Understanding the FL email experience

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Future Learn

1. The problem

We don't currently have a holistic understanding of how the automated emails that FutureLearn sends to learners work. We don't have a good idea of the content, how frequently learners receive them, which of their actions trigger them or where the gaps are. This makes it difficult for us to know how to provide both learners with a meaningful automated email experience.

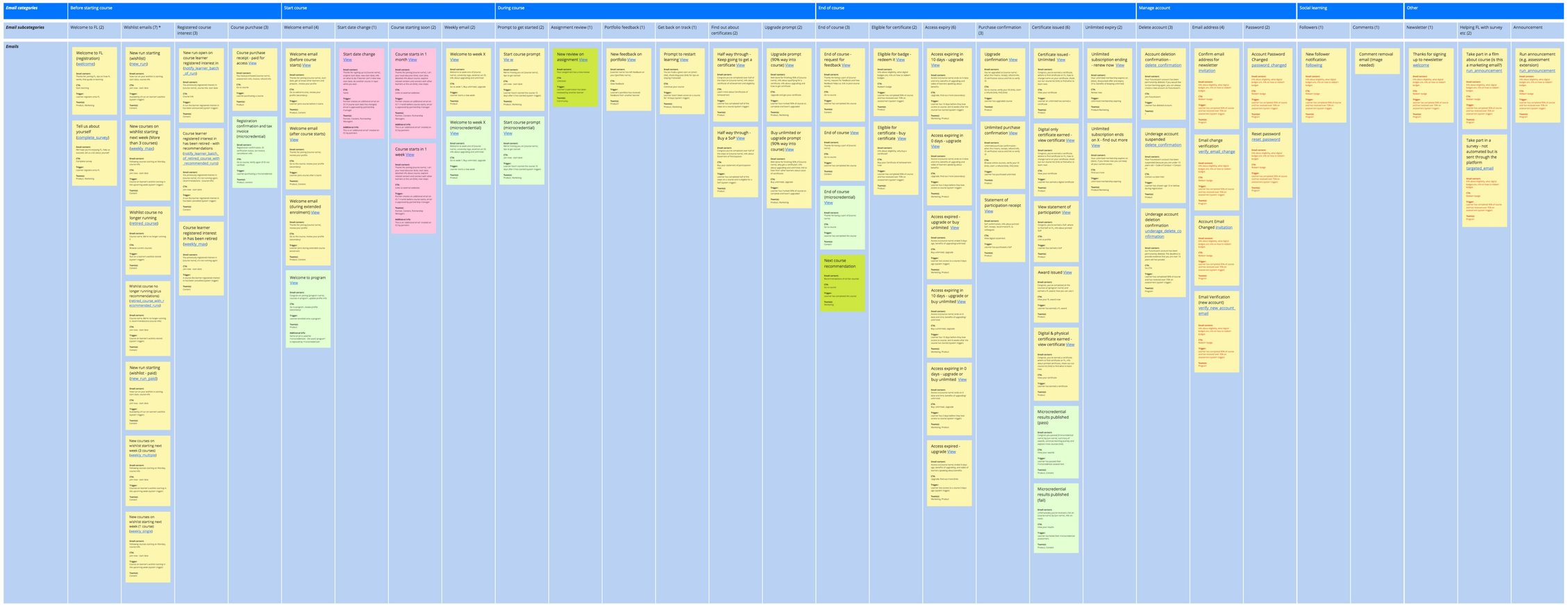
2. Assumptions

By having a good, holistic understanding of how FutureLearn emails work, we will be able to send relevant, engaging and effective emails to learners at the right time and ensure that our tone of voice remains consistent. This will in turn increase learner trust and user retention, whilst also helping FutureLearn staff work more effectively.

3. Approach

- **Service blueprint** to map all automated emails
- **Customer journey mapping workshop** to focus on a typical user journey for learners, and identify gaps and opportunities to improve FutureLearn's emails

