



How to engage and energise colleagues in the Colleague Voice Strategy

University of Surrey



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About the University of Surrey

The [University of Surrey's](#) ethos is based on the belief that it can make a real and positive difference to the world. Through the endeavours of its students and staff they are creating an environment where its community comes together as one to educate and develop the future leaders and citizens that will make the world a better place, as well as creating new knowledge, sharing ideas and innovating for the benefit of society.

Culture, community and a strong sense of purpose are key to what motivates the 3,300 employees to perform at their best and work hard to deliver the University's vision.

[Lisa Hughes](#) joined the University of Surrey as employee experience specialist and lecturer, and for the last 9 months has led on, amongst other projects, the [colleague voice](#) programme. She has a background in HR consultancy, specialising in OD, culture and talent development and is recognised for leading award-winning HR global projects and shaping organisational culture on a global scale. Lisa's first experience of Surrey was as a student, studying a postgraduate in Management Education at the Business School. Since graduating Lisa lectures at the Business School in economics, business ethics and HR. Lisa is one of only a few that has a hybrid role at the University.

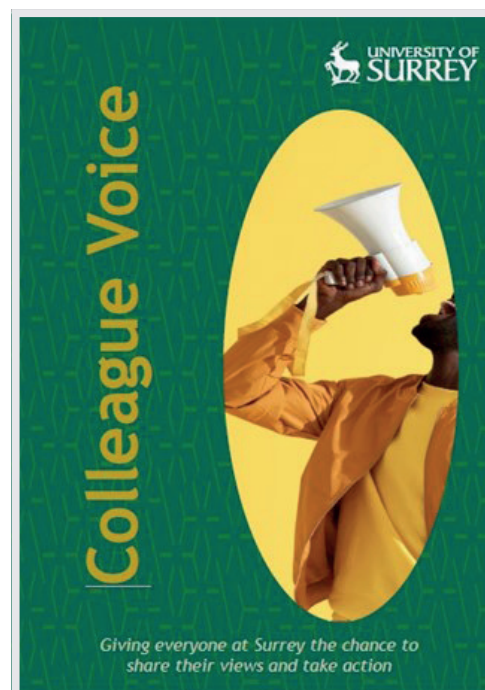
Lisa's ambition was to make colleague voice an essential, impactful part of the culture

Lisa approached the colleague voice strategy with a real passion. She said,

"I saw that the people survey could become less routine and more dynamic if we were able to fire up all of our stakeholders, managers and colleagues. I wanted everyone to see how through participation and feedback we can make real positive change happen.

"There are of course, many challenges. We've three academic faculties and professional services, who work very differently and see the world differently. We're evolving as a university to meet the needs of our students and are part of the foundation in supporting society to be innovative, economically stable, and environmentally sustainable. Our colleagues (employees) have had to be agile and more responsive to the needs of our students over the last two years. As we now start to emerge from the pandemic, we want to utilise this time to become more human centred, take the time to listen, respond and act. The people survey is proven to be the fabric of a great people strategy utilising our colleagues' views and ideas to weave in various initiatives that all our colleagues have identified as important.

"Our [Vice Chancellor](#) and Chief People Officer have been very supportive of colleague voice. However, there is so much more to do to make the survey programme feel like an essential, impactful part of our culture. My task has been to change the approach, help reposition the survey and build capability around the University to realise this potential. Enabling our managers to have tools at hand to support them with focused team development, performance and celebration has been one of the important factors in re-engaging with our colleagues. The personalised dashboard access that People Insight supply, has added value and we are now actively using it as the 'action', 'measure' and celebration tool. With its reporting options, we are now managing and measuring together.



