Online system for reporting attendance at tutorials and lectures

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Summary

The Department of Chemistry developed a web-based database system for reporting attendance at tutorials and lectures. The system automatically emails students who miss a tutorial and alerts the level director when students have missed three tutorials. The system also allows the electronic submission of tutor reports at the end of each semester.

The Department previously used a paper-based tutorial attendance system whereby attendance sheets were handed into the departmental office and staff would collate information. Due to staffing changes, solutions to work “smarter not harder” were found to replace the labour-intensive manual system with a fully automated system, which has been running successfully for three years.

How it works

The tutorial system works as follows:

Level 1 - Students have a weekly tutorial (24 tutorials) with their personal tutor; each tutor has between five and seven tutees. The personal tutors also write end of semester reports using the web-based system.

Level 2 - Students have a bi-weekly tutorial in inorganic, organic and physical chemistry (36 tutorials in all) with their personal tutor and two other tutees. The personal tutors also write end of semester reports using the site.

Level 3 - Personal tutors write end of semester reports and, where applicable, enter information about first employment destination.

Level 4 - Personal tutors and project supervisors write end of semester reports and enter information about first employment destination.

Notification system

Level 1 and level 2 - After each tutorial, the tutor enters the data online. If a student is absent the student (and tutor) is automatically sent an email requesting them to contact their tutor and explain their absence. If they miss three tutorials they are automatically emailed advising them that their absences have been reported to the year director (both tutor and year director are emailed as well).

www.sheffield.ac.uk/lets/toolkit
Level 3 and Level 4 - These are primarily report gathering systems which allow the importing of reports into student records.

Attendance data for level 1 and level 2 can be exported as a csv file for importing into Excel. Students receive both lecture and tutorial attendance figures with the transcript of their unofficial exam results.

Checks

Heads of section can check that attendance data is being completed. An email reminder can automatically be sent if attendance data has not been submitted.

Problems

Sometimes the data can become corrupt and MySQL database table has to be sorted out using phpadmin on cPanel.

Attendance data may not always be recorded straight after the tutorial.

The Department also uses a signing in sheet for level 1 and level 2 tutorials as physical proof that the student has or hasn’t attended, which may seem like duplication of efforts. However, the sign-in represents an additional proof of attendance.

Portability

Would this system work in other departments? Possibly, if the department has a similar tutorial system to chemistry – smallish (five to 10) groups of students and provided that members of staff are on board with the system.