Groups and Forums

UCAS

Minutes

DG/20/M1

Data Group meeting

Held on Wednesday 10 June 2020, virtually through Microsoft Teams.

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
	Andrew Lewis	University of Southampton
	Andy Fidler	Keele University
	Gareth Samuel	Cardiff University
	Hannah Chilvers	University of East Anglia
	Jonathan Aubrey	University of Nottingham
	Kirsty Younger	Durham University
	Matt Birkett	Lancaster University
	Sandrine Fabris	Aston University
	Shabana Akhtar	HESPA (planning)
Apologies:	Melanie Simpson	University of Stirling
	Richard Bartlett	University of Cambridge
	Sammy Stewart	University of Stirling
	Sarah Banton-Place	University of Huddersfield
	Stuart Winters	University of Stirling
UCAS in attendance:	Deniz Gosai	Provider Engagement Coordinator
	Peter Derrick	Head of Service Delivery (Operations)
	Sarah Barr Miller	Head of Insight Sales, UCAS Media
Presenting:	Paul Chandler	Principal Data Scientist
Observing:	Katie Holden	Senior Legal Counsel

A2/20/01   Welcome and apologies

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

A2/20/02   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:

DG158 – The Group was asked to find out, and email groupsandforums@ucas.ac.uk, the average number of documents applicants uploaded in the undergraduate and postgraduate scheme. This action remained open for feedback.

DG174 – An update on Tracker was not currently available. This action remained open.

DG176 – it was not possible to obtain test data for this meeting. It was agreed that this action would remain open for a future meeting.

DG190 – retention policies had been received from the Group. This action was closed.

DG192 –Peter Derrick, Head of Service Delivery (Operations) agreed to follow up on the number of Chinese applicants who were not categorised as Q5 in MEMs. This action remained open.

DG193 – Peter Derrick, Head of Service Delivery (Operations) agreed to follow up on whether a conversation had been had around creating a London MEM, and the idea of factors that differed between regions. This action remained open.

DG194 – a discussion was had with the Office for Students (OfS) around the similarity of publication timeline. It was noted that sometimes there was an overlap with what was published. This action was closed.

DG195 – feedback had been received from the Group on the usability of the end of cycle reports. This action was closed.

DG196 – the latest release of PERS (at the start of June 2020) had included predicted BTECs. It was asked that where PERS included Tariff, why this was provided in a (quite wide) band rather than the actual number? For example, Applicant Tariff Band 2017 field in PERS EOC. Paul Chandler, Principal Data Scientist, agreed to follow this up outside of the meeting. This action was closed.

DG157, DG184, DG191, DG198 – these actions were covered during the meeting, and subsequently closed.

A2/20/03   Clearing Plus

A Clearing Plus presentation was shared with the Group, and the algorithm was explained. It was noted that UCAS had a lot of dataset on applicants and used this information to produce applicant 'clusters' by attributes. Additionally, course clusters were also put together.

Once the clusters had been created a matching algorithm would calculate a relevancy score (as a percentage). The applicant would then see a list of courses they were matched too, which would be ordered by the relevancy score/strongest match.

It was confirmed that courses would be grouped with other similar courses, and not by size. Course codes was used to help define the groups. A detailed webinar on the algorithm would be held on Thursday 11 June 2020 from 14:00 – 15:00. Providers could sign up to the webinar here.

The Clearing Plus process was explained, and it was reiterated that Clearing Plus would run alongside the traditional Clearing. How providers could set criteria for the courses was also explained.

Sam Sheppard, Product Owner, was thanked for her professionalism during the Clearing Plus webinars, however, there was some frustration from some providers that UCAS had developed Clearing Plus without tariff or bulk uploads, and therefore the product was not ready for purpose for this year's cycle. Additionally, providers were not happy that qualifications such as the Welsh Baccalaureate had not been included this year. It was noted that UCAS was keen to continue moving forward with products and developments to help learners connect with providers. The Group was reminded that they did not have to set criteria if they wanted to attract all applicants.

A2/20/04   YouthSight partnership

A presentation on YouthSight partnership was shared with the Group.

Four 'waves' had already been carried out, and UCAS had committed to a further three waves. The next wave would target current year 12 students.

The number of applicants who had expressed an interest in deferring was discussed, and a more detailed webinar on these statistics, as well as applicant trends to leave it to the last minute to make decisions, would be held on Friday 12 June 2020 - https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_mP2nawftQxGWggQepgmK2g.

Overall, it was noted that there was currently a lot of nervousness from applicants, as they did not know what they would like to do, due to the current circumstances.

A2/20/05   Analytical support for the sector this cycle

The different analytical support UCAS was offering was shared with the Group. This support could be grouped into two:

Free support:
- Unibuddy and UCAS partnership (peer to peer engagement). The Group was encouraged to sign up ASAP to Unibuddy, as the cut-off date was approaching.
- Highlighting online and virtual events – UCAS was happy to list providers online and virtual events on ucas.com
- Tracking applicant sentiment

Paid for products:

- 2020 sentiment tracking report. Further information on this would be available in the correspondence bulletin on Wednesday 10 June 2020. The cost of these reports started from £500 and were available to order immediately.
- The Recruitment Variance Planner – a webinar would be held to explain the planner in more detail to providers, and the first report would be available from £1,000. A further two reports would then be released, as more information became available, at an additional cost of £7,000.
- Clearing Plus enhanced profile – which included a provider's logo and tag line, could be purchased for a one off cost of £2,000.

It was confirmed that these reports had been developed as a direct response from provider feedback.

A2/20/06 Sync and Tracker update

It had been communicated during the February 2020 meeting that UCAS had made the decision to pause Sync. UCAS was currently planning a product-based approach, and was working on Clearing Plus, essential changes in the Collection tool and Search, ongoing developments within the Hub, and understanding the way forward for API's.

UCAS was developing an API roadmap but was hoping to move to a situation where they could focus on having 'restful' API's to eventually enable UCAS to decommission ODBC links and build and improve on the XML link. However, it was confirmed that the ODBC link would not be decommissioned before the 2023 cycle. A detailed update on the API roadmap would be shared at a future meeting. It was also noted that UCAS would publish clear data structures for providers integration with their student record systems.

UCAS was currently maintaining the 'old' Tracker, and a detailed update would be provided at a future meeting.

A2/20/07 Civitas partnership

A 'UCAS Media and Civitas Learning' presentation was shared with the Group. A future webinar would be arranged on what Civitas would be offering, however, a pilot between UCAS and Civitas had been agreed, to establish whether the data UCAS and universities held was good enough to see what could be done to retain learners at university.

It was UCAS' intention to hold four pilots through the webinars, and group members were asked to contact Sarah Barr Miller – s.barrmiller@ucas.ac.uk if they were interested in getting involved. A white paper on this pilot would also be circulated.

DG DG200

The Group was assured that Civitas had already processes in place to ensure data sources from universities was 'cleaned'. Additionally, HESA returns would also be used.

A2/20/08 Any other business and Close

There was no other business. The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 7 October 2020.