minutes

DG/14/M1
Data Group meeting
held on Thursday 15 May, 11:00, at UCAS, Cheltenham

Chair:	Wendy Webster	University of Dundee
Present:	Christine Giles	University of Portsmouth
	Rachel Watson	University of Derby
	Ed Beales	Kingston University
	Daniel Farrell	University of St Andrews
	James Brown	University of Glasgow
	Julie Wilson	University of Liverpool
Apologies:	Helen Reed	University of Cambridge
	Emma Christmas	Keele University
	Nick Bhugeloo	Kingston University
	Gurjit Nijjar	University of Derby
	Daniel King	University of Surrey
UCAS in attendance:	Helen Thorne	Director of Policy and Research
	Maggie Smart	Senior Principal Analyst
	Mark Woodfield	Head of Applications
	Mike Spink	Business Architecture
	Rob Knight	Strategic Product Manager
	Kate Murray	Relationship Manager
	Kate Westmacott	National Partnership Manager
	Philip Blaker	Operations Director
	Zenobia Daar	Corporate Governance
	Keri Jones	PA to the Director of Marketing Communications
	Denise Chaffer	IT Administrator
UCAS apologies:	Nigel Parr	Information Governance Officer (UCAS)

1/14/M1 Welcome and apologies

Wendy Webster, Chair, welcomed the attendees to the refocused Data Group and gave a brief introduction on its purpose. It had been set up to gain a thorough understanding of data issues in the higher education sector. Not just in admissions, but also for planning in other areas – to identify and prioritise changes to improve the quality and accessibility of UCAS data, and to ensure the development of products and services took full account of data issues.

2/14/M1 The new structure of UCAS' groups and forums

Kate Westmacott, National Partnership Manager, presented and discussed the new structure of the UCAS groups and forums.

The review of the groups and forums began at the Admissions Conference in 2013, and was aligned to the introduction of the new corporate governance structure.

No huge changes had been implemented; instead UCAS had aligned the groups to one of five types:

- Scheme Advisory Group (e.g. UCAS Teacher Training or Undergraduate)
- Market Advisory Group (e.g. International or HE college)
- Advisory Group sub groups or User Groups (such as the data and technical groups)
- Change / project groups (such as the NQIS Project Advisory Group)
- Standing Groups and regional forums

Each group had a dedicated UCAS owner who would ensure they were effective and work with the group's Chair to ensure the agenda was fit for purpose.

UCAS would look at overlap with membership of other advisory groups and agree ways in which updates could be linked to the various groups and forums. Minutes of all group meetings were available in the providers' section of ucas.com.

3/14/M1 To discuss and agree the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Data Group and its relationships with other advisory groups

Wendy Webster, University of Dundee and Helen Thorne, Director of Policy and Research, drafted the terms of reference (ToR) for the Data Group, structured around balancing strategic data requirements and direction, with the need for the review of operational elements.

The possible issue of consecutive non-attendance by a group member was discussed. It was agreed that contact would be made with the person to ascertain if they were still interested in remaining part of the group, to ensure it had full representation. This would be the same if a person moved to another higher education provider (HEP), and would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

It was agreed that 'cross cutting' would be changed to 'cross scheme functions' to ensure better representation.   DG DG001

A short appendix to the ToR would be added, outlining the type of data the group would consider, including schools data, courses data, and HEP data – although this was not exclusive.

It was suggested that the sentence 'expecting to share and disseminate good practice' to be more inclusive e.g. key areas to communicate findings and outcomes back to the sector. It was agreed that this would be amended.

Meetings would be held three times per year, four times if necessary, and would take place at a time that enabled the minutes to be fed into other groups, e.g. coupled with the Technical Group but before the Scheme Advisory Meeting had taken place.

It was clarified that feedback to software suppliers was the role of the Technical Group. UCAS had an IT Engagement Team who provided the link between third party software providers. This was a relatively new team, and it was suggested that Andy Gillett, Senior Engagement Manager, should be   DG DG002
invited to join the group.

Further suggestions were:

- It would be beneficial for one higher education (HE) member from the   DG DG003
  Data Group to attend the regional forums; alternatively the Data Group could ensure that any pertinent points were included on the regional forum agendas.

- The Data Group should have a role to play in prioritising activities, and this should be made more explicit within the ToR.

Amendments to the ToR would be made and reissued to the group.

4/14/M1 Expressions of interest in joining the Data Group

Thirteen expressions of interest had been received. These needed to be

reviewed as membership should be kept to around 18 people to be managable.

James Brown, University of Glasgow, highlighted that there was no representation from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). It was confirmed that if agenda items were relevant, a representative from HESA would be invited to attend. It would also be beneficial to have a planning executive on the group, a college representative, and a representative from Wales.

It was agreed to decline the interest from the University of Edinburgh, as the group had good representation from Scotland. The nominee from Oxford Brookes would be invited to join, as they were involved in UKPASS.

The expressions of interest would be reviewed, recommendations put forward and a draft list circulated to the group for approval.

WW/HT DG004

DG DG005

It was agreed that being a Mission Group member was not important criteria but which software provider used was. This information would be reflected in the membership matrix.

DG DG006

5/14/M1 Development of UCAS data products and services strategy, including developments for 2014/15

Rob Knight, Strategic Product Manager, talked through the approach on the current work on UCAS' data products and services strategy. This strategy would ensure coherence around current products and new developments. The group would be updated on progress and outputs at subsequent meetings, and the Strategic Product Manager would visit group member's institutions to help inform their strategy and better understand current usage of UCAS' data services.

