

HIGHER EDUCATION DATA AND INFORMATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME (HEDIIP)

DG/14/004

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1. Issue

This paper describes the scope of the HEDIIP programme and the nature of UCAS' engagement. UCAS would like to use the Data Group as a focus for discussion about HEDIIP activities, particularly the HEDIIP projects which relate to student data collection, the development of a new subject coding system to replace JACS, and the adoption of the Unique Learner Number (ULN).

2. Recommendation

The Group is invited to note the information provided and identify:

- issues which UCAS should explore further with the programme team;
- specific issues relating to individual projects; and
- risks and issues which may affect the delivery of admissions services.

3. Report

Background

HEDIIP has been established to enhance the arrangements for the collection, sharing and dissemination of data and information about HE in order to reduce the burden on data providers and improve the quality, timeliness and accessibility of data and information.

Although the origins of the programme lie in the BIS White Paper "Students at the Heart of the System" the programme is intended to be UK-wide and is supported by HEFCW and the SFC as well as HEFCE, the SLC, UUK and others. The programme is owned by the Regulatory Partnership Group (RPG), hosted by HESA, and funded by HEFCE at £1.8M over three years.

The programme has three themes and nine projects as described at Annex A. There is also an additional project to define programme benefits. More information about HEDIIP, including the programme plan and details about each of the projects is available at <http://www.hediip.ac.uk/>

UCAS engagement

UCAS supports HEDIIP and is keen to work with the HE sector and other organisations to streamline data collection and promote the use of standards to improve data quality, efficiency of exchange, and reduce the administrative burden on HEPs.

The Director for Policy & Research is on the HEDIIP programme board, and UCAS is also represented on the HEDIIP Advisory Panel which advises the Programme Management Office and provides the membership of individual project boards. Full details of membership at:

<http://www.hediip.ac.uk/hediip-programme-board/>
<http://www.hediip.ac.uk/hediip-advisory-panel/>

The challenges for us in engaging with the programme include:

- We need to balance the resources we commit to the programme and specific projects with our strategic and operational priorities. This may limit the nature and extent of our engagement.
- The programme budget is relatively small and it is clear that the majority of the costs of implementation will fall to organisations such as UCAS as well as to universities and colleges. We will need to be clear about the impacts of any proposed changes on our products and services, and decide if, and how much, to invest in making these changes.
- Where proposed changes align with our own development plans, particularly the development of a new admissions system (see Annex B), we will look to implement them as part of that overall change programme. This will help to keep costs down and ensure that changes can be introduced in a well-planned and managed way and have flexibility built in to accommodate future change.
- Where UCAS is critical to the successful introduction of change (e.g. a new subject coding system) we will work directly with other relevant partners (e.g. HESA) to ensure that there is early, well considered discussion of governance and implementation timescales, opportunities and constraints to support the HEDIIP programme team.

We also need the HE sector's help to prioritise our engagement and inform where we should focus our efforts to deliver the most benefits for UCAS' customers. At present we are focusing our efforts on the three projects as discussed below.

New Subject Coding System (project 2.1)

The project is building on work undertaken in 2012-2013 which examined the development of JACS, current usage of JACS and the need for HE subject classifications, the limitations of JACS, other coding frameworks, and alternative approaches. This report is at:

http://www.hediip.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/JACS_Report_2013-07.pdf

The new HEDIIP project aims to produce a more detailed description of the sector's requirements for subject coding, and to develop and new a new coding system. The HEDIIP team is currently tendering for a contractor to undertake this work and has issued an RFP (request for proposal). Bids are currently being assessed by an evaluation group which includes UCAS.

UCAS is holding an internal workshop on 8th May to review and articulate our business requirements for subject coding and inform our engagement in this project. An update will be given at the Data Group meeting. Project pages at:

http://www.hediip.ac.uk/subject_coding/

Unique Learner Number (ULN) & Personal Learner Record (PLR) (project 2.2)

This project is also building on work undertaken in 2012-13 which explored the potential for using the ULN as the standard personal identifier in the HE sector to enable easier, faster sharing of student data.

HEDIIP intends to commission a contractor to undertake a project to:

- Develop a blueprint for what fully realised HE adoption of the ULN might look like, including key interactions between stakeholders that would be mediated by the ULN and case studies to describe how key stakeholders would use the ULN and the benefits that would be realised
- Understand the lessons learned from FE adoption of the ULN
- Design an implementation plan and timetable

An initial scoping meeting was held on 24th March. This meeting identified that there are many different views in the sector about the value and use of the ULN (and the PLR). UCAS is supportive of the ULN and we have previously indicated an interest in both mandating ULN usage for young UK applicants and exploring the potential for becoming a ULN allocator. However, to do so we would need to overcome challenges in relation to data quality, verification and also address potential concerns about the creation of dependencies which could limit our flexibility to innovate. It should also be noted that although UCAS and the Learner Records Service participated in a pilot project to explore the feasibility of linking UCAS systems and the PLR in 2011, UCAS does not currently have any plans to develop this further.

We will be exploring ULN issues at our internal workshop on 8th May and will provide an update at the meeting.

