JISC XCRI Course Data

Business Case

Version

Revision date	Summary of Changes	Changes marked	Version
14/8/2012	First issue		
15/8/2012	Amended by C Little to use standard format, and to reflect project scope	No	

Approvers

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1. Executive Summary

UWE has multiple systems and processes in place for managing course data, to support different processes such as marketing, enquiries, applications, admissions, student records, and to support the different needs of very different market segments such as UG FT and CPD. However, the multiple systems in use face the normal problems such as duplication of effort, inconsistent data, silos of maintenance and development. UWE identified that there were significant advantages from developing its course infrastructure and content, both for future students and for University marketing.   To achieve this UWE needs a more strategic and joined up approach to the collation and publication of its course information.

JISC are supporting Universities to improve the accessibility of course information for courses which are "hard to find" for prospective students, eg distance/open learning, CPD and short courses, and (for some Universities) part time postgraduate courses. JISC are funding projects to develop their ability to provide course data in a standard format (XCRI-CAP) which will, at some point in the future, be used by other bodies to publicise aggregated course information to prospective students. To achieve this objective, Universities typically will have to review the collection and management of course information.

This project will both meet the JISC objectives and help improve the University's approach to managing course information for marketing purposes. Both JISC and UWE will contribute to the costs of the project.

2. Reasons

The UK HE sector is facing challenging changes on a scale never experienced before. The introduction of the £9K fee, reductions in Government funding and increased competition from FE and the private sector requires us to ensure that our offer is more competitive than ever and that our prospective student audiences understand that offer and the benefits it will bring to them so that they choose us for their academic and ongoing professional studies/development.

Research shows that course content is still the most important factor in applicant decision making. UWE identified that there were significant advantages from developing its course infrastructure and content which would benefit the future student and allow the University to compete effectively in a changed home and international market.
Whilst continuing to collect course information in various sources, with no consistent way of recording and publishing or searching for the information, is an option, it has many disadvantages. In particular:

- Poor applicant experience – prospective students find it difficult to find the courses they are looking for , the information provided on the courses is inconsistent and often key information is missing
- High cost – multiple databases are higher costs to maintain both administratively and technically
- Lack of insight – limited opportunity to monitor customer behaviour in response to course information and to take appropriate action as a result
- Difficult to engage with external stakeholders – requests for course information are difficult to respond to and take long manual interventions to pull appropriate information together

If UWE is to compete effectively it must have a more strategic and joined up approach to the collation and publications of its course information.

The JISC XCRI programme is seeking to get course information across the UK into a common electronic format (XCRI-CAP), particularly "hard to find" courses, so that comprehensive course information can be made available online. This is part of the government agenda to allow potential customers (applicants or employers) to locate and compare courses. JISC is funding HEIs and FEIs to improve their readiness for this method of publication.

A project to address all the disadvantages of multiple systems and processes for managing course information would take significant commitment from UWE and would go beyond the timescale of the JISC funding. However, there are benefits in participating in the JISC-XCRI programme, and UWE has committed to it in order to:
- improve the coverage and quality of information available to prospective UWE students for hard to find part-time, online/ distance, postgraduate and CPD courses
- improve the transfer and advertising of courses data information within UWE and between sector organizations

- achieve process efficiencies through reducing duplication of effort and improving the understanding of courses data flows at UWE
- implement a sustainable change to business processes for courses data

This will be undertaken in the context of the courses held on the SITS system, which is the primary UWE course database for advertising and admissions. SITS contains both course which are not "hard to find" such as UG and FT PG, but also "hard to find" courses such as PG OL/DL and a sample of CPD courses. This will put UWE in a better position to address the disadvantages listed above by

- documenting the systems used for each category of advertised courses, both "hard to find" and others
- documenting the processes for collection and maintenance of course information for courses held on SITS, and identifying process improvements
- identifying the potential impact of XCRI advertising (eg volumes of enrolments or income?) for each category of advertised courses
- identifying inefficiencies and overlaps in systems and processes for course information
- implementing process improvements, and improving the quality and coverage of course information on SITS, in line with marketing priorities
- ensuring UWE can provide a data feed to meet the XCRI standard for a key subset of courses, and can plan to provide the data feed for other courses, in line with marketing priorities

3. Business Options

Three broad options have been considered by senior stakeholders.

3.1. Do nothing

3.2. Participate in the JISC XCRI Course Data programme

This work will focus on the course information held on the SITS system

3.3. Undertake a full review of the UWE systems and processes for managing course data, and implement the review findings

This would include

See Appendix 1 Benefits and dis-benefits of the options. The JISC XCRI option is recommended.

4. Expected Benefits

Benefits	Participation in the JISC XCRI Course Data programme with a focus on the course information on SITS (The subset of courses referred to is those on SITS)
Customer experience	For a subset of courses: • Improved advertising via XCRI (subject to any national users of the data feed) • improved quality of information through other channels including UWE website • Information is current and up-to-date so customers are clear about available

	learning opportunities
Cost	JISC funding of £57K Cost to UWE (c £10K)
	For a subset of courses: Course information no longer needs to be separately supplied by M&C or AID to any user of the data feed, eg UCAS (subject to any users taking this up)
UWE staff experience	For a subset of courses: Initial provision of course information is more consistent, higher quality, so less central service effort.
	For a subset of stakeholders • Increased awareness of the value of courses data to different stakeholders • Shared understanding of the long term vision for courses data • Shared awareness of courses data flows at UWE and how they may be developed • Clarity about data requirements for courses data, processes for checking data quality and identifying areas of weakness
Technical issues	For a subset of courses: Initial provision of course information is more consistent so less effort.
	• A technical solution in place to provide the XCRI feed from SITS for a subset of courses • future proofing: Skills and knowledge to deliver rapid development of courses feeds to support new aggregator tools as they become available
Strategy	Will provide additional information to steer future course information plans and developments

