



Corporate Strategy 2015–2020



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Our strategy recognises that better services to learners will benefit higher education providers; and that better services for higher education providers will benefit learners.

UCAS' vision is that we are at the heart of connecting people to higher education. This strategy for the years 2015–2020 aims to put UCAS in a position to provide more and better services to learners and those who support them, to ensure that universities and colleges can efficiently recruit and select the students they want, and to support others who have a stake in developing the benefits of our unique national asset – a single, fair, transparent service that supports progression to higher education.

Strategic context

A brief reflection on our strategy for 2010–2015 reminds us how much has changed in the last five years. Although many of the assumptions we made then were right, the context in which we made them has changed immeasurably.

Our strategy then was to provide efficient, continuously improving admissions services for higher education providers and applicants, and to undertake a fundamental review of the undergraduate admissions process – as a precursor to creating a new single portal which would serve our core undergraduate admissions function. In time, we would expand the portal to improve our services for part-time, postgraduate, and international admissions, thereby increasing our share of the higher education market.

In the meantime, changes in student demand for higher education, funding, numbers of places, and secondary education, have caused a fundamental shift in the dynamic for admissions. A market has been created in undergraduate admissions, with an increase in the number of universities and colleges recruiting rather than selecting students for their courses.


While new recruitment and marketing strategies have been deployed by universities and colleges, we have yet to see any

significant challenge to the three-year, full-time undergraduate degree model. Although our strategy recognised the changing communications preferences of young people, the rapid expansion of social media and exponential growth in users wanting to access our services from multiple mobile devices has proved both an opportunity and a challenge.

In considering our strategy for the next five years, we believe that the magnitude of future change may be as substantial as in the past five. As universities and colleges look to reduce costs and find new ways to secure student numbers and quality, we anticipate that disruptive strategies may start to emerge.

The priorities of our higher education providers are embedded in our strategy for 2015–2020. Our focus is on providing better services which are easier to use, cost-effective, reliable, and which can be quickly adapted to changing needs.

With the lines between admissions and recruitment becoming increasingly blurred, UCAS recognises that a key part of its service to higher education providers is strong advocacy for the benefits of higher education, attracting potential applicants to use our admissions services, and ensuring that learners have access to information which will help them make informed choices about their applications.



Our focus is on providing better services which are easier to use, cost-effective, reliable, and which can be quickly adapted to changing needs.



While we cannot predict how the higher education sector will evolve and change over the next five years, amongst the many uncertainties we can be sure that the strategic challenges UCAS will face will be primarily shaped by:

- the level of demand for higher education
- the range of choices and study options available
- cost-saving and efficiency pressures
- government policies on qualifications, higher education funding, regulation and immigration.

Overall, we believe it is likely that we will see continuing demand for higher education and higher level skills. Whilst the standard three-year undergraduate programme will remain the norm, other choices such as higher apprenticeships, employer training, and study abroad are also likely to grow. We expect to see new higher education providers entering the market and existing providers adjusting their market position, as well as the development of innovative learning models giving students more choice about when, where and how to study. This indicates a primarily recruiting admissions culture and emphasises the importance of enabling students to understand the education and progression choices they have and to make well informed decisions about these.

Assumptions

We have made the following broad assumptions in shaping our strategy for 2015–2020.

Markets

- Demand for full-time undergraduate courses is likely to remain the same or increase only slightly.
- Significant numbers of students will be applying to higher education with new qualifications and new combinations of qualifications.
- Demand from international students for UK higher education is likely to remain strong but may be impacted by immigration policy. Demand for transnational education (TNE) provision globally will rise.
- Part-time undergraduate study has shown substantial falls since the introduction of higher fees. It is uncertain if or when demand will recover.
- More innovative approaches to learning will start to proliferate, including online provision.
- Improvements in student support could stimulate an increase in UK demand for postgraduate study, which otherwise is a declining market.
- Higher apprenticeship numbers will increase and gain credibility as an alternative to more traditional higher education.
- There will be increased competition to attract learners who will, in turn, have greater choice.
- The higher education sector will continue to seek efficiencies and reduce costs.