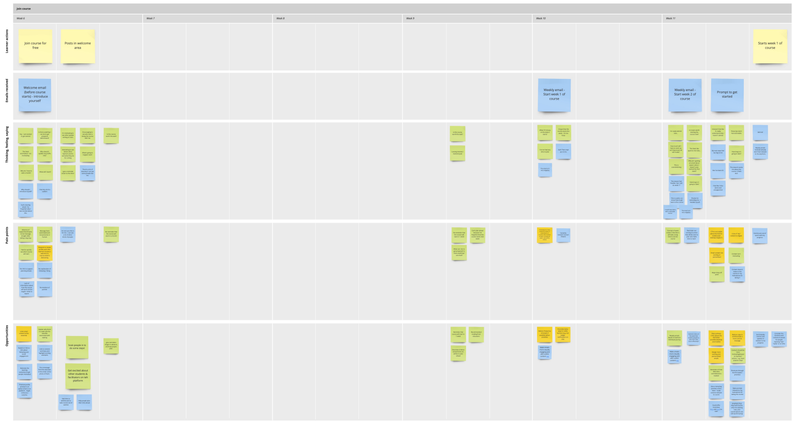
3.1 Service blueprint



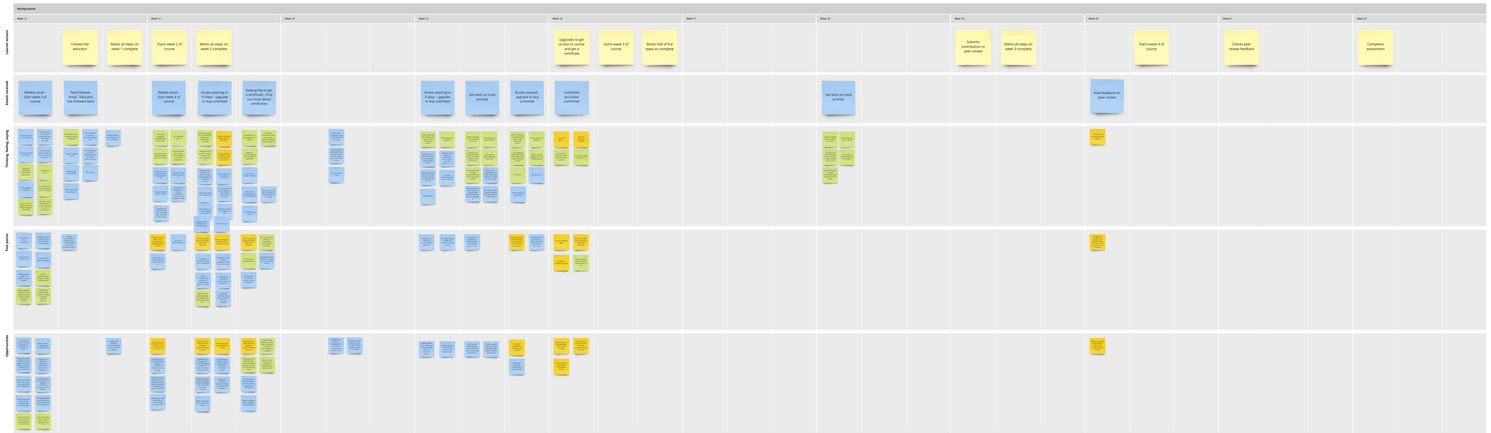
3.2 Customer journey map

Before starting course

Join course



During course



End of course

4. Key insights

The biggest gaps in the email journey are while a learner is waiting to start a course and when they have been inactive on the course for a while

- Learners complained that they receive only one email about the course start date.
- Some partners send additional custom emails whilst learners are waiting for courses to start, to keep learners engaged. This shows there is a need for this type of email.
- Learners value reminders so they can plan ahead, get excited about a course and feel motivated and encouraged.

HMW send reminders at times that suit learners?

HMW make course starting emails more engaging?

HMW help learners prepare and plan ahead of their course?

We don't do a good job of getting learners back onto FL once they've completed a course

- Learners want recommendations of similar courses and guidance about their next steps once they complete a course, but we don't send any emails about these
- Although recommendations after completing a course are useful, they may feel too soon
- Emails could be used as a jumping in point and a source of course inspiration to re-engage learners who haven't been active on FL for a long period of time

HMW inspire learners to keep exploring new subjects once they have finished a course?

HMW balance being pushy vs giving enough inspiration?

Weekly emails help navigate back to the course and give a sense of structure, but they're overwhelming and guilt-inducing when they're out of sync with a learner's progress

- Some learners rely on emails to navigate to their course.
- Regular emails can be important to learners, as they can give a sense of liveness and structure, act as useful reminders/nudges and can be motivating
- Emails don't always come at the right time for learners which can make some feel like they're falling behind.
- The concept of weeks can make courses feel inflexible and like a big commitment.
- The content of emails is not always engaging.

HMW make emails bring value when someone is 'behind' on a course - or ahead?

Should we re-evaluate the concept of 'weeks'?

Could we send emails relating to the learner's progress/pace?

Is there a better time to send the weekly email to support planning?

We're not incentivising users to learn based on their personal needs, motivations or goals

- Email messaging can feel very automated and demotivating
- We often promote payment options and try to use certificates to motivate learners, but not everyone cares for a certificate or tests
- Learners say they are motivated by making progress, confidence-boosting copy, interesting content, educator engagement, and prompts that make their next steps feel achievable for example

HMW make emails more motivating and personal?

We're asking learners to think and do too much

- Some emails are lengthy and focuses learners' attention on non-essential content
- We have up to 4 CTA's being used in some emails, making it difficult for learners to know what to do next
- Email copy should be short and concise, and CTA's should be clear about what the learner should do next

How might we ensure course emails contain the information and calls to action learners need?

We're overusing emails in some places

- We are sending learners multiple emails about the same thing
- Learners complain about getting too many emails prompting them to pay.
- Unsubscribing from emails is not quick or intuitive
- Sometimes a notification could be enough

How might we ensure we use email for the most appropriate situations?

How might we bundle up emails that are occurring frequently?

Should we re-evaluate when we use emails vs notifications?

Suggested next steps

- Make sure the service blueprint uses the correct list of the emails that FL is sending to learners;
- Repeat the workshop but include marketing emails;
- Run more workshops to consider different user scenarios
- Include data analytics to help identify further opportunities for improvement
- Conduct qualitative research to understand specific emails and user engagement
- Identify where previous insights have already been addressed and are out of date
- Talk to teams related to CC to understand more about course related emails

Thank you!

Miro board of the journey map
Link here

UX Research insights summary
Link here