

UCAS

**Corporate  
Strategy**  
2010-2015

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# Section 1: Introduction



Welcome to the UCAS Corporate Strategy, which sets out the strategic direction for UCAS between 2010 and 2015.

Putting UCAS at the heart of connecting people to higher education is our focus, but as well as responding to the undoubted external challenges, we have also taken the major step of looking inward, reviewing the services we provide our customers and the way in which we deliver them.

In March 2010, we redefined our vision, mission and strategic objectives whilst also embarking on an internal business improvement drive. Throughout 2010 we undertook a comprehensive programme of activity that scrutinised our organisational development, our products and services offering and the technology and systems we have in place to enable us to deliver.

This document introduces our new Ten Point Strategy, with the underlying themes of developing new services to members that will drive efficiency in the sector, improving the match of applicants to courses and extending the reach and effectiveness of information about higher education to those who need to use it.

With this Strategy we underline our commitment to providing services that better meet the needs of member institutions, applicants and our other customers and stakeholders, whilst remaining focused on and at the heart of admissions to higher education.

It is our intention that this strategy is forward-thinking, is flexible enough to adapt to the inevitable changes that the sector will face, and will continue to reflect our belief that the logic of the customer should be the logic of UCAS.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Mary Curnock Cook". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

**MARY CURNOCK COOK**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

# Section 2: Change as a constant - the context for this strategy

Recent times have seen significant change for the higher education sector.

On top of the challenges posed by unprecedented rises in application rates for full-time undergraduate study - the core customer base for UCAS services - the sector has had to take on board budget cuts and a cap on funded places (in England) which put further pressure on managing admissions numbers.

Changes in the applicant landscape point to a new emphasis on part-time study and on different modes of delivery including variable start dates, distance learning and two-year compressed degrees.

Our member institutions are becoming increasingly active in international markets, where they can attract self-funding applicants, and of course there is significant evidence of individuals returning to higher education, fuelled by the desire to retrain and refocus, perhaps as a reaction to the context of a deflated and changing economy.

These applicants, whatever their backgrounds, need to make informed choices based on relevant and up-to-date information, advice and guidance (IAG). This is becoming increasingly important with the pressure on improving both retention rates and the match between applicant and course.

This Corporate Strategy reflects changes to the admissions landscape and the wider challenges faced by our colleagues across the sector. It is about delivering more for less: improvements to existing services, new services that deliver financial and operational benefits to our members, better information and advice for applicants and a commercial strategy which helps underwrite our investment plans.

It also recognises that a technology-based business such as UCAS cannot afford to stand still. We need to invest in our products and services to ensure that they stay up-to-date with the levels of functionality and quality that our customers expect in the age of digital communications, social networks and the technology of young people.

Above all, this strategy is about ensuring that the logic of UCAS matches and reflects the logic of our customers.

# Section 3: Our vision, mission and strategic objectives

## OUR VISION

Our vision is that UCAS is **at the heart of connecting people to higher education.**

## OUR MISSION

Our mission is

**creating value for members through  
shared services**

and

**delivering admissions services that help  
applicants make the right choices, for  
the right reasons and with the right  
outcomes.**

# Strategic Objectives

1

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: MEMBERS' SERVICES**

**To provide an efficient service to members; and to expand the range of our services and our value to members.**

Outcomes:

- We have a clear membership proposition
- We manage member relationships through a centralised account management team
- We are alert and responsive to members' requirements
- We have developed new valued services for members
- Members experience continuous improvement and enhancement of services
- Our market share for services increases
- Members can realise efficiency gains and cost savings by participating in UCAS shared services

2

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: ADMISSIONS SERVICES**

**To provide for all customers a comprehensive, trusted and continuously improving admissions service and information resource to support progression to UK higher education courses.**

Outcomes:

- Continuous, measurable improvements in service to customers
- Increased market share in admissions
- New admissions products and services delivered off the main service platform
- Our products and services are fit for purpose, continuously improving and applicants and advisers are well supported in using them

3

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: RESEARCH**

**UCAS is recognised as the authoritative source of intelligence about participation, progression and admission in higher education in the UK.**

Outcomes:

- We publish influential research, information and statistics
- We collect and use data in a way that supports the widening participation and fair admissions agenda
- We respond to and anticipate the information requirements of members, educators and applicants
- We are consulted by government and key stakeholders about relevant pre-higher education and higher education policy issues
- We are a trusted and recognised brand for research, information and statistics

# 4

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4: PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**To help all learners make the right choices in their education and preparation for admission to higher education.**

Outcomes:

- There is wide availability of high quality information about courses and higher education institutions
- Applicants are clear about what qualifications and attainments are required for selected courses and higher education institutions
- We have reliable data and information about offers, acceptances and non-placed applicants
- We work with partners to improve the reach of UCAS services across social classes and centre types
- We have developed new products and services to help applicants understand their options and make the right choices in higher education
- We support the work of professionalising admissions
- We publish information relevant to widening participation and fair admissions

# 5

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5: COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY

**To maximise our reach and impact on all customers through a commitment to the technologies of the digital age, leading-edge systems, creative communication techniques and innovative marketing.**

Outcomes:

- Our brand personality and voice is strong and consistent through all interfaces with users
- We are renowned and visible in the technologies of young people today
- The user interface with UCAS systems is rationalised and intuitive
- There is a consistent and planned approach to systems upgrade, refresh and renewal
- We have a marketing capacity and capability which supports the success of all our products and services
- Our web presence supports our customers' aspirations