Competition

- There will be many organisations offering learners information and advice about educational progression.
- Traditional ways of contacting learners will be replaced by increasingly sophisticated and integrated digital, video and mobile communication channels. Social relationship management will underpin engagement with learners.

- There will be growing demand to connect with young people and prospective students in a competitive recruitment market.
- Higher education providers will use a range of services to connect with and recruit students, particularly international students.
- Higher education providers will increasingly use sophisticated analytics to underpin their marketing, recruitment and admissions strategies and practice.

Legislation, regulation, devolution

- Devolution will drive further diversification in policy, funding and regulation in secondary, further and higher education in different parts of the UK.
- Government policy will focus on finding sustainable solutions for the funding of higher education, as well as increasing employer engagement in the design and delivery of courses offering higher level skills.
- There is likely to be stronger emphasis on education and skills provision, and progression at local, city and regional level.
- Students and parents will increasingly want information about the quality and added value of the student experience and graduate employment prospects.
- Reducing inequalities in attainment and progression, and supporting equality of opportunity for access to, and participation in, higher education will remain a public priority.
- Providing all young people with access to comprehensive, high quality information, advice, and careers guidance will also remain a priority.
- Legislation and policy on the sharing and uses of data, balanced with how learners want their personal data to be treated, will present challenges and opportunities for UCAS and its customers.





VISION AND MISSION



Vision

UCAS is at the heart of connecting people to higher education.



Mission

To inspire and facilitate progression in education through information and admissions services.

Principles

Education is our universe; higher education is our heartland

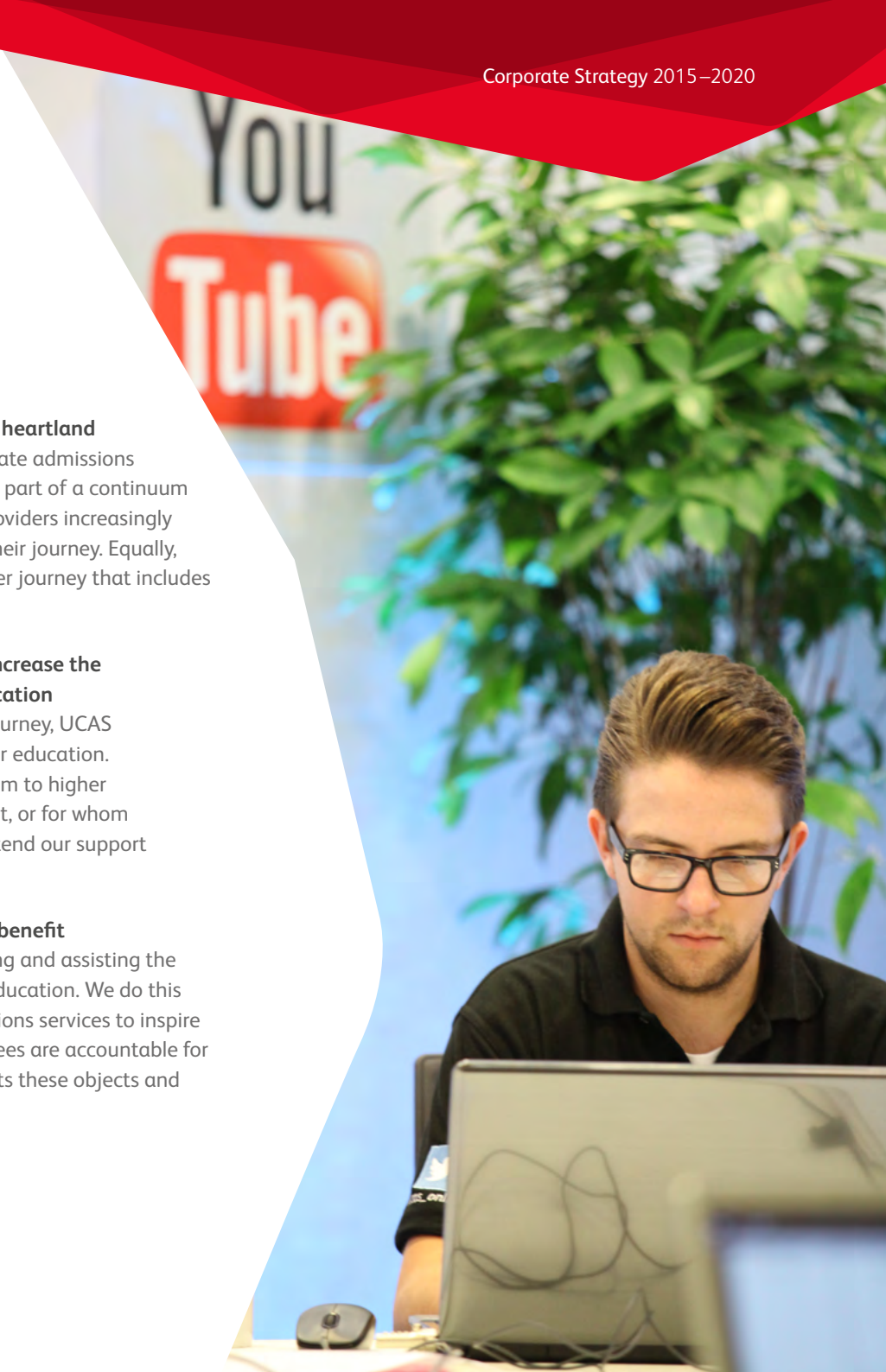
Our core business remains the full-time undergraduate admissions service. However, progression to higher education is part of a continuum of progression in learning, and higher education providers increasingly want to engage with potential students earlier in their journey. Equally, undergraduate study is itself part of a longer learner journey that includes employment and possibly postgraduate study.

