

# UCAS response to HESA Aggregate Offshore record review and Student record expansion

## Introduction

UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, is an independent charity and the single largest channel for international students entering UK study. It connects the world to UK higher education (HE) by delivering a world-class, shared admissions service that supports high-quality and diverse applications. UCAS plays a key role in helping maintain the UK's competitive advantage through our independent, impartial, and trusted brand and services. Approximately 95% of undergraduate entrants from the EU, and 60% of entrants from outside the EU, apply through UCAS.

In the 2022 cycle, we engaged with over 1.5 million individuals of whom 400,000 were from outside of the UK; supported 130,000 international applicants (and tens of thousands of their advisers and agents) from around 200 countries and territories to make applications; and helped place over 70,000 international students into a UK university or college. UCAS has also supported progress towards delivering the [international education strategy](#) (IES) - being the global gateway to UK HE is at the heart of our [strategic objectives](#).

Given the growth in transnational education (TNE) and associated interest in improvements to TNE data collection, UCAS welcomes HESA's proposal to expand the collection of data about TNE students to fill current knowledge gaps and allow for a deeper understanding of the progression journey of international student, and support enhancement of this. Our response does not comment upon the relative importance or burden of the collection of specific data items. We highlight upcoming trends in demand for TNE, UCAS' potential support for this type of provision, and how this data can be invaluable in improving the overall student journey.

Summary of key points:

- Demand for UK undergraduate study from international students is [set to grow](#) by 60% by the end of the decade, increasing the importance of the supply of high-quality opportunities – TNE can be a resource effective way to scale-up provision and diversify to mitigate geopolitical risks.
- UCAS is expanding relevant and personalised information, advice, and guidance (IAG) to support all choices and routes to UK higher education (HE), including pathways provision, advanced entry, and TNE.
- UCAS could also expand its course collection processes to include a fuller range of international pathways, including TNE provision. This could lead to the evolution of our student data collection processes and the inclusion of

- TNE students within the UCAS Data for HESA transaction, generating efficiencies for the sector.
- UCAS strongly supports the expansion of international graduate outcomes data collection, both for those who remain in the UK and those who return overseas, as increasingly decisions over study destinations are linked to employment opportunities post-study.

## The Journey to a Million

### *Growing demand from international students*

UCAS [projects](#) that by the end of this decade, there could be up to a million applicants to UK HE across the full range of level four and above qualifications. This growth will be largely driven by increasing UK 18-year-old population (38% increase by 2030), and UK 19-year-old population (10% increase by 2030). With this, a 60% increase in demand is also projected from international students, with a 75.6% increase in non-EU applicants coupled with a stabilising decline in demand from EU applicants. These projections [account for factors](#) such as a growth or decline in UK's market share, and geopolitical factors, that could accelerate or disrupt this journey to a million.

As of UCAS' 30 June deadline 2023, 138,050 international students have applied to UK HE, a 2.4% increase from last year, and the second highest on record. In this context of rising demand from international students, alternative opportunities can be presented through [transnational education \(TNE\)](#). A deeper understanding of international student progression, across all routes including TNE, will prove invaluable in supporting these students.

### *TNE as a sustainable alternative route*

Geopolitics has a large influence on international student progression. Growing global tensions could have a rapid impact on the progression of international students from specific nations — as we have seen following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. TNE can be a resource effective way of expanding sustainable provision for global learners, whilst mitigating against geopolitics, perceived 'brain drain' and environmental impact. It also acts as a key tool for enabling diversification into new and emerging markets as it avoids the need to travel across borders. Even currently, the scale of TNE is significant. In 2021-2022, English providers taught 455,000 students in other countries, [nearly 16%](#) that of total students registered at English universities. Providers in the UK have the established mechanisms and experience to expand the effectiveness and scale of this delivery.

Given the growth in TNE delivery and associated interest in improvements to TNE data collection, UCAS welcomes HESA's proposal to expand the collection of data about TNE students to fill current knowledge gaps.

## Potential UCAS support for TNE

To 'be a global gateway to higher education in the UK' is one of UCAS' core [strategic objectives](#). UCAS continues to strengthen its commitment to be a world class application service to increase the quality and diversity of international UG and PGT applications. UCAS is exploring the possibility of allowing applicants to discover all routes to UK HE, providing understanding and confidence in the non-direct entry channels to UG, like TNE progression routes and pathway provision.

### *Discover all routes to UK HE*

UCAS is a trusted and transparent source of information for prospective applicants to UK HE. 30% of international students [said](#) that they would be less likely to apply to a UK university or college without UCAS, and 78% would recommend other countries to move to a UCAS style system. 50% of students [agreed](#) that UCAS introduced them to a university of course that they otherwise would not have considered. Strategic plans are currently underway to strengthen this transparency through growing adviser and agent channels, creating a more personalised experience for international students and providers, as well as expanding support for students to discover all routes to UK HE.

Discovery of all routes to UK HE via UCAS can allow a wider range of international students to discover the full range of options available to them on a single platform. Not only that, applicants can also view and discover options they may not have considered otherwise. Just as is done for the current audience, UCAS can use the data collected to create a personalised student journey and experience, helping students make the best choice based on their individual circumstances.

### *Expanding our support for HESA returns*

UCAS provides student data to assist providers in their Student record return to HESA. This is passed to providers through the UCAS Data for HESA transaction (previously known as \*J). There are a number of fields included in the transaction, and a specification is available that describes the fields, as well as any translations from UCAS to HESA coding. Students included in the transaction are those placed in an application cycle for a given year.

In the event that UCAS expands its course collection processes to include a fuller range of international pathways, including TNE provision, this could lead to the evolution of our student data collection processes. This could result in the inclusion of TNE students within the UCAS Data for HESA transaction, generating efficiencies for the sector.

## Importance of graduate outcomes data

Given that HESA is considering these changes to fill current gaps in knowledge on TNE, this can be an opportunity for a broader consideration of collection of data on international students.

Previous [UCAS research](#) found that prospects after graduation appear to be more important for those wanting to study in the US (57%), Singapore (54%) and the UK (54%) than other destinations. There is increasing [competition](#) from other international study destinations such as Canada and Australia. There is also a shift in attitudes for major student markets like [China](#) where increasing number of students are reevaluating their plans for overseas study based on job prospects. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly essential to demonstrate the outcomes in knowledge and skills international students can expect to achieve through international HE study.

As such, UCAS strongly supports the expansion of international graduate outcome data collection – both for those who remain in the UK and return overseas - as this continues to be a significant gap to build confidence amongst the thousands of international students who choose UK as their choice of study destination.