

Minutes

DG/20/M1

Data Group meeting

Held on Wednesday 12 February 2020 at UCAS, Cheltenham

Chair:	Bella Malins	University College London
Present:	Amy Butterworth Amy Cooper Alex Ingold Gareth Samuel Hannah Chilvers Jonathan Aubrey Kirsty Younger Matt Birkett Melanie Simpson	University of Bristol University of Leicester The London School of Economics and Political Science Cardiff University University of East Anglia (Microsoft Teams) University of Nottingham Durham University Lancaster University University of Stirling (Microsoft Teams)
Apologies:	Andy Fidler Richard Bartlett Sarah Banton-Place Sandrine Fabris Shabana Akhtar	Keele University University of Cambridge University of Huddersfield Aston University HESPA (planning)
UCAS in attendance:	Deniz Gosai Peter Derrick Sarah Barr Miller	Provider Engagement Coordinator Head of Service Delivery (Operations) Head of Insight Sales, UCAS Media
Presenting:	Carys Fisher Charlie Brown Fiona Johnston James Harley Richard O'Kelly Sam Dolman	Senior Policy Executive Lead Data Scientist (Microsoft Teams) Director of Operations Principal Data Scientist Head of Analytical Data Data Scientist
Observing:	Lynsey Hopkins	Sync Adoption Manager

A1/20/01 Welcome and apologies

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

A1/20/02 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:

DG157 – the Group was encouraged to think about which type of questions they would like included in the student survey. This action remained open.

DG158 – UCAS was still keen to find out what restrictions providers put in place for document uploads. This action remained open.

DG174 – the Group confirmed that they would still like a demonstration of Tracker, and if possible, a document. Data would be live shortly, and more information would be available in upcoming webinars. This action remained open.

DG176 – an item on test data would be on the next meeting's agenda.

DG184 – an update on surveys would be added to the next agenda.

DG186 and DG188 – multiple equality measures (MEM) was covered later in the meeting, and UCAS was in conversations with the Office for Students. This action was closed.

DG187 – Transparency data was discussed later in the meeting. This action was closed.

DG189 – the full list of Sync Pioneers was available on ucas.com.

DG190 – UCAS would still like to receive feedback on providers retention policies. This action remained open.

A1/20/03 Sync update and discussion

It was confirmed that Fiona Johnston, Director of Operations at UCAS, was working full-time on Sync, along with Kim Eccleston, who was on secondment from University of Warwick.

A presentation on UCAS Sync was shared with the Group.

Due to UCAS not meeting their own internal deadlines, providing vendors more time for their developments, and the announcement of two admission review, UCAS made the decision to pause the developments of Sync. In addition, the sector had said that although the changes to Clearing was welcomed, they would not be able to use the functionality in their student record systems without support from the student record system vendors, and so would need to rely totally on web-link, which in some cases was not a viable option. The plan was now to adopt a product-based approach,

breaking the development into smaller pieces. There was then the option to potentially release them as and when they were ready, or if the change would affect fairness, hold them back for release at the start of the cycle. A further update would be provided at the Admissions Conference.

The short-term focus aims were shared with the Group.

The following points were noted or stated:

- It was confirmed that more communications with vendors would take place, and a UCAS vendor team had been put together. UCAS would be asking providers and vendors the best working approach. In addition, more readiness and testing would take place ahead of the cycle.
- Providers were unhappy with the delay, as they had secured budget funding for internal change projects or support teams, which they would now lose.
- UCAS was dedicating a lot of resources and recruiting colleagues from the sector to help develop Sync. UCAS' advisory groups were one of the communication channels providers should be using to give their feedback to UCAS.
- The UCAS Board was being kept informed of Sync reset progress, and the executive commissioned a 3rd party review to share with the Board, to assess options for moving forward. It was noted that there was a member of the Board with significant technology expertise to bring to bear, but that changes to the corporate governance, could support the recruitment of additional digital expertise in the future.
- The Group was keen for UCAS not to forget about the providers who did not use vendors but developed in-house. It was confirmed that UCAS would be working closely with these providers, but it would also be helpful for UCAS to understand the wider financial planning timelines for all providers. Some members of the group confirmed that many providers had to complete budget requests by February, and so would not secure any funding for the following cycle.
- Many of the short-term priorities were not provider-centric given the short time until the start of the 2021 cycle. Moving forward, an API-first approach would be adopted, and provider priorities would be considered more. It was agreed that an update would be provided at the next meeting including the set of priorities of development.

DG DG191

A1/20/04 Update on Multiple Equality Measure

A presentation on the Multiple Equality Measure (MEM) was shared with the Group.

The following MEM reports were available on ucas.com:

- [Full report: MEM – technical report.](#)
- [MEM – summary report.](#)
- [Annex — MEM model output.](#)
- [Data for figures used in the report.](#)

Discussion questions at the end of the presentation.

- Awareness of MEM was good.