All progression in learning has the potential to increase the pool of people who can benefit from higher education

By embracing a wider perspective of the learner journey, UCAS recognises that there are many pathways to higher education. By connecting with those whose journeys take them to higher education through apprenticeships or employment, or for whom a degree becomes relevant later in life, we can extend our support for non-traditional learners.

UCAS is a charity which exists to deliver public benefit

UCAS' charitable objects are focused on advancing and assisting the advancement of higher, further and secondary education. We do this through the provision of information and admissions services to inspire and facilitate educational progression. Our Trustees are accountable for ensuring that UCAS' strategy demonstrably meets these objects and delivers public benefit.



We have six strategic objectives

Learners

Learners know that UCAS is where you find out about progression in education and make applications

Education providers

UCAS is a trusted partner for attraction, recruitment and admissions services

Advisers

UCAS provides comprehensive resources to support learners who want to progress

Data and analysis

UCAS is the trusted and authoritative source of intelligence about achievement, progression and participation in education

Commercial

UCAS Media is the premier channel for education providers and commercial customers for marketing to potential students

Business model

UCAS is an exemplar of an efficient and effective national shared service

1. Learners

Learners know that UCAS is where you find out about progression in education and make applications.

- To provide fair, transparent and accessible services for applying to courses and other learning opportunities.
- To be the first and most trusted choice for high quality information and advice about options for progression.
- To be the leading course search provider for higher education courses and a wide range of other learning opportunities.
- To develop and share rich community and user-generated content which inspires and supports learners who want to progress in education.
- To engage actively with non-traditional learners and support widening participation.

2. Education providers

UCAS is a trusted partner for attraction, recruitment and admissions services.

- To maintain the integrity of a trusted national admissions service for full-time undergraduate courses.
- To provide efficient, reliable and innovative admissions services that meet the varying needs of education providers.
- To give higher education providers the opportunity to build affinity with prospective students and provide services which support the active recruitment of students.
- To offer innovative analytical products and services which support the effective planning and management of admissions and widening participation.

3. Advisers

UCAS provides comprehensive resources to support learners who want to progress.

