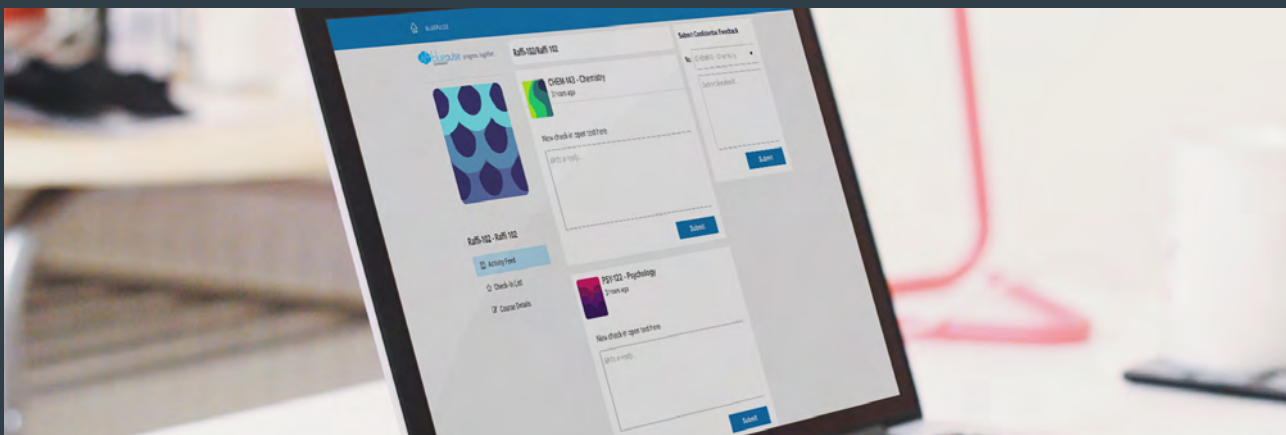


READING YOUR MODULE'S PULSE WITH **BLUEPULSE 2** – THE TOOL TO CAPTURE ANONYMOUS STUDENT FEEDBACK



How are your students coping? What's the best way to find out?

In academic session 16/17 term 1, 6 module leaders and staff studying as students on the PGCert in Higher Education Teaching programme have participated in a trial using Bluepulse, a software platform designed to give students the opportunity to respond anonymously to questions regarding module content, administration and facilities; in addition students have 160 characters each day to ask any question or make a comment. The idea is that students will be able to give teaching staff feedback as they study their modules rather than waiting for a module questionnaire. Of course students can always speak to staff directly or e-mail them but students may be shy or think their question will make them look stupid, although we all know . . . there is no such thing as a stupid question.

We've learned a lot about how to introduce the tool and use it effectively and have reached out to Dr R Parrish Waters from University of Mary Washington for some ideas as he has been using Bluepulse with his students for over a year. Abertay staff have also provided tips on how they have used the tool.

Here are the Top Tips for a successful implementation

Make sure its appropriate for your module.

If you have a small cohort where you know communication won't be a problem and your students are happy to talk to you and engage in discussion in class, Bluepulse probably isn't needed. However, staff have reported it is sometimes difficult to get students to say they don't understand content or articulate other problems. Think back to when you were a student, were you really comfortable speaking out in a lecture in front of your peers? Really? Bluepulse allows your students to voice any questions or problems without fear of embarrassment.

Know what you want to achieve

Dr Natalie Coull wanted to keep in touch with her large class of 169 students who she only saw in lectures; tutorials are run by Post Graduate Researchers. She asked questions via Bluepulse to gauge prior knowledge of the topic, the pace of the module and some content questions to help her to identify the topics students struggled with allowing her to provide targeted additional resources.



Dr Parrish Waters uses it to empower his students to give them control over the pace and content of the module. He has questions that he asks every week regarding engagement/ accessibility and following any high stake assessment he will ask students how fair they found the test, bearing in mind the materials provided. If he finds that he is getting negative feedback on the perceived accessibility of material because students are finding it too difficult, he tends to slow down and provide a review session.

Understand the software

Ensure you know how the software works. When you respond to students only the group of students answering a poll question saying "I'm really struggling" will see your response. Parrish says if you feel that the whole class has a problem because you've received a few comments on the same topic, take it back to the class and say "10 of you have indicated you have a problem with topic . . . so that probably means about half the class has the same problem, let's go over it and here are some extra resources."

