

Higher Education Student Support Champion in partnership with Unite Students: Transition into Higher Education for Young Students

Roundtable two summary: The possibilities, benefits and challenges of information sharing pre-enrolment

Chair: Edward Peck, HE Student Support Champion

Date/time: 24 August 2023, 10:00 – 11:30

Agenda:

| Item | Duration | Topic | Lead |
|------|----------|--|---|
| 1 | 5 | Welcome and Introduction | Chair |
| 2 | 5 | DfE data strategy update | Gladys Mugugu, Head of Data Strategy DfE |
| 3 | 15 | UCAS – Information flows to HEPs | Ben Jordan, Head of Policy, UCAS |
| 4 | 15 | JISC - Creating a learner's digital passport to better wellbeing | Jon Bentley, Commercial Director, Open Athens, JISC) Jim Keane, Data engineering solutions manager, JISC |
| 5 | 45 | Discussion | Participants |
| 6 | 5 | Close – what do we do next? | Chair |

Welcome and introduction

- Edward Peck began the session by providing a summary of the first roundtable which explored the experience of schools and colleges of the increasing support needs of pupils. He noted the considerable interest there in enhanced information sharing.

DfE Data Strategy Update

- Gladys Mugugu provided an update on DfE's emerging data strategy. This aims to develop 'golden threads' through the available data to improve insights and policy decisions, create opportunities for utilising big data, and map data overlaps. Challenges highlighted included ensuring data quality, identifying appropriate points

at which to share data, and incorporating post-16 datasets not held currently by DfE (i.e. JISC, EFSA, OfS).

UCAS Presentation

- Ben Jordan gave an overview of recent updates to the UCAS application which capture additional student information. These include new questions related to personal circumstances, refinements to the personal statement guidance and school references, and additional contextual information services available to HEPs. This was a source of contextual information which did not rely on applicant disclosure which HEPs used to differing extents in their recruitment processes and could deploy in their assessment of individual enrolees. However, it did not provide the depth of insight into an enrolee that colleges and schools possessed.
- It was noted that these additions have been helpful but still rely on applicants choosing to respond to data requests and understanding how to describe their needs or situation in ways that would shape the support delivered by HEPs.

Jisc Presentation

- John Bentley provided background to JISC and a current project exploring the possibility of utilising a single student identifier (SSI). He noted the challenges posed by the non-linear nature of the student journey including multiple transition points, disparity of data quality, and connectivity of data systems.
- JISC is now looking at how to bring datasets related to individual learners, providers, and government together to manage transition points more effectively. John noted that Wales, Scotland, and Project Titan run by ESFA have had some success with this approach, albeit with smaller datasets, suggesting small pilots may be appropriate to test this approach.
- Jim Keane stressed the importance of data systems with student consent at the heart, as well as creating easy methods in which students can control their data.

Discussion

- There was agreement among participants that an SSI would be beneficial if deliverable. However, it may be challenging to determine what information would sit within this SSI and which agency would maintain and control the data. The use of an SSI would create opportunities to utilise both big data analysis as well as foster a greater understanding of the needs of individual students. It was noted that identifying when this information is being captured and being clear about what it would be used for is paramount.
- The concept of consent was prevalent throughout the conversation, with participants noting that a key element of consent is students understanding what their declarations mean for them and how their data will be used.
- Participants noted the central information gap between schools/colleges and HE. A significant amount of contextual data is lost in the transition period. The DfE representative noted that there is some work going on to merge the schools and post-16 identifier, but this is in its early stages and it was still unclear how much information about individuals it could or would encompass.
- The role of the SLC was discussed. It was suggested that an SSI would be required particularly to track students under the LLE as students move in and out of HE and across providers. It was proposed that engagement with the SLC might be important

here, although it was not obvious why it would have any interest in data or information held before an applicant seeks a loan.

- Intermediate solutions to the challenges of implementing an SSI included 'fuzzy matching', by collecting consistent details when collecting data. This would require a consistent data approach with individual organisations (e.g. SLC, UCAS). It was noted that being explicit about what data will be used for will encourage organisations and students to provide requested data/intelligence.
- Some participants provided examples of current approaches to capturing contextual information from students on, before, at, and beyond enrolment. This included direct outreach to schools, pre-arrival questionnaires, and post arrival and recurring surveys that signpost students to support or provide the basis for 1:1 interventions.

Summary and Close

- Edward Peck closed the session by noting the increasing complexity of the data landscape and suggested a number of approaches to consider further:
 - Development of a SSI that follows a student from school through to HE, enabling a single data history throughout education. The extent to which this would provide enough information about an individual enrollee's personal circumstances was unclear. It may also be a long way off.
 - Mapping and connecting existing systems, focusing on linking connected data sources through 'fuzzy matching', might be fruitful as this could include both data and intelligence but would require further development.
 - Collecting additional intelligence within existing information collection methods (i.e. UCAS and SLC application processes). At present, the former seemed a more immediate prospect for the majority of students entering HE. Was there a possibility of eliciting more personalised intelligence as part of the reference process?
 - Encouraging institutionally-bespoke pre-entry information gathering (i.e. pre-arrival questionnaires) which are informed by what HE knows already from other sources (predominantly UCAS).
 - The DfE data strategy initiative was important but did not prioritise intelligence on individuals.
- It was noted that these options still require students to provide additional information to various degrees and this may impact students with more complex needs.