

UCAS' response to the Department for Education Implementing a New FE Funding and Accountability System Consultation

As an independent charity, UCAS is the leading authority on student progression. Our significant role as the gateway to post-secondary opportunities allows us unparalleled insight into the shape of the HE and training landscape. Overall, we engage with over 1.5 million prospective students each year to provide careers advice on the full range of post-secondary choices. This includes apprenticeships, technical education, lifelong learning, and flexible and part-time options – fulfilling our aim to establish ourselves as a leading discovery brand, positioning ourselves as 'route neutral' to ensure clarity and parity across academic and technical routes.

Each year we help over 700,000 students from over 200 countries and territories around the world with 500 different forms of qualification to make the best choice on their next step in education and training. UCAS is a student centric organisation with unparalleled reach – ucas.com receives 30 million unique visits per year – and CIAG expertise, which includes tools such as the Careers Quiz, where outcomes and skills data support decision-making to allow young people to connect to the right progression opportunity for them.

It is this insight and understanding of the student mindset, along with our experience of delivering the shared admissions service, which underpins our response to this consultation. For this response, we have chosen to focus on proposals around the Decentralised Identification System (DIS). We look forward to further discussion with the DfE and ESFA ahead of its issuing of a response.

Summary

- It is UCAS' view that the proposed DIS offers wider potential than that outlined in the consultation and could offer value to students and the wider secondary and tertiary education sector.
- This is particularly the case in relation to the Lifelong Loan Entitle (LLE). UCAS is a key enabler for the LLE, supporting students in exploring and connecting to opportunities, and it remains our view that a unique identifier that accompanies students across their educational opportunities is fundamental to the successful delivery of this policy.
- UCAS would welcome discussions with the Department regarding the scoping and delivery of the DIS, and how it can add value to students connecting to their post-secondary education.

UCAS comments regarding the development of a Decentralised Identification System

The need for a unique identifier to support with the Lifelong Loan Entitlement

Earlier this year, UCAS responded to the DfE's consultation on the [Lifelong Loan Entitlement \(LLE\)](#). Within this, UCAS recognised its role as a key enabler of the LLE, along with several other partners including the Student Loans Company and JISC. Our response was underpinned by extensive engagement with the wider sector, including roundtable sessions with higher education leaders and sector experts. Through these, there was consensus that wherever possible, existing and trusted mechanisms should be used to enable the delivery and roll out the LLE, bringing with them efficiency and reliability.

This engagement recognised that the future student journey for students benefitting from the LLE will be more fluid and sporadic, with engagement lasting for a student's lifetime. In order to facilitate this, our engagement highlighted the need for the education sector and government to work together to explore the adoption of a consistent cross-system unique learner identifier, to track and recognise learners throughout their continuous engagement across lifelong education. Furthermore, such an identifier could form part of any connection service UCAS offers in this space. Such an approach would require significantly greater uptake and commitment to the existing ULN, with expansion to include adult education. It is UCAS' view that the DIS offers significant potential in supporting this need, and we'd welcome discussions about how this could be realised.

We also recognised that collaboration is needed with partners such as the Student Loans Company and JISC to best understand how student information can flow between our systems to simplify the learner experience. This seamless learner journey can be realised through such partnership working – a journey in which learners and their supporters can understand and explore their options through the single doorway of the UCAS Hub. This would allow for sharing of a student's personal information once, trusting that it is appropriately shared with education providers and the SLC using a mechanism such as the ULN to remove the need for further manual entry on their part as they apply for courses of study and access funding. Individuals would also have confidence that when courses and modules have been completed, those same data flows would allow UCAS to store academic credentials in a qualifications account ready for inclusion in future applications, or to present to employers. This partnership working would enable learners to free themselves from investing in the administrative business of accessing HE, and instead invest fully in the exploration of what will most suit them and in completing their courses of study.

In addition, our response covered the use of a single application service, with UCAS being well placed to offer this. Stakeholders from the wider sector agreed that careers education, information, advice and guidance would be critical to making the LLE a success. UCAS - working with partners as it currently does – is uniquely positioned to use its wide audience to highlight the pathways through the reformed higher education and training landscape, as well as integrating qualification verification into the single application service.

Furthermore, in our response to the consultation regarding the Lifelong Loan Entitlement, UCAS outlined that there is a need to ensure a coherent relationship between the Lifelong Loan Entitlement and other sources of education and training funding, including the new Skills Fund. It remains our view that consideration should be given to the relationship

between these funds, and how we can promote a seamless experience for students.

Opportunity for wider adoption of Decentralised Identification System than just in the FE sector

There are clear benefits for implementing a Decentralised Identification System for the FE sector, as it will allow for the streamlining of processes and easier management of data, creating a better system for students and providers. However, UCAS believes that the DIS could offer value across the entire secondary and tertiary sector. We believe it is vital that schools, FE and HE sector have a common approach to identifying students and linking information about them. From UCAS's perspective - with our ambition to become the go-to place for the full range of post-secondary choices - we can see a clear opportunity for a single source of data collection for students that can be used by the full range of education, training and employment providers, spanning from undergraduate course to apprenticeships.

In addition to supporting the Lifelong Loan Entitlement, it is UCAS' view the DIS could have the following potential to:

- Greater support in making it easier for students to connect to apprenticeship opportunities via UCAS
- Provide for consistent data and insight, especially useful for mature students and those taking advantage of the LLE in the future.
- Pre-populate data for UCAS applications, expediting processes for providers and enabling smoother user journeys.
- Link with HESA and ILR data

We would welcome the opportunity to take this conversation further with colleagues from the Department as we can see a great opportunity for this initiative to be taken further to help the sector improve its efficiency and data sharing, helping students better navigate complex application systems to education and employment opportunities.