# CELCAT
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# Case Study

## Attendance Monitoring

## Bolton University

Bolton University was among the first HEIs to adopt CELCAT Timetabler Attendance Read more about how this university has benefited from using CELCAT's attendance tracking applications.

# Introduction

Bolton University was one of the first HEIs in the United Kingdom to implement student attendance monitoring for all students. This case study highlights how the university deployed the CELCAT Timetabler Attendance applications and focuses on the resulting benefits.

# Background

The University of Bolton came into existence in January 2005 when the Privy Council designated Bolton Institute of Higher Education a University. Although the university has existed for a short period of time compared to some, it has a rich history in education. It origins can be traced back over 150 years, to the founding of the Bolton Mechanics Institute in 1824.

Since 2005 student numbers have grown to around 13,000 including franchise and overseas students taught off campus. The university has invested £20 million in campus and student facilities and now operates in 7 countries employing 700 academic and professional staff.

Bolton University makes a £50 million contribution to the economy of Bolton and the North West, offering educational opportunity and advancement to individuals and organisations.

# Facts and Figures

**Students:**  circa 13,000

**Modules:**  1,725

**Programmes:**  circa 250 on campus programmes
(Timetabled in CELCAT Timetabler)

**Campus:**  Town centre single site

**Teaching Staff:**  circa 350

**Teaching Rooms:**  circa 125 booked centrally

**CELCAT Applications:**  Timetabler, Attendance, Web Publisher, Notification Service

# Attendance Monitoring Project

## Summary

The proposal to implement a student attendance tracking system was approved by the university's executive in June 2007. Backing was sought and received from the teaching unions. CELCAT Timetabler Attendance was installed as a pilot scheme and commenced operation at the start of the 07/08 academic year.

Initially the purpose of the project was to improve retention rates by quickly identifying students missing classes and at that point make an intervention before the student withdrew from the course. To support interventions a number of Student Liaison Officers (SLOs) were appointed, one to each school. The SLOs reported directly to the Director of Learning, Retention and Professional Practice.

To assist SLOs in carrying out their duties, a number of reports were developed. Running these reports daily helped to identify any 'at risk' students.

Toward the end of the 08/09 academic year, the UK Border Agency Tier 4 regulations were published and the university started to explore whether Attendance could help meet the obligations set by Tier 4 legislation. Initial investigation proved favourable and as it was the incumbent system, the decision was taken to use Attendance for UKBA reporting requirements.

The attendance monitoring project went live across the whole university at the start of 09/10 academic year. Staff could mark registers in the teaching room using Windows or Web applications or with Card Reader. Allowance was made for taking a paper register and updating the system within a 48 hour period of the class taking place.
Within a month or so, an 80% compliance figure was achieved despite some initial challenges with training and confidence building. Interestingly, the compliance figure hadn't improved by the end of Semester 1 so bespoke reports were generated to quickly identify staff not marking registers completely. This information was sent to the Dean on a weekly basis. Additionally, CELCAT Notification service was introduced to send automatic emails to absent students in a gentle 'missed you' manner. Teaching staff also received a reminder email if a register was more than 48 hours overdue, with a further email going to line managers after 72 hours. By the fourth week of Semester 2, the compliance rate had reached 95%.

# The Impact

- The introduction of attendance monitoring at Bolton has served to improve processes for example enrolling students onto the correct modules quickly.

- The project stimulated debate over a number of issues connected with timetabling and teaching such as semesterisation and the length of teaching slots.

- Student satisfaction was improved. According to the National Student Survey (NSS) satisfaction peaked at 61% the highest for 5 years against a national average of 63%.

- A more uniform approach to managing students not appearing on registers. The University's attendance policy requires the student be directed to the school office where they can be advised and assisted to rectify the situation. Exclusions form registers often occur when the student hasn't been enrolled correctly, has not selected modules for the current academic year or is in debt.

- Timely identification of students attending but not yet enrolled has improved the quality of data returns to Funding Councils and charging of tuition fees.

- Financial standing of the university through improved student retention and completion.

- Bolton look forward to accessing and confirming the correlation between attendance, retention and success. This will be done by randomly sampling graduates from all schools, comparing their attendance data against their degree classification.

# The Benefits

- Improved awareness and understanding of the procedures necessary for accurate attendance tracking.

- A reduction in the time taken withdrawing students, from 1 week to less than 24 hours.

- Measure and report on actual space utilisation. Compare planned utilisation (the timetabled event) against actual utilisation (the marked register). Key management information can be supplied in real time. A financial saving of £4,000 per annum as room audits are no longer required.

- Improved compliance. Over 95% of registers fully marked.

- Greater transparency. Academic staff and tutors have access to timetables and registers to investigate student attendance patterns.

- Increased student satisfaction through improved timetabling processes. The call for accurate timetable data to drive accurate registers has increased timetable accuracy and reduced timetable changes.

# Improved Management Reporting

As mentioned earlier, the University has striven to develop reports for all staff. This has been achieved using SQL Server Reporting Services (SSRS). As a result of the high compliance rates data is available to report on giving a transparent view of activity throughout the whole organisation. Reports include:

- Class marks by category (absent, cancelled, etc.)

- Space utilisation comparing planned and actual

- Unmarked registers report

- International students flagged where their attendance falls outside of stipulated criteria.

# Future Plans

The University intends to review the use of CELCAT's new offline marking application for its potential in tracking the attendance patterns of postgraduate research students. The number of reports will be increased with an emphasis on tailoring to the needs of individual senior managers. Possible expansion of the project may be seen in tracking the submission of student assignments

*" CELCAT Timetabler Attendance forms an integral part of our attendance process and is key to the successful implementation of the university's attendance policy. "*

*- Andy Dale*

**Andy Dale, Systems & Process Development Manager**

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