Student Data Collection Review (project 3.1)

HEDIIP is the custodian of an inventory of HE data collections, (<http://www.hediip.ac.uk/inventory-of-he-data-collections/>). Under the current project HEDIIP has appointed consultants to interview a number of data collectors (including UCAS) to understand that rationale and purpose of current student data collections in order to identify opportunities for standardisation and rationalisation. UCAS is speaking to the consultants on 8th May and an update will be provided at the meeting.

Project pages at: <http://www.hediip.ac.uk/data-collection-review/>

Annex A: HEDIPP themes and projects

HEDIIP is designed around three themes with associated projects:

- 1) Strategy and change
- 2) Standards and understanding
- 3) Capability and excellence

Theme 1 -Strategy and change

This theme will initially consider the broad question *what should the redesigned information landscape look like and how do we get there?* As the programme evolves, this theme will focus on change activities that are required to achieve the goals of the programme and identify specific issues to be addressed through themes 2 and 3.

Theme objectives:

- A design (expressed in whatever form is suitable) of the future information landscape
- Broad consensus and support for that design
- A roadmap setting out the journey required to achieve that design.

Projects:

1.1 A new landscape

This project will define the new data and information landscape for HE, providing a blueprint to maintain the programme's focus on delivering the required transformations. Following the development of the new landscape the project will work to develop an adoption plan and also develop a governance and sustainability model to ensure the on-going maintenance and development of the landscape.

1.2 Data Collection Inventory Review

An enabling project to evaluate the implementation of the Data Collection Inventory and identify any further actions required. The project will be initiated after the inventory has been in place for 12 months. The project reviews the inventory's contribution towards delivering programme outcomes. The review will also identify any follow up actions, including changes to the inventory, to leverage the benefits of the inventory.

Theme 2 – Standards and understanding

This theme will promote the standardisation of HE data and information definitions to reduce the burden involved with data supply and to improve the opportunities for data sharing and the comparability of published information. Where data and information can – or should – not be standardised, it will aim to increase the understanding of differences that exist.

Theme objectives:

- An improved understanding of the data specifications that exist

- Improved dialogue and understanding amongst those bodies that create and manage data specifications
- Real progress on standardising data and analysis definitions where it is appropriate to do so

Projects:

2.1 New Subject Coding System

The project will develop a new subject coding system to replace JACS. Stage 1 will include building on the 2013 report by Dr Gill Ferrell, engage, consult and define the detailed requirements for a new subject coding system for HE. Stage 2 will include the development of a new subject coding system for HE, including the specification of a standard approach to analysis and aggregation of subject data.

2.2 ULN

The first stage will be a pre-project scoping exercise, engaging with the Advisory Panel to review the 2013 Fice/Ferrell report on adoption of the ULN in HE; develop an approach and timescale for the adoption of the ULN in the HE sector; consult with relevant stakeholders in order to achieve consensus. The conclusion from this scoping exercise will be presented to the Programme Board. Following this project/s will be defined in detail to support the implementation.

2.3 Data Language

The project aims to bring about the adoption of a standard core data specification and a standard lexicon for the HE landscape. The project initiation stage will use the benefits identified by the Scoping Project (3.1) and the 2013 report by John Milner on the development of an HE data language to define the project approach. The Advisory Panel will be engaged to review the scope in terms of its breadth and depth. This initiation stage will define the project delivery stages, which may include dividing the project up into a number of delivery projects.

Theme 3 – capability and excellence

This theme will address the processes and capabilities associated with data and information, including management and governance issues where appropriate.

Theme outcomes:

- Improve data management and analytical capabilities across the landscape
- A greater understanding of the data collections that currently exist
- The identification of opportunities for standardisation and rationalisation of collections
- The identification and development of best practice for data and information stakeholders
- The development of a more nuanced evaluation of the cost/benefits of data collection

Projects

3.1 Student Data Collection Review

This is an enabling project to review student data collections in order to inform quantifying the programme benefits and recommend next steps. The project will review student data collections to gain a greater understanding of drivers, practice and barriers to standardisation and rationalisation. The review will recommend achievable goals for the standardisation and rationalisation of collections and identify next steps.

3.2 Best Practice for HE Providers

The project will identify and disseminate best practice in data management and governance for HE providers. It will review of data management and governance amongst HE providers with an emphasis on how they respond to requests for data and information; identification and promotion of best practice; and identification of areas for further development.

3.3 Best practice for Data Collectors

A parallel project to 3.2, this project will identify and disseminate best practice in data management and governance for HE providers, including identification of areas for further development.

3.4 Cost Benefit Methodology

Drawing on the experiences of data collectors in other sectors, the project will develop and consult on a process to assess the cost and benefit of data collections that can be used in HE in order to gain efficiencies and manage burden.

ANNEX B: Developing our next generation admission services capability and infrastructure

UCAS' admissions services have been developed over a long period of time specifically for each of its markets, such as Undergraduate, Postgraduate, Conservatoires, Teacher Training etc. This has left UCAS with a large portfolio of different services, each of which has to be updated individually when we want to make changes. This means that it is time consuming and expensive to make even relatively small improvements.

To address this we are developing, a blueprint for a series of generic business services such as "registration" and "payment" which can be configured to deliver specific admissions services. As existing products are updated or replaced we'll be using this model to build them. This will increase UCAS agility, reduce maintenance duplication, and decrease time to market. We have produced a short video to provide more information about our blueprint at: <http://play.buto.tv/9qQqb>