

UCAS ref: MCC/HAS

UCAS

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> We were very interested to see the SCORE report "Choosing the Right STEM degree course – investigating the information available for prospective applicants." We would be very pleased to meet with you to discuss the outcomes of this research and the possible ways of working together to address some of the issues identified by the report.

We note the comments about the need to consult multiple sources of information about HE entry requirements and apparent inconsistencies between them. In practice, the UCAS Course Search entry requirements and Entry Profiles should provide a one stop shop for such information for applicants and their advisers, perhaps in conjunction with the HEIs' own websites to which there are links. Ideally this information should be complete, accurate and clear and in many cases it is. We acknowledge that it is not perfect and that there are issues of quality control. The responsibility for providing the information rests with the individual institutions and it is difficult to validate all of such a large volume of data. We are happy to discuss ways in which the situation might be improved for STEM programmes in HE in respect of the data held by UCAS. UCAS is not, however, in a position to control information made available by HEIs through their own channels such as websites and prospectuses.

The variation of entry requirements between institutions is the result of a free market where a number of factors interact including the popularity of the course, its size and location, the number of places available, the size and profile of the candidature, and any special factors which admissions tutors are looking for. In the context of academic freedom, UCAS would not be in a position to influence offer levels or to seek to impose uniformity on HE entry requirements or offer making, providing that the published information is clear. Different levels of entry requirements are a feature of the UK system as a whole, necessitating good quality information provision and research by applicants.

The proposal to use groupings of courses in order to simplify entry requirements is an interesting one, which would need discussion with HESA and the HE sector as a whole. It is likely that this would not necessarily meet the needs of some HEIs which may have good reason for specifying different entry requirements for different courses. Nevertheless it is worth pursuing further.

In respect of the report's numbered recommendations, we concur with recommendations 1-3 which represent the good practice the sector is aiming for across all discipline areas, not just STEM.



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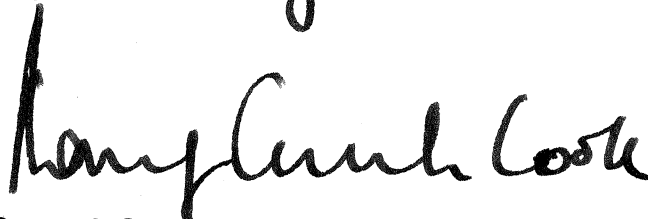
In respect of 4 and 5, work on improving Course Search is part of our ongoing policy of continuous improvement, and we would welcome a constructive dialogue about ways in which Course Search might be improved as a whole. There are separate issues which would need to be considered such as the design and architecture of Course Search, the operation of the search mechanisms, the use of JACS codes and their possible grouping and the nature and quality of the data provided by HEIs.

The JACS coding system is indeed used jointly by UCAS, HESA and HEIs and is used to identify the subjects contained within a course to enable an accurate breakdown for statistics, research and funding; it is not readily usable as a method of grouping courses. UCAS and HESA, in consultation with the HE sector has recently concluded a review of the existing JACS 2 structure and is in the process of implementing JACS 3 for Year of Entry 2012. UCAS is currently investigating a redevelopment of Course Search and its underlying data architecture with a view to improving both its functionality and usability

We would value a meeting to discuss these issues further and would be happy to host this in Cheltenham or visit you in London.

Please let me know your preference and which of your colleagues would be involved so we can liaise on arrangements.

With best regards



Mary Curnock Cook, OBE
Chief Executive