

Postgraduate Applications Tracker

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THE OXFORD RESEARCH AGENCY
SEEING FURTHER. THINKING DEEPER.

1. Background

Whilst Undergraduate application levels by institution are available publically, levels of Postgraduate applications are not. Universities who see unexpected increases or decreases in the levels of PG applications are therefore uncertain if this is part of a wider trend or is a specific issue impacting on their institution.

The Oxford Research Agency has been contacted regarding the possibility of it acting as a central body to collate this type of information.

This document details our understanding of what data collection is required. It is important to note that this is not a 'pitch' for work and that The Oxford Research Agency is not looking to receive any direct financial gain from this programme. As an Agency we have been increasing the amount of research we conduct with Higher Education Institutions over the past few years and see this as an opportunity of increasing awareness of us as a company in this area.

Below we will set out how we would see this programme operating and will note what limits will need to be set for this work to be done without charging a fee. Again it is important to note that we are not seeking to persuade any institutions to pay for increased information levels but would be happy to discuss this if requested (a number of institutions have already stated that they would like to examine the possibility of examining data by individual subject group, either now or in the future, and we have provided some guidance and potential costs for this at the end of this document).

This document contains all of the details previously provided but also makes some amendments and clarifications based on initial feedback provided by Universities.

2. Information

Our understanding is that the following information is required:

Total number of PG applications

Full-time

Part-time

Home

EU

Overseas Non-EU

Fee status will be used as the definition for Home, EU and Overseas Non-EU categorisation.

The data will then be split by PGR and PGT students.

In the previous proposal we suggested that it may be useful to include whether these students are currently at that same University or are from elsewhere. We understand that some universities will not be able to provide this data. Therefore it will only be included for those universities for whom this data is readily available (and we will be clear about which Universities are included). We recommend that students be classified as currently being at the same university if they have been registered as a student there on any type of course (full-time, part-time, UG, PGT, PGR etc) at any point during the academic year in which the application is made (for the September data this will be the academic year starting the previous September).

In order to ensure consistency, all data provided should be for entry on courses that start in September (entry for PG courses with intakes at different times of the year, e.g. January intakes, will not be included).

As individual applicants can make a number of applications (to the same University but also to different universities) we propose collecting data for the total number of 'applications' received.

As an example, therefore, institutions would complete a proforma similar to that below:

University name:		
Period:		
Number of applications	PG Research	PG Taught
TOTAL:		
Home:		
EU:		
Overseas Non-EU:		
Full time:		
Part time:		
Attended Uni in this academic year:		
From elsewhere:		

This data would need to be collected and tracked at a number of times per year, we have assumed 4 points throughout the year and would discuss which of these would be most appropriate, potentially however,

End of November
End of March
End of June
End of September.

Therefore, for each institution we would collect up to 16 pieces of information, 4 times a year (64 pieces of information in total).

The responsibility for completing the details would lie with participating institutions. Participants would receive 1 reminder email one week after the relevant period closes.

There has been some discussion since the original proposal was produced over whether or not the information collected and reported should be based on total numbers of applications or the %change in applications compared to the same period in the previous year.

The concern over using the number of applications comes when new universities enter the scheme, drop out or, for whatever reason, fail to provide data for a particular quarter. In these instances the overall data will change based on the profile of Universities participating rather than any fluctuations in application rates/ profiles.

The benefit of looking at changes in applications is also that this gives, from the first wave of data, an indicator of how the universities are doing in comparison to other universities in terms of attracting more or less applicants than previously (e.g. are increases or decreases specific to one university or part of an overall trend).

Whilst this would double the amount of data that is collected we believe it is information that is easily accessible to universities and we would only need to do this in the first year (and for any new universities who join later in the process). We will therefore collect and report both the total number of applications and the %change in application compared to the same period last year for all universities for the first year (from then on we will just collect the number of applications and calculate the % changes from previous details given).

3. Reporting

It is important that reports produced for this research provide institutions with useable information but that it also is not provided in a way that can impact on the anonymity of individual competitor institutions.

After each period, universities will receive a short report that consists of two trend graphs for each of the factors being examined (average number of applications per institution and % change compared with the same period in the previous year). Also include on these charts will be average levels for up to four comparator groups (three of which will be standard groups available to all, Universities can choose three from the following groups; Total universities, Russell Group Universities, 1994 group Universities, Pre-92 Universities or Post-92 Universities) and one group of specific competitors that have been pre-agreed (and can only change on an annual basis).