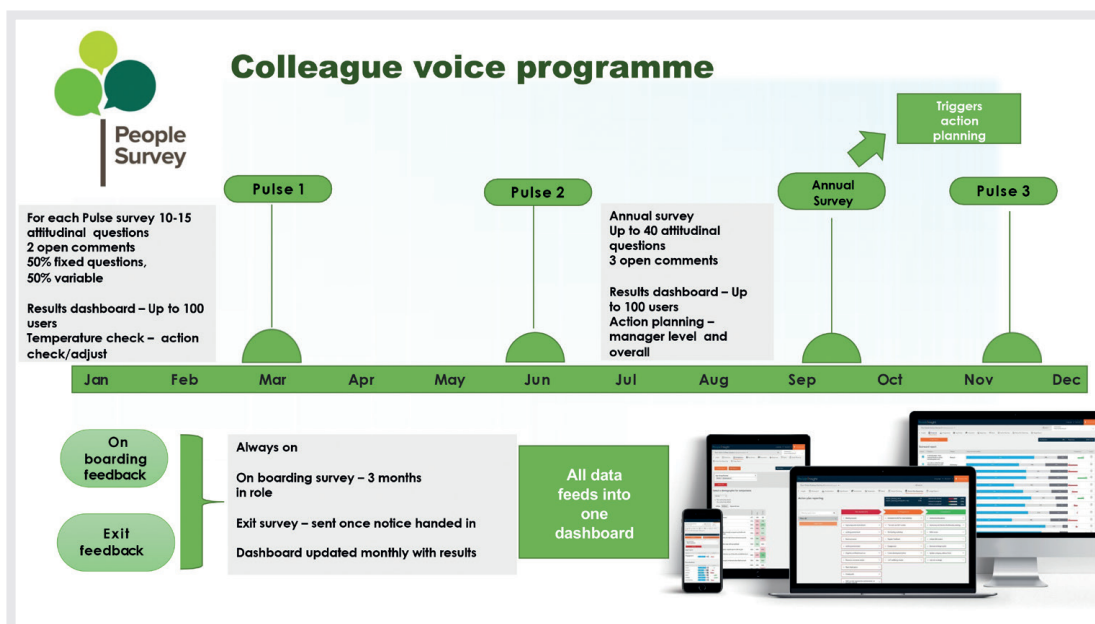


Employee survey programme with People Insight

Lisa worked with People Insight to establish an annual survey that is imperative in delivering the colleague voice strategy with the addition of [pulse surveys](#) throughout the year to provide more question flexibility. This means leaders and managers can check in on hot topics and progress on survey [actions](#) throughout the year. In addition, **onboarding and exit feedback** are run from the same platform, so that one People Insight dashboard provides combined rich insight.

The [platform](#) is equipped with department and team logins for every level so every manager can see their survey results. There is also **action planning functionality** and 'Inspirations' – ideas relevant to each action to help managers make improvements. Critically, Lisa has oversight of how the platform is used, helping her evaluate uptake, activity, and progress throughout the University.

Of course, designing a programme is one thing, but implementing it successfully by bringing everyone on board and changing behaviour is quite another.

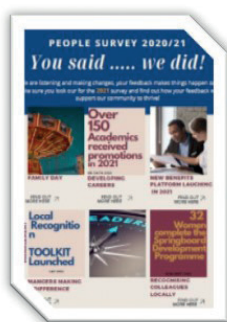
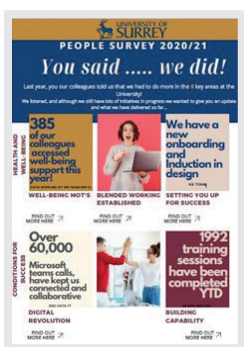




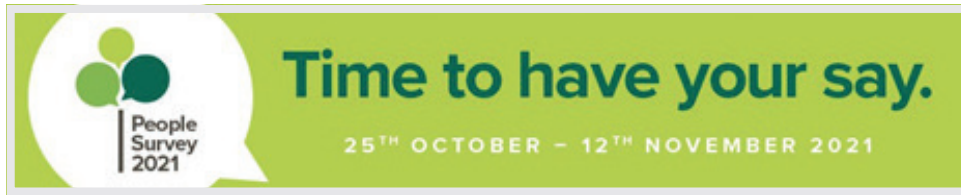
Innovative ideas: How Lisa engaged & energised colleagues in the survey programme

1. 'You said, we did' reminds employees of the benefits of feedback and actions taken previously

At the start of Lisa's journey, it was vital that colleagues could see and feel a fresh approach to the survey programme. Lisa began the survey cycle with a 'You said, we did' internal communications campaign to remind everyone of the emphasis going forward – action and change because of listening to employee feedback. The use of an infographic in traditional University colours closed off the previous survey actions, while in the background we were working on a new look and feel and starting to get our colleague audience ready for what was to come.



