

Middlesex University Promotes Student Wellbeing with campusM Quick Polls

Concerns about students' mental health during lockdowns prompted Middlesex student engagement and wellbeing teams to launch a monthly survey to assess and support student mental health.

Executive Summary

Middlesex University uses frequent surveys to capture student attitudes to its policies and activities. In recent years, the University has stepped up its focus on mental health but there was concern about survey fatigue and that students might opt out of long forms.

The University's student engagement and wellbeing teams believed a less formal survey that gave students more clarity about how their information is used would be more effective. Leveraging the institution's campusM mobile app Quick Poll feature, a cross-departmental task force created a single-question wellbeing survey. This monthly survey enabled students to easily give feedback and get immediate value from their input.

Key Takeaways

- About 700 students participate in the wellbeing survey on a monthly basis.
- Automation of survey data capture empowers wellness representatives to identify and reach students in need without waiting for IT intervention.
- A response text based on survey submissions removes barriers to professional help by linking students to various health opportunities and support services in the same moment that students identify a need.
- Creating the survey facilitated tighter collaboration between Student Engagement, Student Wellbeing, the University's Psychology Department and the Students' Union on student mental health.
- Polls led to an increased awareness of available support, higher engagement rates compared to other student communications channels and students being more likely to trust that mental health is important to the University

About Middlesex University

More than 44,000 students study with us globally at our London, Dubai and Mauritius campuses, and our London campus hosts students from 165 and staff from over 75 different nationalities. With a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, we are passionate about providing innovative, flexible and highly accessible practice-led education. We focus on teaching, research and engagement to tackle global issues such as gender inequality, climate change, and achieving peaceful societies and economic growth. In 2021 we were placed in the top 200 universities around the world which are working hard to tackle these issues (THE Impact Rankings 2021).

The Challenges

With the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and the changing nature of learning on and off campus, Middlesex University wanted to be able to consistently check in with their students about their mental health and to offer support. While surveys had been a go-to method for gaining insight into student opinion, there was a concern about survey fatigue.

“We needed something short and simple,” says David Gilani, Head of Student Engagement and Advocacy at Middlesex University. “We have a

variety of methods of working in partnership with students, but recognised that during the pandemic we needed something that asked very little from students and gave them a clear benefit.”

As the University went in and out of lockdowns and the uncertainty persisted about what the next iteration of the student experience would look like, the need for a simplified mental health survey became more pressing.

The Solution

To make mental health surveys more accessible and engaging, Gilani and colleagues decided to make use of their institution's **campusM mobile app Quick Poll** feature.

How do campusM Quick Polls work?

1. Admins generate a single question multiple choice poll for a targeted audience. Polls can be configured to set up to go out automatically on a monthly basis.
2. Students within that audience receive a push notification that they have a new poll in their Quick Poll inbox.
3. Students respond to the Quick Poll.
4. Leveraging the data:
 - a. The response is recorded in the cloud. The data is extractable in real-time through APIs who? or the campusM App Manager.
 - b. Students receive an automatic response based on what they answered. Students can review their responses and the automated responses within the Quick Poll inbox.
 - c. Admins can configure automatic changes to the user experience based on students' response. For example, students that chose one answer may see new tiles after they've finished with the poll, or they may be assigned to a new app notification group based on their response*.

