Case Study 7: University of Westminster

Using Generative AI to Help Productivity and Wellbeing of Professional Services Staff

What issue were we trying to address and why?

The university sought to evaluate whether Microsoft Office 365 Copilot could enhance productivity, wellbeing, and support digital transformation across professional services. Given the increasing pressure on colleagues' time and resources, the institution recognised the potential of generative AI to automate routine tasks, streamline communication, and support information management. However, it was equally important to understand the practical challenges of adoption, determine whether the tools aligned with diverse workflows, and identify areas where further development or support would be required to ensure meaningful long-term implementation.

What we did

A pilot programme was launched offering Microsoft Office 365 Copilot licences to around 120 colleagues - known as AI Facilitators - across ten professional services areas. The initiative aimed to enable hands-on exploration of AI-enhanced working practices and gather structured feedback through surveys and focus groups.

The pilot ran from June 2024, culminating with an initial survey distributed in early October. By mid-October, 88 responses had been collected. These included both quantitative metrics (e.g., frequency of use, perceived productivity impact) and qualitative insights (e.g., reflections on use cases, barriers, and desired improvements).

Data was analysed to understand patterns of use, departmental variation, and the relationship between Copilot adoption and reported productivity. Free-text responses were categorised under themes such as adoption challenges, training needs, and future development opportunities.

Who was involved

The pilot involved staff from a wide range of professional services areas including: Student and Academic Services, Learning Innovation and Digital Engagement, Academic Engagement and Learning Development, Information Systems and Support, Human Resources, Marketing and Communications, Finance, Business Engagement, Employability and Strategic Planning and Performance.

Each department was allocated a number of licences related to the size of the department. Oversight and evaluation of the programme were led by Learning Innovation and Digital Engagement. Participants were encouraged to experiment, provide feedback, and reflect on how Copilot could integrate into their everyday workflows.

Measures of success

The pilot identified several indicators of success:

- **Adoption and Use:** 63.6% of respondents reported using Copilot daily or several times a week, with two-thirds saying they had formed a habit of using at least one Copilot tool regularly.
- **Ease of Use**: 78.4% found the tools easy or somewhat easy to use, indicating a low barrier to initial engagement.
- **Productivity Gains**: 62.5% of users reported moderate to major improvements in productivity. Statistical analysis revealed a positive correlation between the frequency of use and perceived productivity benefits.
- **Positive Use Cases**: Participants reported saving time on summarising documents, managing meetings, drafting content, and retrieving information. The Copilots in Microsoft Word, Outlook, and Teams proved especially valuable.
- **Innovation Potential:** Some users began exploring new capabilities such as Excel-based data analysis, support with the development of custom Copilots, and even interest in advanced AI tasks like video editing or coding assistance.

However, success was not universal. Variations in uptake and impact were linked to differences in existing work habits, departmental culture, and the availability of support.

How do you plan to develop the intervention/activity?

Based on survey findings and participant feedback, several areas have been identified for future development:

1. Targeted Training and Peer Support: Users expressed a strong desire for hands-on, interactive training sessions tailored to departmental needs. There is also an appetite for peer learning opportunities and use case demonstrations. A structured onboarding framework - featuring task-based challenges and reflective activities - could help embed the Copilots better into daily routines.
2. Improved Prompt Engineering Support: While ease of use was generally high, many respondents struggled to generate effective prompts. Developing simple guidance, examples, and workshops focused on “thinking with AI” could accelerate confident usage.
3. Addressing Functional Limitations: Excel Copilot and other less-used features require further development by Microsoft to meet professional expectations. In particular, users requested enhancements to file handling, customisation, and third-party integrations.
4. Strategic Integration: Feedback revealed a need for clearer messaging about the university’s long-term AI vision and how Copilot fits within broader digital transformation goals. A roadmap that aligns AI adoption with institutional priorities - such as workload reduction, service efficiency, and staff wellbeing - will help ensure sustained engagement.
5. Evaluation and Feedback Loop: As the capabilities of Microsoft Copilots continue to evolve, it will be important to repeat and expand the evaluation process. Follow-up surveys, more focus groups, and case studies can help track longitudinal impact and inform decisions about licence renewal and scaling.

This pilot phase has demonstrated that, with the right support and strategic direction, Microsoft Office 365 Copilot can play a meaningful role in supporting staff across diverse professional services roles. Future phases will focus on deepening adoption, resolving integration challenges, and ensuring that AI tools genuinely enhance - not complicate - everyday academic and administrative work.