2. Tree planting as an incentive for survey participation



One of the objectives of the survey programme was to have more impact, so Lisa broadened this out to align with the University's sustainability goals. To encourage participation, each time a participant completes the survey, the University commits to planting a tree. This incentive is tied into the survey branding. It is achieved in partnership with the Eden Reforestation Project, which enables tree planting work for impoverished communities around the world. As the University community started to come back together after lockdowns, it was felt that this was a great initiative to be involved in.



[Click here to find out more about the Eden Reforestation Project partnerships.](#)

3. Pre-survey workshops for managers with a focus on action



A critical step in the change of approach was a series of line manager workshops before the survey launched. The workshops shared the vision for colleague voice as a vehicle for positive change, shared the survey programme in detail and encouraged ownership of results and action.

Over 500 managers were invited to participate. The sessions were co-run by Lisa and People Insight, and the agenda included:

- ▶ The vision for more dynamic employee listening at the University
- ▶ How the survey questionnaires were designed (of particular interest to academic staff who are themselves experts at sophisticated research techniques)
- ▶ The benefits of the colleague voice for line managers – for example building relationships with team members, improving team performance, and bringing people together with common goals
- ▶ Live demos showing how the People Insight dashboard made it easy for managers to review results, create instant presentations, dig deeper into the data, and create online action plans
- ▶ What was expected of line managers before, during and after the surveys
- ▶ How results would be communicated
- ▶ How action planning would work at the University and team level; with pan-university and faculty level focus groups planned to act forwards.

It wasn't just the content of the workshops that was important, the delivery of the workshops and the communication around them was critical. There was a great deal of transparency and honesty about the whole approach, delivered with energy and positivity throughout.

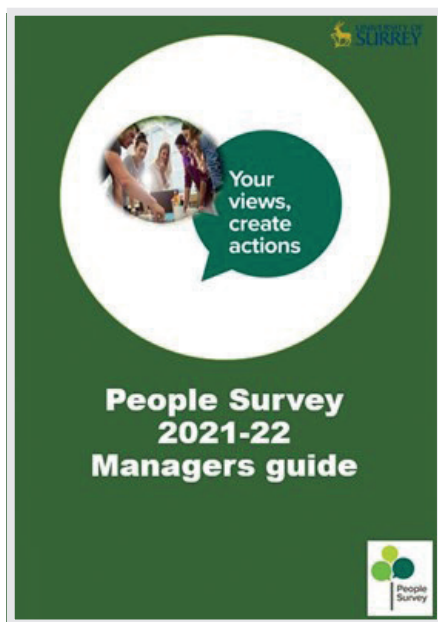
4. Ambassadors for hard-to-reach populations support inclusion

The survey programme is 100% digital, but not every team around the University has daily access to IT. To ensure these teams could make their voices heard, QR codes and kiosks were made available, with support from 'Ambassadors' who worked tirelessly to encourage participation, with snacks on offer for good measure.



5. How Lisa got almost 100 managers engaging with the survey results dashboard

Having whet the appetite for the survey results by sharing demos of the results dashboard in the pre-survey workshops, Lisa had created interest for managers in getting their hands on their own results. Instead of just cascading the dashboard access via email (which is an approach we frequently see), Lisa invited managers to request access. Those who took this up early, or who had really engaged with the workshops told others. Soon Lisa had almost 100 managers accessing the results, creating presentations, and running sessions with their teams. The fact that Lisa nudged colleagues towards the results, rather than issued mandatory guidance, has been successful for the University.