* Middlesex University uses all three options of leveraging Quick Poll data

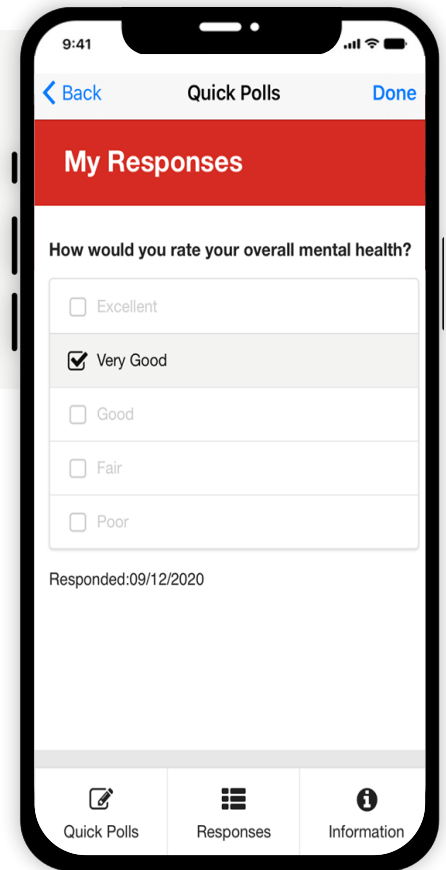
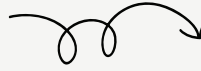
In this case, the teams involved wanted the poll to feature a recurring question and multiple-choice answers about students' mental health. To create the best possible question and answers that would elicit responses from students and help them accurately report their feelings, Gilani and the wellbeing team consulted the University's Psychology Department.

“We did some work with the academics within the Psychology Department around standardized questions for evaluating mental health and wellbeing,” explains Gilani. “From a research and reliability perspective 7 or 8 questions would have been ideal. But we wanted to make it easier for students to answer the survey and increase the likelihood that they'll engage with the question.”

The Psychology Department suggested the following question / answer format, which app admins have been deploying monthly since December 2020:

How would you rate your overall mental health?

1. Excellent
2. Very Good
3. Good
4. Fair
5. Poor



"The campusM App Manager makes it really easy to set up this type of survey and run with it," says Gilani. "If we were doing this as a homegrown project it could have taken half a year to set this up, and we would lose valuable data."

From the beginning of this project, the University teams involved students' union representatives. Recognizing that the students' union needed to be an involved partner in discussions about student mental health, students' union representatives have helped keep the project team in tune with broader aspects of the student experience.

Results

Approximately 700 students take the mental health survey monthly, without any prompting beyond an app push notification to let students know that a new poll is available. For university administrators, the access to monthly wellness data has been a game changer:

"It's been incredibly useful to have the ability to track and measure how students are feeling each month, and knowing this data is specific to MDX," says Rachael Wall, Head of Membership Services at Middlesex University Students' Union. "This feature has enabled us to collect short term data every month, and gives us the ability to build this up over time to create a longer-term picture of student mental health at Middlesex. This in turn will be useful in identifying why students feel the way they do, and implement measures to help improve mental health amongst the student population."

Data and insights captured from Quick Poll have helped put the right information and support services in students' hands the right moment as well as identify broader mental health issues on campus. However, the automated responses to student survey submissions are doing some of the outreach work for wellbeing staff.



9% of poll users took some form of follow-up action, which is slightly higher than is seen through other communications. This finding corresponds to an additional 225 students seeking mental health support in the first year of the polls being utilized.

"The ability to provide bespoke replies to students based on the response that they give has been powerful," shares Vanessa White, Student Wellbeing Coordinator at Middlesex University. "Students want to feel heard and by giving them bespoke replies, we can help our students to feel listened to and to give them the right information that they need at the right

time. As a staff member in Student Support and Wellbeing, it's reassuring to be able to craft these replies knowing that students will be receiving important health and wellbeing information in a novel easily accessible format at a time when we know that engagement with other areas of communication are waning."

Follow-up evaluation

To better understand how taking part in the polls has supported students' mental health, Middlesex University conducted a set of twin surveys: 258 students who had taken part in at least one poll and an additional 156 students who hadn't completed any of the polls participated in a follow-up survey about mental health. This helped the project team learn more about what had made the poll guidance useful and how to improve it in the future.

Students who took part in the polls responded more positively than the control group when asked about whether they knew how to access support and whether they perceived mental health as important to the University. The more times that a student took part in the polls over the previous year, the more likely they were to believe that student mental health is important to the University.

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