubrics and assignment details are clearly communicated. Additionally, the inconsistency in lesson postings and the instructor's sporadic attendance have created challenges in accessing necessary resources for preparation. It's crucial that we establish a more reliable system for sharing lesson materials and maintaining consistent engagement with students, including prompt responses to emails. Overall, enhancing communication and ensuring timely feedback will foster a more supportive learning environment.

Communication > Availability

To improve communication and availability, we need to prioritize consistent and proactive engagement from instructors. The lack of live classes and minimal communication about course details has left students feeling disconnected and confused. It's essential that we establish regular updates, clarify timelines, and provide detailed explanations alongside posted materials. Emphasizing the importance of live interactions can greatly enhance understanding and overall course effectiveness. Let's focus on ensuring that instructors are not only sharing resources but also actively participating in students' learning experiences.

Most critical insights Your strengths

Persons > Agreeableness / Approachability

The comments highlight several positive attributes related to agreeableness and approachability. The individuals mentioned are consistently described as friendly and enthusiastic, fostering an environment where questions are welcomed and clarified, which minimizes confusion. Their helpful nature is emphasized, particularly in providing constructive criticism and thorough explanations, ensuring that everyone understands the material. Additionally, their ability to connect with others, especially students, further enhances their approachability and effectiveness in communication. Overall, these qualities not only contribute to a positive atmosphere but also facilitate learning and collaboration.

Hybrid Learning

Hybrid learning has proven to offer several positive outcomes, particularly through the effectiveness of instructors. Many participants highlighted the exceptional organizational skills and accessibility of their online instructors, which made the courses easier to navigate. Interactive elements, like group activities and real-time feedback, fostered a sense of community among students, enhancing the overall learning experience. Even while some expressed a preference for in-person interaction, they still found online formats engaging and enjoyable, showcasing the adaptability of instructors in delivering content effectively. These insights emphasize that with the right approach, hybrid learning can provide a supportive and enriching educational environment.

Persons > Quality

Heriot-Watt Case Study

Manual Processing Time

MLY Processing Time

Survey	Number of Students	Number of Responses	Response Rate	Number of Comments	Manual Processing Time			MLY
					Time to code 1 Comment (approx.)	Total Minutes	Total Hours	
Early Experience Survey	18,459	3,822	21%	4,065	15 Seconds	1,016	17	30 mins
PTES	5,877	981	16%	2,386	15 Seconds	597	10	30 mins
NSS	1,621	1,123	69%	1,687	15 Seconds	1,687	28	30 mins
PRES	1,033	342	33%	1,296	15 Seconds	422	7	30 mins
Annual Student Survey	9,560	1,484	16%	551	15 Seconds	138	3	30 mins
Course Experience Survey Sem 1	15,487	3,393	22%	11,680	15 Seconds	2,920	49	30 mins
Course Experience Survey Sem 2	15,208	2,286	15%	5,881	15 Seconds	1,470	25	30 mins
Mid Semester Check In 1	15,487	4,516	29%	11,857	15 Seconds	2,964	50	30 mins
Mid Semester Check In 2	15,208	3,814	25%	8,690	15 seconds	2,173	36	30 mins
TOTAL				48,093		13,387	225	4.5 hours

Explorance MLY Software has reduced the time required to process comments from 225 hours to just 4.5 hours. This represents a staggering 98% reduction in processing time, allowing us to allocate resources more efficiently and focus on higher-value tasks.

Kingston Case Study

- Qualitative course evaluation analysis for the first time ever
- Able to provide qualitative insight in top-level reports

Before MLY

Never*

With MLY

**15-20
minutes**

Why Explorance?

Strategic Partnership

University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland



Student Centric Experience

Durham University



Strategy: 12 Big Moment Surveys

Universidad Internacional de Valencia



Student Voice Strategy

Cardiff University



Closing the Loop Enhancement

University of Worcester



Measure and Track Crucial Educational Gains

Explorance



Survey Standardisation

University of Sheffield



One System, One Strategy

University College Absalon



Student Voices Are Driving Forward The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Explorance



Any Questions?

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