How University of Gloucestershire are using learning analytics

Moderator

Welcome to the Jisc podcast. Jisc’s effective learning analytics project is building a national service for further and higher education organisations to help them understand and analyse their student data in order to deliver more personalised learning experiences that maximise their attainment potential. University of Gloucestershire is one of the institutions involved in the pilot and will shortly implement the student app. Here we speak to Dr Nick Moore, director of IT service for the university, about the drivers for learning analytics and working with Jisc.

Dr Moore

I’m Dr Nicholas Moore. I am director of IT services at the University of Gloucestershire. I've been there for about two years.

Interviewer

Can you tell me about your interest in learning analytics, particularly where you see the potential in using it at the university?

Dr Moore

So I guess just like all universities we collect a whole load of data just by virtue of how students interact with the various systems. There's an awful lot of potential for that data to play back to the students in terms of how well they're doing or how good their experience is that's actually very hard to do just by surveying or observing so the data is really important in terms of being able to answer those kinds of questions and it's a technical problem so therefore as an IT director it's an interesting area to be involved in.

Interviewer

So are you currently using learning analytics in any of your practices?
Dr Moore  No, not at the moment. I mean we have a lot of information and data that we use as part of business intelligence and that. But in terms of the learning analytics, in terms of capturing lots of raw data and doing algorithmic work upon it, no. That's the whole point of working with Jisc is to understand what we could be doing and to get better at being able to use that. Some of the early adopters as part of Jisc process, we have done a readiness assessment through the Jisc process and we will be piloting learning analytics with some of the schools in the university come September. So we're not going to go for everyone at the start but I think that way we'll learn how to get best out of the data and what you learn from it and I guess how do you use it to best effect.

Interviewer  So it's looking at those learning experiences initially rather than perhaps retention. Is that an issue do you feel?

Dr Moore  We've had that discussion. The university itself doesn't have a huge retention problem in terms of benchmarking with other universities. We would seek to understand and use it for the student experience but also to improve teaching of the courses. I think one of the things that the University of Gloucestershire looks at is the personal experience of getting to know its individual students. So learning analytics, where you're using data to provide a view to an individual student, is quite consistent with that kind of view.

Interviewer  The group that you're piloting it with first off. Is that just a small group within a particular discipline?

Dr Moore  It's three schools: business school, health and social care and education. We haven't quite agreed exactly which groups but we'll probably try and limit it to full-time undergraduates. We're not doing too many different sorts of students or student experience in one go, probably about half a dozen courses.

Interviewer  And you mentioned that the Jisc pilot is your first foray into learning analytics?

Dr Moore  I think the great thing about working with Jisc... learning analytics is not a mature subject. It's not something that everyone has an answer to and Jisc are helping the sector explore and put in place solutions that work for the sector. So instead of just going to a company and buying a solution, I'm going to a bunch of experts who know about education and who are trying to develop something that is of benefit to the sector and are interested in a two way process of learning. So we will learn stuff and I
know that the Jisc folk are interested in that and take that on board. I'm not engaging with a bunch of people who are just trying to sell me something, they are actually trying to work on this as a solution that will work for me. And we're a relatively small IT department, there's a lot of experience that Jisc has that therefore I can tap into in terms of the way to manage the data and the way to build the system so it's a very positive experience.

Interviewer

Next sector we sort of talked about a little bit already - piloting with those groups of students. I guess it's then working with the ILT teams and just making sure the learning analytics, as you say, supports those personal journeys?

Dr Moore

That's right. It'll be live in September and as we go through the next academic year we'll look at how to present the data best to students, how to present the data best to the personal tutors with a view, assuming it's successful, to then roll that out to more and more of the schools and other types of courses.