

# **Improving Healthwatch Barnet's communication with young people: A Middlesex University and Healthwatch Barnet Collaboration**

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**July 2018**

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## **Background**

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Healthwatch Barnet is part of a national network led by Healthwatch England, which was established through the Health and Social Care Act in 2012, to give health and social care service users a powerful voice both locally and nationally. We are the independent voice for people's views on Barnet services, both good and bad. We listen to local people and feedback patient experience, to local commissioners and decision makers, in order to improve services.

In late 2017, Healthwatch Barnet was approached by four Middlesex University students on the Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship MSc programme, to take part in one of their course projects. The aim of their project was to work, over a number of months, with an organisation in the borough of Barnet to understand the work they do and to choose an area of the organisation to develop, taking an innovative approach. It was important for the students to think about the processes involved and to ultimately write-up a report and recommendations for the organisation.

## **Why communicating with young people?**

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We held a number of meetings with the students\*, to explain our role as Healthwatch, help them choose an area to focus on and to review project proposals. It was decided the students would look at how Healthwatch Barnet could better communicate and engage with young people aged 18 - 30 years, with a focus on students studying at Middlesex University. There were a number of factors that led to this. For example,

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\*Although initially there was a group of four students, due to other commitments and circumstances two of the students dropped out early on. Two students therefore carried out the research and wrote up the final project.

Barnet has a large and growing older population and many of the health and social care topics we deal with are often most relevant to this cohort. As a result young people may be less engaged, however, it is important they know about Healthwatch and are able to share their experiences and views on health services. In addition, Middlesex University has a large international student population, who may be harder to reach and less familiar with the NHS. The students fell into the target age bracket, had access to a large student body and felt their experiences would allow them to tackle this area.

Other ideas for projects that emerged through discussions we had with the students during the project development stage were beneficial. For example, we were made aware of confusions around which health services to access, particularly amongst international students, and a lack of information for students about local services. This led us to develop other projects with the university, as can be seen in the **outcomes** section at the end of this document.

### What did they do?

The students designed a survey, which they carried out with fellow students. The target population was people aged 18 – 30 years (this age range allowed for mature students), studying at Middlesex University. The survey asked students: information about themselves (age, nationality, where they lived, how long they had been living in Barnet); their use of social media; how they prefer to receive health information; if they were aware of Healthwatch Barnet; and their views on Healthwatch Barnet's current website and social media platforms.



### Student report & recommendations





### Findings

65 students answered the survey. 40 (61.5%) were aged 18 – 23, 12 (18.5%) were aged 24 – 29 and 13 (20%) were either under 18 or above 30. Most students lived in Barnet (39, 60%) and although most were from the UK (38, 59%), a large proportion (27, 41%) were either EU or international students.

63 out of 65 students used social media, with Facebook the most frequent platform (85% of students used it) when compared with Twitter (30% of students used it). 60% (39 students) said they used social media multiple times a day. When asked their preferred style for posts about health services, the most popular choices were

photos/pictures (36, 55%) and videos (32, 49%). Only three students had heard of Healthwatch Barnet. When asked to score how appealing they found Healthwatch Barnet's social media platforms, there was a mixed response. 31 (48%) found the Healthwatch Barnet website appealing, compared with 22 (34%) who did not (the remaining responses were neutral). Similar results were found for Twitter and Facebook.

## Recommendations

 <b>1</b> Healthwatch Barnet to use a wider range of social media platforms, including Instagram, as these appeal to a younger generation. These platforms also allow for interactive ways to get feedback.	 <b>2</b> Engage younger ages through relevant visual content on social media platforms. For example, through the use of images with a better mixture of age ranges in them.	<b>3</b> Healthwatch Barnet to create a Youtube platform as young people prefer photos and videos as ways to receive information about health services. 	 <b>4</b> Healthwatch Barnet to continue collaborating with Middlesex University and attending university events, to engage with a wider student population.
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## Outcomes

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As a result of this project, there have been three positive outcomes. **Firstly**, Healthwatch Barnet will take on board the student recommendations to further develop our social media and communication streams, so that they are better adapted for a younger population. **Secondly**, we have established a good relationship with Middlesex University, particularly the Wellbeing Service, leading us to take part in a number of on-site events. **Finally**, we learned that students do not always know which health care services to access and what is available locally. As a result of this, we have been collaborating with the university to create an information leaflet for students, which provides information on the different health services located close to the University; an explanation of when to use them; and opening hours. We hope this will be shared on the university website, on their app and given out during freshers' week.

## Acknowledgements

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We would like to thank the Middlesex University students for choosing to work with Healthwatch Barnet and carrying out this research, which has provided us with valuable ideas on how to engage with a younger population.