The report will not include any written summary or interpretation.

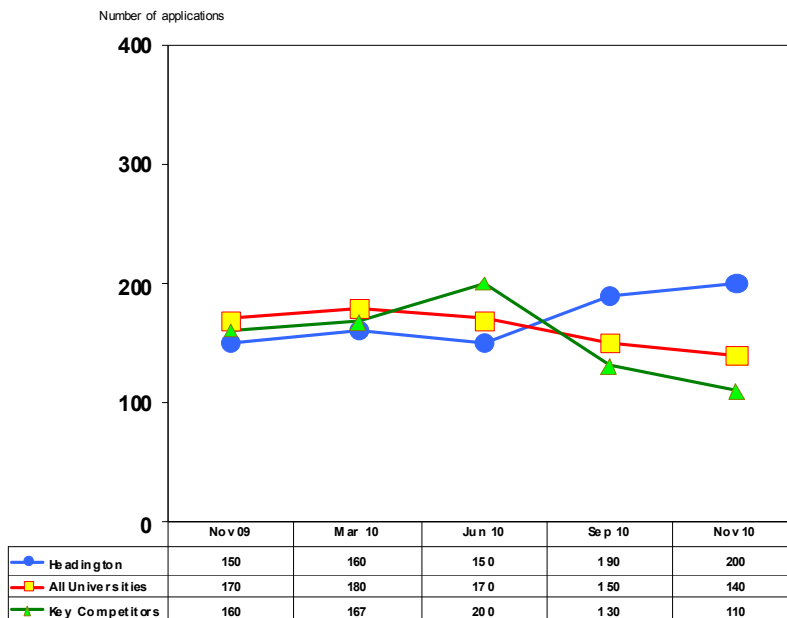
No group containing fewer than three other institutions will be reported on. Also given that there is no charge for this service and some restrictions are required on analysis time, those individual institutions being reported on will also be included in the comparator data (e.g. in the Salford report the total universities data would also include Salford), however the one specific group of competitors shown to Salford would not include Salford.

On the next page we have included some example charts which show how this data would be presented (n.b. these charts contain dummy data).

The first of these demonstrates the average number of applications by period whilst the second chart demonstrates how these applications change in comparison to the same period in the previous year. These charts clearly show that in this example the University of Headington has bucked the overall trend, seeing an increase in applications from PGR Home students whilst the main competitor group has seen a sharp decrease.

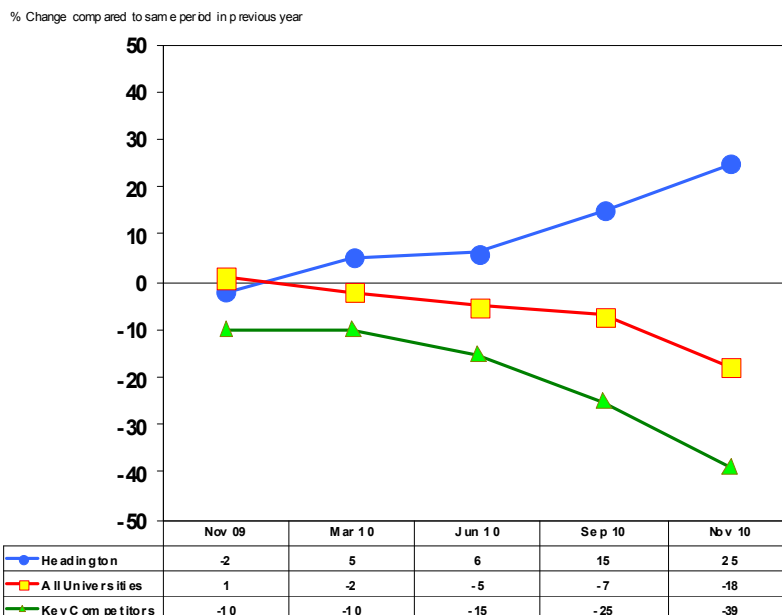
Example charts:

Number of Applications – PGR Home



Caution: DUMMY DATA

% Change in Applications – PGR Home



It is important to note that The Oxford Research Agency is not responsible for individual institutions taking part in the process and anyone who does not complete the form within the specified timescale will not be included in that wave's analysis.

