Learning analytics update at Digifest 2017

You’re listening to the Jisc podcast. Institutions are bringing this data together into a central database and not just using it for learning analytics but they’re also very keen to make that data accessible and available for students to see. One of the key things at Digifest is learning analytics. We caught up with Rob Wyn Jones, our senior data and analytics integrator who explains more.

Learning analytics really is the collection of various student data into a central database as we call it within Jisk, into our learning records warehouse, where that data is collected on a live daily basis and is used to eventually predict when a student is either at risk of failure of a specific module or qualification; to predict whether they are indeed at risk of failure or attaining certain grades or achievement within their studies.

The information is important to HE Institutions because it really does allow them not just to perform learning analytics as I said earlier, in terms of predicting or providing early alerts to a student at risk of attainment or at risk of failure, the data is also useful from what we call a descriptive analytics point of view. They can actually analyse and correlate engagement and different sources of engagement, and looking at patterns there visually to see what are their students’ performance versus their engagement based on a VLE, based on their
attendance, based on their attendance at a library and any other sources of engagement as well so for example, when they lock onto the wifi signal institution as well.

I think having that information collected into one central place on a live basis is really important from an analysis point of view, but I think another real benefit is bringing it all together for predictive modelling is something at the moment institutions just don’t have in the UK.

I think what we’ve seen so far in our pilot project at Jisc is the fact that institutions are bringing this data together into a central database and not just using it for learning analytics but they are also very keen to make that data accessible and available for students to see.

I think having that kind of mode of communication around attendance data, around engagement and how it correlates to their academic performance as mentioned earlier is really important and I think giving them that awareness, whether they are at risk of failure or attainment or not, making that data purely accessible is very important. I think the one thing we found on the learning analytics project so far is also providing that information through an app, through our study goal app at the moment, is certainly making them think about their engagement, making them think about their performance versus engagement and actually giving them effectively a bit of a helping hand and essentially an electronic coaching experience as well. One thing is giving them the information, but the mechanism for giving out that information using an app is some kind of coaching, and that is starting to reap some dividends.

I think ultimately as per the current climate within higher education, it’s very important for institutions to realise in terms of sustainability moving forward the learning analytics is there not just to increase or enhance the student experience, in terms of the retaining students and making sure that high or better grades are achieved, but when you think about it, when a student drops out from an institution that results in obviously a loss of time and obviously investment for the student, but also a loss of time and investment on behalf of the institution. I think some of our figures have already started to show that very small in-roads and enhancements in student retention can result in significant cost savings for those institutions way above how much investment they would require to put into implement learning analytics across the board.

Learning analytics is really gathering pace now, in Jisc we have 20 firm learning analytics pilot implements going on at this point in time in March 2017. The way we hope it will shape up is that we will continue to develop our architecture, which is vendor and solution agnostic, the aim and where we see the future of LA with regards to the HE in this country is we hope that the learning records warehouse will be a catalyst for service suppliers more cost effective healthy competition in and between those suppliers to provide the best and most significant solutions to provide the benefits and to pride those retentions and those quality of degrees and student learning that it certainly promises to be from the work done in Australia and the U.S. The key is having an architecture there that is flexible and will allow our vendors and other vendors to join up and provide those solutions.
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