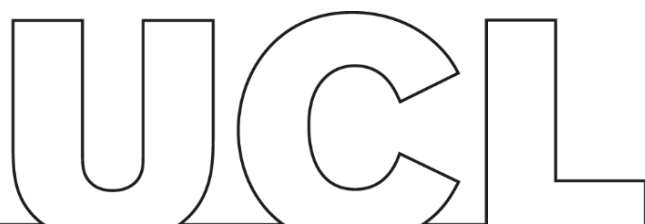


UCL STUDENT AND REGISTRY SERVICES  
Academic Policy and Quality Assurance



# Market Research

## Contents

- 1) A good practice guide – Market Research**
- 2) Market Research Question Set**

# 1) A good practice guide – Market Research

As UCL adapts to a changing landscape in Higher Education it is essential that innovative ideas for new programmes of study are supported by sound evidence that there is a gap within a Department / Faculty / the University's portfolio, a demand amongst applicants, and that the qualification will be both recognised and welcomed for future study and by employers. Proposals should also be consistent with UCL's and the Faculty's strategic objectives.

It is essential that market research is initiated as early as possible (two years prior to delivery for PGT and 3 years prior to delivery for UG) in the programme design process to ensure that valuable time and resources at departmental, faculty and central levels are not wasted in developing programmes for which there is insufficient evidence of demand and therefore an uncertain ability to meet recruitment targets. Please refer to Annex 7.1.1 of the UCL Academic Manual for detailed timelines for Programme and Module Approval and Amendment.

The Communications & Marketing team regularly works in collaboration with Faculty colleagues to support the development of new programmes, and provides advice about research options to provide market insight. More information is available from the team at:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/staff/external-engagement/vpee-teams-and-contacts#Business>

## Points to consider when conducting market research

- The process should start by identifying opportunities, most commonly highlighted through a gap analysis. A thorough gap analysis should look at whether the subject area has potential that is not yet being met through existing UCL subject offerings and should provide an indication of the possible size of the market. Where subject areas are new and innovative, this analysis should be looking at growth in interest in the subject as a whole and other indicators of possible recruitment, including qualitative evidence from enquirers, students, employers and academics.
- Once a need has been established, it is important to develop a clear and concise rationale for the programme. Questions that should be answered include:
  - What are the broad aims and outcomes of the programme? Where will students go on to upon completion of the degree?
  - How will the programme address needs that are not currently met?
  - How will the programme differentiate itself from competitors, either existing or into the future?
  - What is UCL's strength in the subject area
- Where a new programme is moving into an existing area, there needs to be evidence of student demand. Communications & Marketing colleagues can assist in understanding demand by identifying the size and trends of recruitment to specific programmes at UK universities.
- Where a new programme is going into a completely new area this research will need to be more nuanced. Communications & Marketing colleagues will conduct any appropriate analysis on student numbers for similar programmes. For new subjects, this research will likely take longer to conduct, so timings should be considered carefully.
- Furthermore, it is recommended qualitative research is conducted into student perspectives for innovative programmes, and we also recommend speaking to potential employers to gather feedback from them. Responsibility for commissioning or undertaking market research, and associated costs, sits with the

Department or Faculty. The Director of Faculty Marketing and/or Faculty Marketing and Communications lead can provide advice and guidance on how to take this forward.

- When looking across UCL it is essential to look not just at the programme name but also content and learning outcomes, to ensure that a new programme is distinctive and not likely to cannibalise recruitment to existing programmes. If there are overlaps with existing programmes these need to be understood, addressed and managed.
- Throughout the market research and development processes, consideration should be given to the ideal target student, or cohorts. This will enable more directed and targeted marketing at the point of launching a programme. Recommended practice is to develop student personas which describe the shared characteristics of your target market. These could include indicators of:
  - What stage of life is the group in?  
e.g. Undergraduates straight from school, following directly on from an undergraduate degree or mid-level professionals looking to develop further skills. *Understanding age and stage is key to developing some of the other distinguishing features of a persona, such as media consumption.*
  - What is their primary motivation for studying on your degree?  
e.g. To get an entry-level job in the relevant field, career development, academic interest.
  - How do they consume media and conduct research?  
Can be informed in part by the age and stage, but understanding how they consume media helps to understand the best methods to communicate and advertise to the students and ensure the right students are finding out about the degree.
  - What UK regions or countries are they coming from?  
It is useful to consider any markets beyond the UK where a programme may be popular. This will inform number planning, marketing and the potential diversity of students on the programme.

