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INDUSTRY WEEKLY DIGEST

YOUR WEEKLY DIGEST OF CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRY TRENDS



ABSENTEEISM AND STUDENT WELLBEING

Are they connected?

Poor mental health in university students is on the increase and universities are under pressure to do more to take care of student wellbeing. This article illustrates how attendance monitoring can be used as an early warning system to identify students that may be struggling to cope.

In this digest, Dr Emma Delaney, Senior Personal Tutor for the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management explains the roots of the schools attendance policy, how it operates and now, looking back one year on, reviews the multiple benefits that have been derived from it to date. A learning and teaching grant enabled Emma and her colleagues to explore staff and student attitudes to the attendance policy, which was overwhelmingly positive and encouraged the School to continue to monitor attendance.

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EFFECTIVELY MONITORING STUDENT WELLBEING THROUGH ATTENDANCE

Dr Emma Delaney

The growing evidence of above average levels of poor wellbeing in students in HE across the globe has been referred to as an international crisis and in 2023, the number of students declaring a health condition (physical or mental) on entering university climbed to around 45% (Maxwell et al, 2023). Poor health can result in students missing classes which in turn can lead to them failing to fulfil their academic potential, dropping out, or even committing suicide. Monitoring the attendance of students, as a form of learning analytics, is a way of collecting data on student behaviour that can act as an early warning mechanism for potential wellbeing issues and may be a strong indication that a student is experiencing problems and is struggling to cope.

The School of Hospitality and Tourism Management introduced a mandated student attendance policy in the 2022/23 academic year for all undergraduate and taught postgraduate students. Students who are absent for 3 or more timetabled sessions are referred to the School's Senior Personal Tutor (SPT) for a wellbeing check.

Although the policy was created largely due to staff dissatisfaction with poor attendance (leading to a reluctance to organise trips and guest lectures and issues with groupwork and group assessments), it has proved to be an effective way to monitor student wellbeing.

Dr Emma Delaney, the School's SPT, confirms that a high percentage of absent students that are referred to her, have been struggling with their mental health. This has led to some students being referred to their GP, to the Centre for Wellbeing or to another professional support body on or off campus. Emma adds 'our attendance policy, is certainly having a positive impact on our staff and students. Not only are we signalling to students how important it is to attend classes, but we are using it to quickly spot students who are struggling so that we can put support in place to help them succeed'.

Maxwell, R., Draper, M., & Morris, I. (2023) Current challenges in personal tutoring and the role of data as part of the solution. Roundtable discussion UK Advising and Tutoring (UKAT) Annual Conference 2023, Swansea University, UK.