# 6

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6: RESOURCES

**To increase funds available to deliver our vision and mission and enhance value to customers; and maximise efficiency and sustainability across the Company.**

Outcomes:

- Staff across UCAS look for, recognise and support opportunities to generate and increase income
- We have a well-led, skilled and motivated workforce and can attract and retain talent
- We have a culture of high performance, continuous improvement and organisational excellence
- We take a strategic approach to resourcing and high priority is given to efficiency and value for money
- We demonstrate a commitment to community, sustainability and environment

# Section 4: Key assumptions

In developing our Corporate Strategy, it has been necessary to make a series of informed assumptions about our markets, the higher education sector and applicants:

## ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT MARKETS

- Full-time UK-domiciled undergraduate admissions will remain static or may fall owing to funding pressures, demographic changes and market substitution
- Admissions for part-time undergraduate study will rise
- Admissions for full- and part-time postgraduate study will rise
- Admissions from and to (via TNE/transnational education), international markets will rise
- Full data sets, by virtue of their policy, operational and commercial value to higher education applicant markets, provide management information that our member institutions want and need

## ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

- The number of higher education institutions will stay steady or contract
- The role of further education institutions in delivering higher education may increase
- The potential for differential tuition fees will create a new variable in the admissions landscape which will have profound implications for the current one-size-fits-all UCAS full-time undergraduate application model
- There are considerable synergies between the current UCAS application model and the Student Loan Company process
- Higher education will look for value for money and cost efficiencies as key drivers for change in admissions processes and/or shared services
- The sector will be under continuing pressure to demonstrate fair admissions, social equality and widening participation

## ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT APPLICANTS

- Levels of achievement and aspiration to progress to higher education will continue to rise
- Applicants will want higher quality information and advice about courses, institutions, teaching and learning standards, graduate careers, costs and living standards
- Applicants need more sophisticated and targeted advice to help them make realistic choices and to ensure successful outcomes from their higher education investment
- There are applicants who require more help to find the information they need to support ambitious applications for higher courses
- Applicants will become less patient with outmoded forms of communication and clunky online services



# Section 5: Our Corporate Strategy, 2010-2015

Our Corporate Strategy for 2010-2015 is based on ten points, which will drive the work of UCAS:

- 1 UCAS CULTURE**  
We will create within UCAS an **energised, customer-focused, high performance culture.**  
  
We must be nimble, dynamic and responsive, using sophisticated strategic planning and disciplined delivery management. Improved financial and investment management will help drive and monitor performance.
- 2 SECTOR EFFICIENCIES**  
We want to deliver admissions and applications services for all our members and all their higher education students. We believe that **a single portal can encompass a wide range of different admissions and application services** for higher education and deliver a rich data set to the sector. **New shared services will be developed quickly to support efficiency gains in the sector.** The approach will aim to remove administrative burden on institutions, reduce costs and deliver a better match of applicant to course of study.
- 3 ADMISSIONS PROCESS REVIEW**  
**We will work towards a review of the admissions process.** Over the last 50 years there have been technological, environmental, attainment, participation and economic changes that make a review desirable. The current context for higher education points to the need for a more flexible, holistic and efficient solution for admissions and applications services.
- 4 INTERNATIONAL SERVICES**  
We must be more flexible to meet the needs of our member institutions so that our **application process is an enabler to international recruitment** and results in a dataset of significant value to the sector.
- 5 APPLICANT INFORMATION AND SUPPORT**  
Objective, relevant information and advice is critical. UCAS is a trusted source and we plan to build on this reputation. Working in partnership with our member institutions, government and the funding councils, **we can provide more sophisticated and targeted support to applicants and their advisers.**
- 6 DATA ASSETS**  
We will provide first class data that are captured and maintained in ways that ensure accuracy, robustness, flexibility, scalability and confidently underpin the principles of data quality management and control.  
  
**We will enable and deliver focused, clear and contextualised analysis and research**, including best practice forecasting and modelling techniques and we will publish the outcomes of this research to sustain and develop the UCAS reputation within this field.
- 7 TRANSFORM IT RESOURCE**  
A new technology platform will be built using modern, industry-proven architecture, standards and principles. This will deliver **a consolidated, simplified, flexible and secure platform based on leading edge user interface technologies, reusable business components and a consolidated data model.** This will be delivered in parallel with the existing platform and transitioned over a phased period.

8 **COMMERCIAL REVENUE GROWTH**  
**We will optimise our commercial growth through a targeted commercial strategy.**

We will align the non-commercial services with commercially sold services, recognising that both missions are valid and can be mutually supportive.

9 **BUSINESS AS USUAL**  
Over the five years covered by this Corporate Strategy, UCAS will continue to provide its core services to members and individuals at a high standard. **All existing services will continue to be fully supported** – for example through publications, advice and statistics.

Development of new systems will run in parallel with maintenance of existing systems until secure transfer can be guaranteed.

UCAS will continue to roll-out new high value shared services (based on the existing platform) to the sector while new developments are underway.

10 **UCAS EFFICIENCIES**  
We will commit to driving business improvements throughout the organisation, realising fundamental efficiency savings.

# Section 6: UCAS management structure

A key part in the delivery of this new strategy is an enhanced management structure and an Executive team heading up clearly defined and focused business units. These are:



# UCAS

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## For more information

In the first instance, for more information on any aspect of the UCAS Corporate Strategy, contact UCAS Communications on [communications@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:communications@ucas.ac.uk) or 01242 544 987.