- To provide a trusted source of information for teachers, parents and advisers to support and motivate learners as they progress in education.
- To extend our reach to those who advise the full diversity of learners in a wide range of settings.
- To provide information and training resources to those wishing to expand their knowledge and effectiveness as advisers.
- To provide accessible tools and systems that teachers, parents, and advisers can use to support individuals and groups of learners making their choices about qualifications, educational progression, and applications to courses.

4. Data and analysis

UCAS is the trusted and authoritative source of intelligence about achievement, progression and participation in education.

- To be the recognised primary source of intelligence about demand, progression, participation and admissions in UK higher education.
- To improve public understanding about education progression by developing and sharing insights with customers and stakeholders.
- To use our data to support widening participation and fair access to higher education.
- To be known as an independent and trusted commentator on the currency of qualifications for progression.
- To be recognised as an innovative and accessible source of data and analysis.
- To develop comprehensive, agile and cost-effective data and analysis services.

5. Commercial

UCAS Media is the premier channel for education providers and commercial customers for marketing to potential students.

- To develop UCAS Media's business in a way which complements and extends UCAS' mission.
- To assist universities and colleges in connecting with prospective students through digital channels.
- To leverage our brand, digital footprint and data assets, to generate funds which support innovation and reduce the costs of using our services.
- To develop relevant and appropriate commercial partnerships that offer value and support to learners.

6. Business model

UCAS is an exemplar of an efficient and effective national shared service.

- To ensure that our activities deliver public benefit aligned to our charitable objectives.
- To deliver shared services and drive operational efficiencies that provide value to customers and minimise costs to the higher education sector.
- To secure our customers' loyalty through exemplary customer service, trusted relationships and deep understanding of the higher education sector.
- To be an innovative digital business which optimises the use of technology to improve services and minimise cost.
- To collect, manage and protect our rich data assets to facilitate the delivery of high quality products and services.
- To develop and maintain a motivated and digitally literate workforce.
- To implement a business model which ensures UCAS services are self-funding.



STRATEGY



Strategy

Our ten-point strategy to deliver these objectives is set out below.



1. Digital

We believe we can deliver these ambitious objectives if we become a fully digital organisation. This means continuing our journey from legacy IT systems towards cloud-based, service-orientated applications that minimise costs for users, improve our ability to react quickly to changed needs, and enable a more sophisticated relationship between learner needs and education provision.

A digital platform, with service-orientated architecture, enables us to manage our services for undergraduate admissions, conservatoires, teacher training, postgraduate, and post-16 as a single cluster of services with multiple pathways. This approach means greater flexibility to meet changing requirements for different user groups, improved efficiency, better reliability, and greater resilience.

Embracing digital technology has profound implications for the organisation and its ability to improve our core admissions services for all users. Internally, our journey to digital means developing new skills for our staff, deploying agile methodology in product management and service development, and embracing more flexible working approaches.

As we become increasingly digital, we can extend our services, and offer innovative approaches for universities and colleges wanting to target and increase their recruitment, and for connecting learners with learning opportunities.

Digital technology opens rich opportunities to provide personalised services and content to learners, as well as connecting with them through the channels that are now part of 21st century culture.



2. Social relationship management

A digital approach enables an engagement with learners, through perhaps a decade or more of key decisions, in their journey through education and into employment.

‘Social relationship management’, or SRM, is a strategy to be more responsive and engaged with our customers, to listen and respond to their needs quickly and with a consistency and transparency that is valued and, increasingly, expected.

SRM takes our customers out of communications silos that are complex and costly to manage. It embraces ‘listening’, engagement, publishing, and content, as well as analytics. It allows content to find the learners instead of learners needing to search for content, and has the potential to transform how we motivate and prepare learners for progression in learning.

With the learner journey as the axis of our strategy, we anticipate beginning a relationship with a learner when they make key decisions at age 16, and continuing this through undergraduate and postgraduate admissions, through to employment. Throughout this journey, learners build profiles of achievement and aspirations. As well as offering the opportunity for higher education providers to build affinity with learners before they apply to courses, the development of learner profiles will facilitate more accurate applications and recording of qualifications.