5. Expected Dis-benefits

Dis-benefits	**Participation in the JISC XCRI Course Data programme with a focus on the course information on SITS** (The subset of courses referred to is those on SITS)
Strategy	Will solve problems for a subset of courses without identifying and addressing equivalent issues for the others; may increase silos

6. Timescale

The project will run from January 2012 to March 2013 (15 months).
Benefits will be realised
   a) as new processes for collecting and maintaining course information are implemented and course information improves over 1-3 years
   b) as advertisers and admissions bodies use the XCRI feed, over 2-4 years.

7. Costs

Total funding of £57,490 received from JISC. UWE will provide some £10K in existing staff time to supplement this. No additional funding is requested at this time.

8. Investment Appraisal

Although it is hard to judge whether providing an XCRI feed will be a requirement for all HEIs in future, there are indications from JISC that it will be used in future by UCAS. This subset of courses covered in the project would include the UCAS courses. On that basis, let alone other uses for the data feed and other benefits from improved data, funding from JISC for an estimated 90% of the project cost represents good value.

Future maintenance costs are hard to estimate until new processes are designed, but there are efficiencies to be gained in reducing staff effort in duplicate inputting and checking of data (eg to SITS and UCAS) and in editing information in AID and M&C.

9. Major Risks

See project risk register
https://share.uwe.ac.uk/sites/proj/jisc/Lists/Risk%20Register/AllItems.aspx

10. Appendix 1: Benefits and dis-benefits of the options

Key

	Significant benefit
	Minor benefit
	Minor dis-benefit
	Significant dis-benefit

	Do nothing	Participation in the JISC XCRI Course Data programme with a focus on the course information on SITS (The subset of courses referred to is those on SITS)	Full review and implementation of any recommendations (including XCRI feed)
Customer experience	Continued inability to find some UWE course advertising easily, inability to find some key information	For a subset of courses: • Improved advertising via XCRI (subject to any national users of the data feed) • improved quality of information through other channels including UWE website • Information is current and up-to-date so customers are clear about available learning opportunities	• Improved information and marketing for all courses through XCRI and other channels including UWE web site • Information is current and up-to-date so customers are clear about available learning opportunities • Opportunity for UWE to provide further value-added services
Cost	Continued duplicated	JISC funding of £57K	Similar to JISC project plus

	effort, inefficiencies, unquantified.	Cost to UWE (c £10K)	cost of implementation of any recommendation (£200K plus?)
	Potential loss of income, especially hard to find courses, unquantified.	For a subset of courses: Course information no longer needs to be separately supplied by M&C or AID to any user of the data feed, eg UCAS (subject to any users taking this up)	Course information no longer needs to be separately supplied by M&C or AID (subject to a national user of the data, eg UCAS)
UWE staff experience	Varied ways of providing course information means that central services do more editing to maintain consistent standard of information across UWE.	For a subset of courses: Initial provision of course information is more consistent, higher quality, so less central service effort.	• Course information entered fewer times (ideally once only) and shared across systems. • Higher quality and more consistent information. • More transparency about advertising for academics and others. • Improved management information on marketing impact
	Continue with local methods of recording, maintaining and publicising course information tailored to specific audiences, eg CPD for NHS, Aero	For a subset of stakeholders • Increased awareness of the value of courses data to different stakeholders • Shared understanding of the long term vision for courses data • Shared awareness of courses data flows at UWE and how they may be developed • Clarity about data requirements for courses data, processes for checking data quality and identifying areas of weakness	For stakeholders across UWE • Increased awareness of the value of courses data to different stakeholders • Shared understanding of the long term vision for courses data • Shared awareness of courses data flows at UWE and how they may be developed Clarity about data requirements for courses data, processes for checking data quality and identifying areas of weakness
		Some change in ways of providing and sharing information	Widespread change in ways of providing and sharing information; risk of staff overload
			Data would have identified "owners" which would increase clarity about roles & responsibilities, quality and use of data.
Technical issues	Varied ways of providing course information means that systems need more	For a subset of courses: Initial provision of course information is more consistent so less effort.	Reduction in number of systems - central and in faculties/services - which hold course information;

	complexity to maintain consistent standard of information across UWE.		reduction in number of interfaces.
	If major data users (eg UCAS) start to use the XCRI data feed in future, UWE would have to make the changes without JISC support and funding.	• A technical solution in place to provide the XCRI feed from SITS for a subset of courses • future proofing: Skills and knowledge to deliver rapid development of courses feeds to support new aggregator tools as they become available	Recommended changes may impact on systems very widely, eg ISIS CEREUS and CRM, becoming a "wicked" problem
			Recommended changes may impact on staff practice very widely, and cause staff overload
Strategy	No improvement	• For a subset of courses: Clarity about UWE courses data – long term planning, process owners, audiences, effective content, use of third party sites • Will provide additional information to steer future course information plans and developments	Clarity about UWE courses data – long term planning, process owners, audiences, effective content, use of third party sites
		Will solve problems for a subset of courses without identifying and addressing equivalent issues for the others; may increase silos	
Timing	N/A	Jan 2012-March 2013 (although some implementation may go beyond this)	2-3 years (estimate)