6. Manager capability building for survey action planning and change

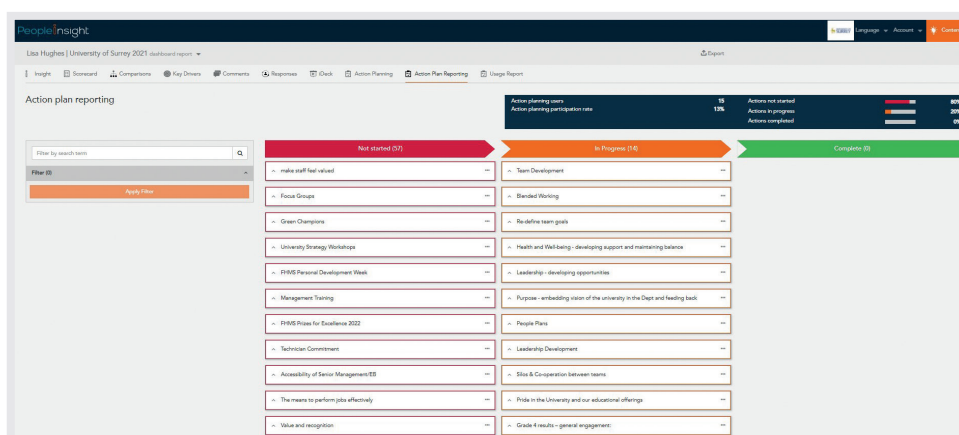
Once the survey was complete, Lisa followed up the line manager workshops with guides, training videos and templates from the People Insight Content Hub. Lisa also held coaching sessions to maintain the momentum for results analysis and action planning. The toolkits served to build managers' knowledge and capability in their role in supporting the survey results with their teams.



7. Pan-University focus groups and opening up the use of the dashboard for actions.

Whilst action planning took place both centrally and in faculties, a key strand of action planning has been pan-university focus groups. Thirty attendees were identified by Deans and HRBPs as influential voices from across the University who frequently spoke up. These individuals discussed several initiatives that could address the key issues that came out of the survey, and the proposed initiatives that came out of the survey have been communicated to all employees.

In addition, because managers have been so engaged in the survey results dashboard, thanks to Lisa's non-mandated approach, they have been able to make the most of the action planning functionality. With limited time and resources, the Dashboard supports an agile way of working. The tool is the one central resource where team actions are logged, monitored and measured both across the University and at the local level. It also gives the Executive Board visibility, offering opportunities to celebrate teams for increased engagement and accountability.



The action planning record in the People Insight dashboard gives Lisa an oversight of all actions not started, in progress and completed.



Key learnings about changing the process from Lisa

For Lisa, so far so good with the new colleague voice programme. Because of the different, refreshed approach, and Lisa's dedication to thorough, frequent communication, the programme is on the road to success, with more line managers than ever engaged in action.

Here's Lisa's key learnings about what has made the most difference:

1. **Success is all about the execution.** The programme design was signed off, but it took a lot of communication, briefings, and individual support to get it implemented well. We were able to focus on the this because People Insight managed all the survey and results dashboard implementation and provided expertise and support throughout.
2. **The pre-survey workshops** were a game changer, because we'd been able to answer a lot of questions well – particularly around survey design and rationale, confidentiality and managers' role in change.
3. **Demonstrating the results dashboard** and really selling in the benefits to line managers in advance created an appetite for them to get their hands on their own data.
4. **Giving all managers the option to request their results** rather than formally cascade them has worked well, resulting in over 100 requests for access. When everyone is using it, there's a strong incentive for others to get involved.
5. **The tree planting incentive** brought an external impact element to the survey, which our audience really responded to, and since the survey Surrey University has partnered with Eden Reforestation and will utilise this connection to support student attraction with the potential to build a research community while enabling eco-systems to be re-established and for villages to thrive.
6. The colleague voice programme has been pivotal in **demonstrating the University's values;**
 - a. **Innovation** - Digital tools to support all our colleagues to get involved,
 - b. **Inspiration** - The offer to plant a tree in exchange for participating in the survey encouraged everyone to get involved and feel good about taking part.
 - c. **Inclusion** - Everyone could complete their survey online, in their own time, with support on hand.
 - d. **Integrity** - Building trust in the colleague voice, People Insight has strong confidential guidelines, and this has started to increase participation. Sharing access to the dashboard has supported transparency and honesty.



Finally, how was it working with People Insight?

Lisa said,

"The relationship with People Insight has been personal, responsive and supportive – a true partnership. They are a great team, with a genuine, expert approach, and a real deep knowledge of the university sector which has been invaluable."

We'd love to talk

If you are interested in how our employee engagement programmes could help your organisation, contact us at:

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