3. Courses data and course search

If we are to support higher education providers in attracting and recruiting learners, we need to position and build the UCAS platform as the single destination for learners wanting to progress in education. The keystone service to underpin this ambition is our courses data and our course search platform. It is therefore central to our strategy to develop these services to be best-in-class. Learners have a choice of search services to use, so it is incumbent on UCAS, as the UK's central admissions service, to develop sophisticated, trusted and accurate course services that support learners' decisions and providers' recruitment needs.



4. A progression ecosystem

Our vision is to be at the heart of connecting people to higher education. Our strategy is to position ourselves as a digital hub in which the strength of our engagement with learners underpins the value of our service to education providers. And the strength of our engagement with providers underpins the value of our service to learners. This symbiotic relationship, enabled by UCAS services, is the core of a balanced ecosystem of ancillary services and relationships. This will also embrace the role of multiple stakeholders, advisers, parents, schools, awarding bodies and others who play a part in supporting learner progression.



5. Customer service

If we want to continue to earn the trust and commitment of our customers to the central admissions service for higher education, we need to maintain a singular focus on exceptional customer service. We employ customer logic in everything we do and we look through the customer lens to inform all our service delivery and development.

Our commitment to digital methodologies and technology goes some of the way to ensuring an excellent customer experience. But not all relationships are conducted in cyberspace, and UCAS remains committed to engaging with customers through a network of user groups and advisory boards. These range from groups serving the four countries of the UK and regions within them, to groups based on markets such as international, undergraduate or postgraduate. We have dedicated teams managing our relationships with higher education providers, schools and colleges, and with technology professionals throughout the sector.



6. Data and analysis

As we transform our technology platform, we also have the opportunity to build an ever more sophisticated data architecture. The rich, real-time dataset that UCAS is privileged to hold provides numerous opportunities to support our customers. We will continue to build on recent improvements to the sector-wide data that we publish, as well as developing new services that providers can utilise to optimise recruitment and admissions strategies.

We remain committed to widening participation and fair access. We will increasingly deploy analysis services to support non-traditional learners and those from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to benefit from higher education.

We are governed by the Data Protection Act 1998 and use high standards of data governance and information security.



7. Qualifications

Qualifications are the currency of progression in learning and UCAS has a strategic role to help learners understand the value of the qualifications they choose to pursue.

We will ensure we keep higher education providers up-to-date with qualifications developments in the different countries of the UK, and the new Tariff will increasingly be rolled out to embrace international qualifications.

Validated qualifications information is an essential element of the admissions process, and we will continue to enhance our data exchange with awarding bodies.



8. Commercial

To enable the significant improvements in our services that this strategy anticipates, we will continue to develop our commercial arm, UCAS Media. Many of our higher education customers require bespoke marketing and analytical services, and we can strengthen our value to the sector and complement our mission by extending our paid-for services.

In addition, UCAS Media is able to offer opportunities to selected commercial organisations who want to connect to our audiences. We do this where those companies' services add value to students and prospective students.

These paid-for services generate profits which are gift-aided to the parent charity, providing funding for innovation as well as keeping costs to applicants and providers at a minimum.

While generalised advertising and marketing messages may be shown on the UCAS website and digital channels, neither UCAS nor UCAS Media ever provide paid-for marketing content direct to its customers without their consent.



9. Our people

Delivering our strategy relies on UCAS being able to attract and retain skilled and talented staff to support our ambitions. We have a comprehensive approach to staff development, training people with new skills, and building digital literacy across the whole organisation. Staff at UCAS are highly committed to our mission and we will continue to develop our culture of excellence and high performance. We want UCAS to be an employer of choice and for our employees to experience fulfilment and motivation at work.



10. Financial

UCAS has a conservative financial strategy as befits a charity providing an important public service. We aim to get to a position where the core services become self-funding, and funds generated through our commercial arm can be deployed to fund innovation and enhanced public benefit.

For more information on any aspect of the UCAS Corporate Strategy, in the first instance please contact UCAS Communications on communications@ucas.ac.uk or 01242 545723



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