How to introduce Bluepulse to your module

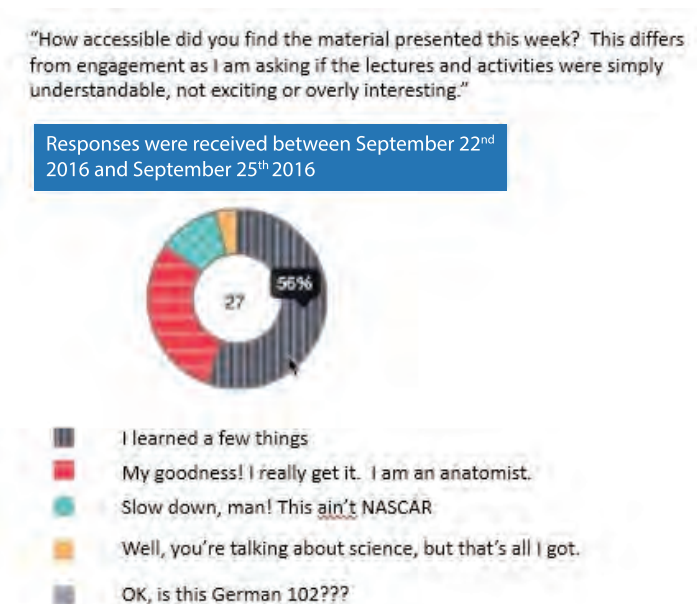
All staff who have used Bluepulse recommend introducing it in class. It has to be a "hands on" demonstration. You might like to ask a few questions gauging level of knowledge. Ask students to use their own devices to post responses and comments. Show students what you see when they answer poll questions and send comments. Students should check their devices to check what they see. You should check what students see too.

Get your students buy in to the process. Parrish says it's important that students get something out of it. Let them know that they can dictate the pace and the scope of the course and that they will learn much more if they engage with it.

Keep up the Momentum

Natalie and Parrish agree it's important to take 5 minutes at the beginning of each class to talk over the results of polls and questions you want to address with the class. This lets students know you are using Bluepulse and listening to them. The most time consuming part is responding to comments and questions, Parrish reports this takes him

approximately 35 minutes each week. He says "It helps when the questions are humorous. "Students feel like it is a more informal environment, . . . it changes the tone to something that they are more willing to respond to" See example question below.



All participants noted that students had to remember to go into Blackboard and Bluepulse to post comments and see if there were any replies. Explorance who provide Bluepulse have promised daily and weekly summary email notifications will be available in the next couple of week.



Promote constructive comments

Staff commented prior to the trial that providing an anonymous feedback platform may lead to hurtful comments from students. This hasn't materialised but a couple weren't totally constructive. As part of introducing Bluepulse to students, remind them that they are partners with the institution in their learning, should behave professionally according to Abertay Attributes and be aware of Abertay's social media policy which precludes online bullying. Staff have found by talking about the results of Bluepulse polls in class and feeding back on questions raised, students know they are talking to their tutor via Bluepulse and behave appropriately online.

Feedback

Natalie reported that it did help the teaching team on her module keep in touch with student progress and identify topics causing difficulty. She intends to use it for the follow up module next term. Staff who did not get student engagement thought that perhaps their module did not lend itself to Bluepulse because the cohort communicated well and were already engaging in discussion forums, one thought the module topic didn't lend itself to Bluepulse. Others felt that because the software wasn't ready at the start of term it didn't get the best introduction and that they had been on a learning curve regarding how to use it but are willing to try again next term.

PGCertHET students commented that although they experience difficulty getting students to communicate they don't really want an anonymous backdoor for grievances, they would rather students discussed issues openly and that is the behaviour Abertay should be promoting. Bluepulse or other software should be used to initiate discussion in the classroom.

Parrish reported that "when asked in the end of module survey how students felt about Bluepulse, his students reported that they had ownership over the class, they felt that they had a voice and that I really responded. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. They say I engaged with them far better than any other professor they had had thus far. I think that it was down to the tool not just me."

What did the students say?

Only 23 students responded but 79% of those student said it had made it easier to communicate with their tutor on the module, 73% that they would prefer to use Bluepulse to a mid-module survey, one saying, "Yes, better to have constant feedback and interaction." When asked what would they change about Bluepulse they said "Make it more obvious", "add notifications or reminders", e-mail every week so you remember to fill it out". When asked what other methods of feedback they would like to use that addressed issues on their mind the responses were mainly N/A, unsure, don't know, can't think of any. However, some suggestions were "paper", "feedback week", "having assigned contact time with the tutor" and "a discussion forum to allow students and tutors to openly discuss issues with the module or certain tasks. This also means that students can check if their question may have already been answered on the forum."

