

# Groups and forums

## Data Group

### Minutes

DG/19/M1

Data Group meeting

Held on Tuesday 15 October 2019 at UCAS, Cheltenham

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Chair:	Bella Malins	University College London
Present:	Alex Ingold	The London School of Economics and Political Science
	Amy Butterworth	University of Bristol
	Amy Cooper	University of Leicester
	Gareth Samuel	Cardiff University
	Hannah Chilvers	University of East Anglia (Skype)
	Jonathan Aubrey	University of Nottingham
	Judith Davison	University of Huddersfield
	Kirsty Younger	Durham University
	Matt Birkett	Lancaster University
	Paul Ashby	University of Birmingham (Skype)
	Shabana Akhtar	HESPA (planning) (Skype)
	Sandrine Fabris	Aston University
Apologies:	Andy Fidler	Keele University
	Jo Hamilton	University of Exeter
	Melanie Simpson	University of Stirling
	Richard Bartlett	University of Cambridge
	Sammy Stewart	University of Stirling
	Sarah Banton-Place	University of Huddersfield
	Sheena Culley	University of Southampton
	Steve Walsh	Aberystwyth University
	Stuart Winters	University of Stirling
UCAS in attendance:	Deniz Gosai	Provider Engagement Coordinator
	David Best	Director, Analysis and Insight
	Peter Derrick	Head of Service Delivery (Operations)
	Sarah Barr Miller	Head of Insight Sales
Presenting:	Andy Irving	Head of Technology Service Management
	Carys Fisher	Senior Policy Executive
	Fin Willicott	Product Executive
	Mark Knight	Information Governance Manager
	Will Beese	Lead Data Scientist
Observing:	Alexa Gillett	Customer Experience Manager – providers
	Philippa Day	Data Consultant, UCAS Media

**A2/19/01 Welcome and apologies**

The Group was welcomed to the meeting, and apologies were noted. The Group introduced themselves.

**A2/19/02 Minutes and action log from previous meeting**

The minutes were approved as a correct and accurate reflection of the last meeting.

The open actions from the log were discussed:

DG120 – UCAS was working with DfE to compile a complete listing of school reference data. Reference data would be released as soon as it was available. This action was on hold.

DG147 – Data Futures was currently on hold, and so this action could not currently be taken forward.

DG157 – A copy of last year's student survey would be circulated to the Group for comment.

DG158 – The Group was asked to feedback on the type and size of documents applicants uploaded.

DG171 – The Group agreed that it would be better for UCAS to leave it to providers to decide whether subjects should be categorised against an ATAS code. This action was closed.

DG174 – It was agreed that a Tracker demonstration would be appreciated. This would be arranged for the next meeting.

DG175 – It was confirmed that APIs for postgraduate were now available, and undergraduate would be available in 2020. This action was closed.

DG176 – Information on HEP3 would be sent out in the bulletin, hopefully by November 2019. This action remained open as the Group would like to include test data on the next agenda.

DG178 – It was debated whether there needed to be different pricing for widening participation (WP) requests, given that these were very hard to identify – they transcended many teams and requests. It was also noted that WP was one area where providers had budgets. It was therefore agreed that pending any further plans from the Analysis and Insights team, the new pricing methodology (as detailed in the previous advisory group) would be rolled out. This offered pricing simplicity and transparency. This action was closed.

DG181 – No further work on campuses has been carried out by UCAS. The action remained on hold and would be brought back to the Group when a further update was available.

DG184 – Surveys would be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

#### **A2/19/03 Freedom of information – best practice from UCAS**

A presentation on freedom of information (Fol) was shared with the Group. If providers had any requests, they were asked to email [foi@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:foi@ucas.ac.uk). It was helpful for providers to have a consistent message provided by UCAS.

#### **A2/19/04 Data strategy**

A verbal update on UCAS' data strategy was given to the Group. UCAS was undertaking a data strategy project, with the aim on aligning all the data UCAS currently held into one place. The project would have three workstreams: governance practice, modernised infrastructure for the cloud (to speed up accessing data), and the re-use of data in a single business intelligence platform. By the end of the project, it was hoped that many data sources could be self-served by providers, which would also include clear and sufficient data services to incorporate third party data sources.

The first phase of the strategy began in September 2019, and would finish in January 2020. This included redeveloping the EXACT services, which could be found here – [www.ucas.com/file/178571/download?token=YTWdZ0lP](http://www.ucas.com/file/178571/download?token=YTWdZ0lP).

After January 2020, the roll out would be in terms of business priorities.

The Group was asked to contact David Best if they had any further questions – [d.best@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:d.best@ucas.ac.uk).

#### **A2/19/05 End of cycle resources discussion**

The Group was sent an end of cycle survey prior to the meeting and were thanked for completing it. A presentation on the end of cycle resources was shared with the Group. This also contained a section on proposals to re-define the way that unconditional offers were flagged (and subsequently reported on).

The Group felt that as this data was received mid-cycle, it was too late to be used for any strategic decision-making for that cycle. Many providers were undertaking recruitment predictions during October/November, and would prefer the data earlier to enable the latest data to be used.