- There was concern expressed that while the Office for Students would not use MEM as a measure of inequality to demonstrate progress in widening participation, adoption in the sector would be low.
- MEM was good for providers if they didn't have capability to create a model. However, for providers who could do it themselves, then MEM wouldn't be as useful, as some factors considered in an institutional measure would not be taken into consideration in MEM.
- One member didn't use an initial version of MEM as all ethnically Chinese applicants were categorised as Quintile 5, regardless of other factors. UCAS confirmed that they did want to refine both ethnicity classifications and geographical factors used in MEM and would also carry out some further research.
- In response to specific concerns using postcode based geographical measures in London, UCAS was considering doing a separate iteration for the London region. It was noted that it would be beneficial to have an idea of factors that differed to other regions. It was agreed that this would be discussed between meetings.

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A1/20/05 Transparency data and discussion

A discussion on Provider EXACT Records Supply (PERS) data and transparency data was had. The Office for Students (OfS) had built a tool, which exported transparency data. UCAS also provided PERS data, and was happy to do more, if there was a need from the sector.

In-cycle, the provider view of some characteristics of data (i.e. ethnicity) was restricted. UCAS confirmed that they did not expect providers to do anything with the aggregated in-cycle data.

UCAS was also working with the Welsh Government to expand MEM and would like to expand data on high schools. The Department for Education owned the data for England on free school meals and there were currently restrictions on UCAS sharing this data with the sector at the most granular level.

UCAS had published reports on gender, education, and background since 2015 with a methodology in place. These reports highlighted that there were some differences in gender and POLAR, and the UK had unfavourable admissions processes to some ethnic groups. UCAS was looking at carrying out further research in this area.

PD/RO'K
DG194

It was noted that providers were asked to produce similar reports to UCAS to the OfS. UCAS agreed to investigate why this was.

Group
DG195

The Group was asked to send any feedback they had on the usability of the end of cycle report to Richard O'Kelly, at r.okelly@ucas.ac.uk.

PD/RO'K
DG196

Finally, UCAS was asked to find out whether PERS included tariff-able qualifications, why it was banded, and why BTECS were only achieved grades and not predicted.

A1/20/06 Representing qualifications applicants have on entry

In response to the UUK and OfS reviews of admissions, UCAS had established a Reform and Reimagine project to consider both what changes could be made to the current cycle to improve fairness, transparency, benefit all customers, and to consider how a PQA model could be adopted. A small group of critical friends made up of providers (both from advisory groups and the wider sector), secondary sector colleagues, and students had been formed. The work completed by the group was now being brought to the established governance groups of UCAS, including the advisory groups.

One proposal was on representing qualifications applicants had on entry to higher education. A presentation on this was shared with the Group, with the outlined proposal.

Feedback on the proposal included:

- Concerns with the data being potentially misleading, due to the changing applicant population potentially with providers being more selective. Provider behaviour did change year on year, potentially causing an issue with a three-year aggregation of the data.
- The data would only be shared for courses with an intake of 50 or more over three years. UCAS had not yet carried out analysis on courses which did not meet this threshold. UCAS would like to receive feedback on how to aggregate courses together to reach the proposed threshold. It was noted that the size and shape of every university was different, and could lead to issues with aggregation being meaningful to applicants.
- There was the potential to discourage WP applicants from applying to the most selective universities if the 'average' achievement of other applicants was higher than they were predicted. Advice and guidance to applicants had to be provided and widening participation applicants would need additional support and information, with potentially a separate iteration for them.
- There was also concerns that too much information would be ignored by applicants, and applicants would not be able to interpret the data correctly. The role of advisers was critical in supporting the use of any potential tool.
- Additional work with students would be taking place.
- It was noted that there is a clear demand for increased transparency in the qualifications used to gain entry to HE.

UCAS' next step was to run with real data and send the results to providers. The Group was very keen to help UCAS with this. It was also suggested that contextualised/widening participation data should be visualised, possibly, overlapping on the distribution curve data.

A1/20/07 Update on student profiles

A presentation on student personas was shared with the Group, and the links to the webinars could be found [here](#).

The Group stated that using a set of personas across the whole sector might not be useful for providers, as they each would like to attract different types of applicants. However, in the future, UCAS might be able to personalise personas for specific providers. The Group liked this idea, as they could use it within marketing (for

example, use the right language for individual personas). In addition, they could see if a specific persona was declining their offers, and look into why. The number of personas was discussed, and it was agreed that student personas would be discussed at a future meeting. DG DG197

A1/20/08 Any other business and close

UCAS had partnered with Civitas Learning in order to gain more student data, including quantitative data on student retention, and those that drop out through combining HESA return data with UCAS application data. Civitas had already worked with some UK organisations, and UCAS would limit the amount of engagement to begin with.

This partnership was still in the early stages, and would be made public on Tuesday 18 February 2020. A pilot would be carried out first with a small number of providers. A more detailed update would be provided at the next meeting. The Group were asked to share their experiences of working on retention. SBM DG198

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 10 June 2020. The venue would be confirmed.