#### Other sources of help

- The Arena Centre programme development workshops
- UCL Careers Service maintains good relationships with a wide range of employers. Consequently, they may be able to provide advice on whether there is evidence of employer demand for graduates with the ranges of skills and knowledge the proposed programme aims to deliver. They can also provide information about the career destinations of graduates from existing UCL programmes.
- Professional contacts in industry and any relevant professional bodies may be able to assess the objectives and content of the programme and advise on whether graduates would be attractive to them for future employment.

## 2) Market Research Question Set

### Guidance

These questions form the basis for the initial discussion around market viability for a new degree programme. The programme lead should get in touch with the Director of Faculty Marketing and their Faculty Head of Marketing & Communications to arrange a meeting. The questions will form the basis of the discussion about the new programme; however, there is no need to submit responses ahead of the meeting. Only the key programme information below is required in advance of the meeting. Market Research Principles follow the discussion questions.

The Director of Faculty Marketing will provide guidance on the next steps in identifying the necessary information and evidence to support the business case for a new programme. These steps will be agreed and signed off by the Director of Faculty Marketing

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### 1 Programme information\* (required)

<b>Level and subject area of proposed programme:</b> e.g. UG Politics	
<b>Programme Lead:</b>	
<b>Proposed academic year:</b> e.g. September 2023	
<b>Mode of study:</b>	Full-time / Part-time / Distance Learning / Flexible Learning
<b>Duration of study:</b>	

### 2 Discussion questions (to be discussed at meeting)

#### 2.1 Rationale

1. Why are we going to offer this programme?
2. Where does it fit in the department/Faculty portfolio?
3. Where does it fit in the overall UCL portfolio?
4. How will it contribute to the strategic aims of the university?

#### 2.2 Evidence

1. What evidence do we have already for demand in this subject area for students?
2. What evidence do we have already for demand in this subject area for employers?
3. Has any qualitative or quantitative research already been carried out?

## 2.3 Competition

1. Are there any existing programmes at UCL that are related in name, nature or intended outcome? Please list them.
2. Are there any programmes at competing universities that are related in name or nature (both in the UK and overseas)? Please list them.

## 2.4 Proposed content

1. What do you expect will be the unique aspects/strength of this a programme at UCL e.g. specialisms, facilities, partnerships etc.
2. Will accreditation be required? If so, how long is the accreditation process?

## 2.5 Target audience

1. Describe the kind of student you are looking to target e.g. what and where are they likely to be studying now? Will they need work experience in a specific field?
2. Are there specific groups e.g. by subject or geographical region that you intend to target?

## 2.6 Graduate outcomes

1. What possible career paths will open up to students upon graduating?

**Please book a meeting with the Director of Faculty Marketing and your Faculty Head of Marketing & Communications.**

# 3 Market Research Principles

Market research is the foundation of programme development within UCL and the question set is intended to provide clear guidance and encourage well-rounded considerations as departments and Faculties put together their programme proposals. This document defines the overarching themes that have led to the changes in the new form.

Further amendments may be necessary, depending on the final outcome of changes to the programme approval process. It should be presented as part of a programme approval timeline.

### 3.1 Encourage a holistic approach to programme development

The changes made to the request form are intended to encourage programme developers to think broadly about their proposed programme at the earliest stages of programme development. This involves answering questions around how the course fits with the rest of the university's portfolio, understanding what the overall market looks like, who potential students are, the reasons a student would want to study this particular course at UCL and what will make the programme stand out. The document is presented as a form, but is intended to be something that academic leads, Faculty marketing leads and the Director of Faculty Marketing will discuss and work through together.

### 3.2 Streamline the information required for proposed programmes

The form is intended to act as the starting point for proposed programmes as they begin the programme approval process. In this way, the proposal process could be streamlined so that each programme will answer the same questions and meet the same level of consideration before moving on to the next steps of external and/or internal market research.

### 3.3 Create a briefing template for further market research activities (external and internal)

Another advantage of using the form will be to outline the core questions that need to be answered in order to guide further market research, whether conducted internally or taken externally for deeper exploration. These questions should be viewed as the essential considerations with which to start, and not as a tick box activity in the PMAP process.

### 3.4 Provide clear options for further market research, alongside expected costs

Internal research: if there is capacity within the department or faculty to conduct further market research internally, the form provides guidance to direct these activities.

External research: if the scope of what is available internally is not enough to satisfy the market research needs, external research is recommended if there is sufficient budget.

A list of external consultants and research companies with potential associated costs would then be made available. The cost for additional market research will be borne by the proposing Departments.

### **3.5 Align the market research process with ongoing procurement activities**

The form and process outlined above will streamline the initial market research completed within UCL, and enable a standardised submission to external market research companies.