UCAS had a data catalogue which could be accessed here – <https://www.ucas.com/file/178571/download?token=YTWdZ0lP>.

It was asked what UCAS' future plans for the End of Cycle Report would be. UCAS would like to change it, but did not want to change anything unnecessarily. Any suggestions or proposals would first be brought to the Data Group before going out to the wider sector.

There was some discussion around the first and fifth scenario on the slides about unconditional offers. It was noted that the proposed offers would be different to each other, based on the data UCAS held. There were some concerns that the media would use misleading headlines with the unconditional offers, and the Group asked whether

UCAS could report on the three scenarios on separate lines, and not automatically aggregate them up to a combined group.

The Group agreed that although obtaining data on providers which had strong recruitment practices would be interesting, UCAS did have to be careful on what they reported on. It was therefore agreed that UCAS would only identify an unconditional offer when it was expressly identifiable in the data rather than using inferences (e.g. where an applicant appears to be waiting on exam results).

## **A2/19/06 Corporate strategy update**

A corporate strategy presentation was shared with the Group.

Members of the Group liked that distance learning was included in the strategy, and some providers were currently having internal discussions around using UCAS to promote their courses. However, it was noted that distance learning applicants were usually mature students, and so this application process was different.

It was raised that some providers would not want automated decision-making undertaken by UCAS, as this could eliminate personal statements, amongst other criteria, as well as make the process entirely mechanistic. However, overall the Group was happy for UCAS to research the suggestions noted in the presentation, but wanted UCAS to continue with its core service – the undergraduate application market.

## **A2/19/07 Round table discussion on equality data**

- OfS transparency return
- UCAS contextual data supply
- Measures used in the sector (TUNDRA, POLAR, MEM)

UCAS currently had two sets of contextualised data – the school contextualised data service which had been running for many years, and a modernised contextualised data service (MEM), which UCAS was still trialling. UCAS was committed to delivering contextualised data, but struggled to get hold of some data from the DfE for active use in the admissions process.

The Group was asked for the feedback around this topic.

- Providers did not feel that access measures were working together. It was asked whether UCAS and the Office for Students (OfS) could work together to decide on the best measure. It was also noted that the sector could also work together to propose the best access measure. PD/SBM DG186
- The DfE did not want to disclose the individual free school meal matrix, although UCAS would continue to push for this data.
- It was asked why providers were asked to return data to the OfS which UCAS already had. UCAS had not been fully briefed by the OfS on what they were requesting. UCAS would not provide data to the OfS on behalf of providers, but agreed to look into whether there was some middle ground. The Group also noted that last year the timing of the request was not ideal. It was agreed that a further discussion on this would be had at the next meeting. DG DG187

Finally, the Group was informed that they could receive MEM data by opting into some data services – for instance, the modernised contextualised data service. This data was not available in PERS or through EXACT.

#### **A2/19/08 Career explorer – run through and update**

An update on career explorer was shared with the Group, and a subject course demonstration was given.

The following points were confirmed:

- Course listings showed lists of courses that most applicants studied with the selected chosen subjects.
- There would be two routes applicants could choose to research courses: the Hub, and/or Explorer.
- On course entry, there was a link which would take the applicant to the university website. It would not take the applicant to the university course page, as this would be too difficult to maintain.
- It was planned that developments would go live by the end of November 2019.

#### **A2/19/09 Sync and its new data fields**

A presentation outlining the new fields to be included in UCAS Sync was shared with the Group.

Currently the passport question would only be available to applicants who were not from the UK. If providers wanted UCAS to extend this to all applicants, then they would need to explain what they would use this information for. Defining 'UK only' was linked to the applicant's permanent home address.

It was asked whether UCAS would be monitoring how many applicants stop an application part way through. Although this was not an idea UCAS had previously thought about, they could consider it. However, this information would be asked in the applicant's profile, and so could be completed later.

All the new fields would be optional – however, UCAS would encourage applicants to complete the information. The Group questioned how applicants consented to sharing data (especially around school information).

Best practice on provider questions would be covered in deeper detail at the Admissions Conference. Currently there were no limits to the number of questions providers could ask, although research showed that most providers averaged three questions. UCAS would be monitoring this.

Finally, it was noted that documents would only be held by UCAS until the end of the cycle, and then be removed.

The Group was asked to contact Sam Sheppard [-s.sheppard@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:s.sheppard@ucas.ac.uk), if they had any further questions.

**A2/19/10 Sync and data transfer fields**

A Pioneer day had been arranged for Wednesday 23 October 2019 where UCAS would share their plans on the data transfer fields. Vendors would also be able to confirm where they were at with developing their APIs. It was confirmed that three providers who did not have vendors would also be attending on this day, and it was hoped that at least one of these providers would become an early adopter. The full list of vendors who were attending the day would be sent to the Group. PD DG189

**A2/19/11 Any other business and close****Retention policies**

The Group was asked to send their retention policies to Peter Derrick, at [p.derrick@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:p.derrick@ucas.ac.uk), if they were happy to share them with UCAS. It was noted that many providers were currently updating their policies. Group DG190

**Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 12 February 2020.