Some institutions have requested that the total number of applications should be shown in the data (rather than dividing the number of applications by the number of universities within a particular group). Our concern with this approach is that the numbers will vary considerably (potentially from hundreds at an individual University level to thousands for groups of Universities) and that this will increase the scale on the graphs such that movements for individual universities become difficult to observe. Whilst we are happy to discuss this we do believe in using an average per institution figure rather than an aggregate score in order to aid comparability.

Clearly given the limited amount of analysis time available for this project (where no charge is being levied) there is little that can be done to compensate for changes in results caused by changes in those institutions participating. However, we will monitor and advise of any major changes which could be driven by participatory levels rather than changes in actual application levels.

However, as previously mentioned, from year two onwards, we would also show %change scores (based on changes at each individual university basis).

4. Timings

Below is an example time frame for the project starting in Mar 2010:

Universities confirm willingness
to participate 26th February

Participants given a list of
participating universities 5th March

Universities to confirm their 'key
competitor groups' 19th March

Applications between 1st December 2009 and 31st March 2010

Online links sent to participating
Universities by 26th March
Period end 31st March
Online questionnaire open 1st – 16th April-
Reminder e-mail sent First week of April
Reports e-mailed 30th April

5. Methodology

Participating Universities can either complete their PG figures via an on-line questionnaire (hosted by The Oxford Research Agency) or through completion of an excel proforma e-mailed to a contact at The Oxford Research Agency.

The University Marketing Forum has already contacted universities to gauge interest and this will continue through any other means available during February 2010.

We currently have over 30 universities who have expressed an interest in participating .

The data is the sole property of the participating universities and will not be made publically available by The Oxford Research or provided to any institutions who do not participate in the scheme (unless permission to do this is provided by a majority of universities). All participating universities will do so on the agreement that they do not make any results public (except those of their own university) without the express permission of the majority of participating universities.

The Oxford Research Agency would reserve the right to use data produced by this survey for analysis requested by those universities who participate in the project, so long as this does not highlight individual institutions results or in any way indicate the relative performance of named institutions (e.g. we would not name the institutions with the lowest number of home applicants etc).

Some institutions have already expressed an interest in having the information split down further than stated here (e.g. into course type). Whilst this would be possible it would greatly increase the amount of work required to collate data and produce reports, we would be happy to discuss this with any groups of Universities who felt this was beneficial but would need to make them aware that we would need to charge a fee for this. Because of the interest already shown we have given a brief summary of what could be done and indicative costs in the addendum to this document.

Costs would also need to be levied if any individual institutions wanted a presentation of results, full written report, analysis outside of that specified in this document or printed copies of charts. Again we would like to stress that we are not pitching for paid work here and do not anticipate any of these charges applying but feel that we need to state what would need to be charged for in order to highlight the boundaries of the proposed project.

If it is felt that this project would be of benefit to individual universities and that you would like The Oxford Research Agency to assist in its facilitation, please get in touch with one of the named contacts in the following section.

6. Contacts

Steve King, Research Director steve.king@tora.co.uk

Or

Stuart Wright, Research Manager stuart.wright@tora.co.uk

Or

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Or

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Addendum

Splitting data down by subject area

Some universities have expressed an interest in examining whether the data can be split down by subject area. This is possible but there are two issues that need to be borne in mind:

- 1) There would need to be a cost levied on those universities choosing to participate in this additional service
- 2) A standard agreement on course definitions would be required in order for universities to be sure that all data is truly comparable.

The cost for this additional level of data would depend on how detailed the course definitions need to be. There would need to be universal agreement amongst all those taking part which individual courses at which universities fall within each category. There would clearly need to be some grouping of courses e.g. All Engineering courses in order to make comparability between institutions possible.

It would also depend on whether the individual course data is to split any further (e.g. PGR/ PGT within course is assumed but does it also need to be split by Home/EU/ Overseas Non-EU?).

We would only be able to provide an accurate cost once we are aware of the number of courses that needed to be included but would envisage the cost being somewhere around £1,000 per institution per year if the data is reported at a total course level split PGT and PGR. This would rise to around £1,500 to £2,000 for splitting the data by Home/ EU/ Overseas non-EU with PGT/PGR.

Once the courses have been agreed these would be provided using the same institution definitions as used for the main data, with one graph provided each quarter for each course covered. Clearly not all institutions offer all courses and as with the main data, no groups would be shown that include fewer than three universities (with this applied on a course by course basis). The amount of comparative data that can be shown, therefore, would be dependent upon the number of universities who participated in this additional element. In order to gain useful data institutions would be able to name a different group of comparator universities for the course analysis than is applied at the total level.