RK DG007

6/14/M1 Update on Higher education data and information improvement programme (HEDIIP)

The report prepared by Helen Thorne, Director of Policy and Research, (DG/14/004) provided background information on HEDIIP – a pan-UK agency programme with an independent programme team funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) based at HESA. UCAS planned to use the Data Group as its main forum for discussion and debate about engagement in HEDIIP.

UCAS did not have the capacity to engage in all HEDIIP projects and was focusing its efforts on the development of a new subject coding system to replace JACS and the sector-wide implementation of the Unique Learner

Number (ULN). Attendees commented that HEDIIP had very limited visibility in the sector and much more effort was needed to engage HEPs, including at senior level.

Replacement subject coding system

Helen Thorne outlined the scope of the project and reported that a tender had gone out. The HEDIIP team was close to a decision on appointment of consultants.

Successful implementation of a new subject coding system would be critically dependent on UCAS and HESA working in partnership. The two organisations were due to meet to develop a joint understanding of the impact of the project on individual products and services, and to consider a feasible implementation timetable.

The group agreed it would be effective to issue a survey and gain feedback from higher education providers (HEPs) to understand what worked well and what did not within JACS codes, to ensure the new system was fit for purpose.

Overall the group agreed this was a positive change but stated it was paramount to ensure that this system would be future-proof, to keep all informed of the visibility and awareness and to a have a generous transition period for implementation.

Unique Learner Number and personal record

The Unique Learner Number (ULN) and personal record project was not as far advanced as the subject coding system. A recent workshop was only attended by one HEP.

UCAS' Director of Policy and Research stated that there was value in the Unique Learner Number (ULN) and UCAS would encourage applicants to use their ULN, if they had one. UCAS would consider how the ULN and its verification could be incorporated into the future redevelopment of Apply, with a view to offering students the potential to draw in verified Level 2 qualifications data, where available. Only 13% of English applicants and 15% of Welsh applicants who might be expected to have a ULN supplied this to UCAS in 2014 (Scotland does not use it).

The question was raised as to whether UCAS could allocate the ULN. The group felt this was not appropriate, but there was potential for accessing Level 2 qualifications from the personal learner record. The main issue was with older applicants, for whom this data would not be available.

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The group questioned the relevance and use of the ULN and stated that if it was just to help pre-populate qualifications data in Apply then there were other more important priorities UCAS should be investing in.

7/14/M1 Data Group priorities over the next 12 months

DG/14/005 outlined a list of potential data issues as a starting point for discussions about the work the group might prioritise over the next 12 months. Wendy Webster, University of Dundee, emphasised that HEPs were already thinking differently about how they managed and used data, but there was a wide range of expertise and needs across providers.

Mike Spink, Business Architecture, outlined the development of a service-orientated architecture at UCAS, and the proposed development of a new Apply service, emphasising the need to build in the right data models and data architecture at the outset. This approach would necessarily limit the changes that UCAS was able to make to legacy IT systems and their associated data models. The group agreed that it wanted to focus on future-proofing as UCAS developed its new systems and wanted to get it right the first time.

Some data principles would be drafted to guide the evolution of the service-oriented architecture, and in particular the development of new data models. These would be shared with the group for discussion. Such principles might include a statement of intent to use agreed data standards, and principles which would help to set expectations around quality.

MS DG008

Members identified a range of priority issues including:

- The need to do more to improve the quality, especially the accuracy, of the 'core' data provided to HEPs at the start of the admissions cycle; qualifications data and data about schools/centres are the priority. Better handling of changes to schools' data, including mergers and changes in status was essential

ALL DG009

- Shaping the new data models that would underpin any new Apply system.
- Understanding the issue of static versus dynamic data and developing solutions which prevented overwriting of data from operational systems.
- Improving the quality of *J data.
- Collecting additional information from international applicants to enable an accurate assessment of fee status. This would avoid HEPs having to send up to five separate questionnaires to applicants. The International Consultation was picking up on these issues and UCAS would feed the outcomes of the consultation into the Data Group.

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- Providing additional added value data collection services for HEPs, e.g. collecting data for UKVI, equal opportunities monitoring, and/or information on criminal convictions.

Wendy Webster, University of Dundee, suggested the group should use Yammer to put forward views on this and would post the starting list for all to comment on and discuss to inform the next meeting.

DG DG010

8/14/M1 Schools / establishment data sets

Wendy Webster commented that report DG/14/006 outlined just part of the issue with the schools data collected by UCAS, and suggested these issues should be part of a wider discussion about the quality and management of schools' data at the next meeting. UCAS was asked to frame the debate in the context of the many uses of schools' data, rather than seeing this as a contacts database issue. As a starting point, there was a need to clearly identify and prioritise what issues need to be resolved. The group would use the proposed Yammer discussion forum to share ideas.

DG DG011

9/14/M1 Next meeting

It was discussed and agreed that the next meeting would be arranged in conjunction with the Technical Group and Scheme Advisory meetings once calendars have been checked for availability. The group would be notified once this had been organised.

HT/WW DG012

10/14/M1 Any other business

Equality characteristics
James Brown, University of Glasgow, highlighted that there had been some complaints from parents about how this was being collected. An update was requested for the next meeting.

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